

Ryszard Kucha (Poland)

Extremely Difficult Paths of Polish Educational Reforms between 1989 and 2014

Summary: In the 25 years after the events of 1989, a mismatch between the system of education and the system of market economy has become a universal phenomenon in Poland as one of the European countries. There are also signs indicating the educational expansion does not promote the role of the individual in the process of socio-economic development of the society. As a result, the younger generation experiences a great dissatisfaction and frustration generated by their difficulties in fulfilling their educational, social, and professional aspirations and expectations. This paper provides a review and critique of the educational strategies implemented by bureaucratic central and local administration of the last 25 years of Polish society life.

Keywords: education system, expert analyses, economical crisis, bureaucracy, irresponsibility, Himalayan heights of inertia and simulation of activity, expectations and hopes.

Резюме (Рушард Куха: Чрезвычайно сложные пути польских образовательных реформ между 1989 и 2014 годы) : Спустя 25 лет после событий 1989 года, в Польше как одной из европейских стран, в качестве универсального феномена возникло недопонимание между образовательной системой и системой рыночной экономики. Налицо тот факт, что меры по реорганизации системы образования не способствуют увеличению значения роли индивидуума в процессе социально-экономического развития общества. В результате этого у молодого поколения растет большое недовольство и разочарование вследствие возникновения сложностей в осуществлении своих образовательных, социальных и профессиональных амбиций и ожиданий. Данная статья предлагает обзор и критический анализ образовательных стратегий, реализованных в польском обществе бюрократическими, центральными и локальными органами власти за последние 25 лет.

Ключевые слова: система образования, экспертные анализы, экономический кризис, бюрократия, безответственность, инертность и симуляция деятельности, ожидания, надежды.

Zusammenfassung (Ryszard Kucha: Extrem schwierige Wege der polnischen Bildungsreformen zwischen 1989 und 2014): In den 25 Jahren nach den Ereignissen von 1989 entstand ein Missverhältnis zwischen dem Bildungssystem und dem System der Marktwirtschaft als ein universelles Phänomen in Polen, einem der europäischen Länder. Es gibt auch Anzeichen dafür, dass die Bildungsexpansion nicht die Rolle des Individuums im Prozess der sozioökonomischen Entwicklung der Gesellschaft fördert. Im Ergebnis dessen entwickelt sich in der jüngeren Generation eine große Unzufriedenheit und Frustration durch die Schwierigkeiten, ihre Bildungs-, sozialen und beruflichen Ambitionen und Erwartungen zu erfüllen. Dieses Papier bietet einen Überblick und eine Kritik an den Bildungsstrategien, die durch bürokratische, zentrale und lokale Verwaltungen in den letzten 25 Jahren in der polnischen Gesellschaft umgesetzt wurden.

Schlüsselwörter: Bildungssystem, Expertenanalysen, Wirtschaftskrise, Bürokratie, Verantwortungslosigkeit, Trägheit und Simulation von Aktivitäten, Erwartungen, Hoffnungen

Introduction

Education systems of individual countries, particularly school systems of different types and educational levels, are the object of continuing and critical assessment, as well as ambitious plans to reconstruct or even reform them. This has almost always been so since the dawn of schools and teachers (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, p. 7). The second half of the twentieth century was exceptional in this respect because it was then that a wave of unprecedented criticism was leveled at the school as an anachronistic institution, or even harmful in many ways. The height of this criticism was the demand that

societies be descolarized. However, school was not eliminated and such plans seem unfathomable today.

On the contrary, there was a 'school explosion', the period of rapid development of school systems. The only positive outcome of these critical attempts to modernize the system was that various improvement strategies and reform efforts appeared. The concept of alternative school was proposed and the strategy for the continuing improvement of school was advanced, becoming the foundation for plans to reconstruct the school system in respect to the whole content of the concept. In some countries, expert teams were commissioned to prepare such plans. This was the case in Poland, where many expert analyzed the school system. However, only three finished plans for school reforms were prepared between 1973 and 2005 (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, p. 7).

The above mentioned expert analyses and plans were followed by a series of hollow declarations, particularly those about the government's priority endeavors to improve the education of the Poles, which, especially when implemented by the next governments, turned out to be empty promises. In 2005, the Polish Academy of Sciences Research and Prognostics Committee [The Committee] presented the "Guidelines for Development Strategy for Poland until 2025". The document in question devoted a lot of attention to education, calling for improving the training level of the population in rural areas, such as villages and small towns, from where 60-70 % of young people entering the job market would come after 2010. It also called for starting widespread continuing education among the adults, in particular among those employed, and for carrying out curricular reforms from the standpoint of the needs associated with the rise of new vocations/professions and specializations. Finally, it sought to guarantee that the school will be, as is the case now, the principle source of knowledge and the primary place where knowledge is continually renewed (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, p. 149).

The Committee also emphasized the need to radically improve the training system of Polish teachers, to spread preschool education, to expand parallel education, and to increase spending on education to 6.5% of national income. The Committee pointed out that education should be not only a commodity in the information society, but also an independent value; schools should not only impart knowledge but also foster civic ethos (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, p. 148).

In the context of the Committee's conclusions, it is in order to ask the question whether any of the signaled reforms and educational expert analyses was fully reflected in the daily practice of political and educational activity of persons responsible for their implementation. The answer should be the thesis voiced by Polish eminent educationalist and teacher, Professor Czesław Kupisiewicz, who formulated an explicit conclusion in his 2006 book, stressing the "indispensable need to re-reform the Polish school system and higher education, i.e. to thoroughly reform the ministerial education reform of 1998" (Kupisiewicz 2006a, p. 149).

Professor Cz. Kupisiewicz strongly supported the correction of the structure of the school system and the reform of the curriculum content (e.g. completing work on the authorial and core curricula, on tightening the assessment criteria, and on authorizing the use of new Polish school handbooks). He also deemed it extremely necessary to abandon the existing receptive-reproductive doctrine for the generative doctrine. Furthermore, he was also in favor of preparing reforms in such a way that they would be participated in by the central educational authorities and by teachers as equal partners of the educational authorities. He believed that the starting point for education reform should be the all-out restructuring of the system of training, complementary training, and in-service training of teachers. The reform should take into account the changing social, economic, and cultural needs of the Poles. In addition, every reform of the education system requires extremely careful consideration

and preparation in terms of concepts, teaching personnel, funds, organization, and infrastructure; moreover, it has to be approved and supported by the country's administrative-political authorities. Should these authorities be unwilling to offer support and funds, positive results of the reforms cannot be counted on. Finally, the help and participation of representatives of educational sciences was necessary in implementing these reform tasks (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, pp. 149-150).

The late 1990s brought the next, far-reaching changes and transformations, taking place under the conditions of rapid social changes in Poland. Successive stages of the lasting development of market economy progressed, and the institutionalization of the democratic system was being established. Nevertheless, all those processes occurred under the conditions of a profound socio-economic crisis. Poland had to experience and fight against inflation, recession, huge unemployment, and the financial penury of the Polish state, making the already difficult living conditions of many social groups even worse, including the disabled and other at-risk groups. The operation of economic entities on the unstable labor market was accompanied by growing unemployment and mass layoffs. Social spending was reduced and the real value of social security benefits such as pensions, disability pensions, allowances, or compensations dropped. The traditional state system of care and assistance collapsed, despite initial weak signs of initiatives for social help and self-help being restored, chiefly through various foundations or NGOs (Radziejewicz & Winnicki, 2001, p. 9).

It might be in order to consider the problem posed by Professor Bogusław Śliwerski, who had plenty of meetings with teachers, school principals, local government activists and academic communities in Poland during the subsequent years to share his thoughts on the democratization of public education in our country. Before presenting his reflection, however, it is important to refer to the little-known and very seldom recalled theses of J. Regulski about the development of local government:

If the political system does not allow local communities to self-govern, they will never acquire the indispensable skills. You cannot learn to practice democracy from books. The necessary skills can be acquired only through actual, practical action. The best government system will not produce self-government if communities are unable to implement it. (Regulski, 2012, p. 230)

Referring to Regulski's theses and the atmosphere of Śliwerski's meetings, Professor Śliwerski explicitly stated that all the participants in these meetings responded almost the same way as regards democratization: "very well, we agree as long as it does not concern us, to our schools, our children, our teachers, our commune or town" (Śliwerski, 2013, p. 7).

It seems, therefore, that the art of appearances and its related methods fully blossomed in Poland while it was forsaking Communism. For over a hundred years, representatives of various trends in humanism deliberated on how to make the country more democratic and its institutions more self-governing. In contrast to those diagnoses, which almost always held cognitive dissonance, it is surprising that this stuck, because a normative pedagogical project has never, throughout history, evolved to be identical with reality. In the past, its assumed functions were not identical with the previously laid down theoretical and practical assumptions. There is always a person who will distort and reduce them, or even prevent their practical implementation (Śliwerski, 2013, p. 8). Morality is measured with the actual conduct and benefits arising out of it, even when the benefits allow us only to avoid evil, injustice, loss or conflict (Nowak, 2008, p. 13).

In the course of analysis of the complex issues concerning the relationships and connections between the school system and democracy in Poland, education always was, and still is, under the influence of ideology, social philosophy and democratic ideas. These matters were already discussed several decades ago by one of the most eminent Polish educationalists an expert in the history of French school

system, Professor Bogdan Nawroczyński. He argues that the school system of every country and state is more than the institutions of kindergarten and school alone, which guarantee access to free education. In the legal meaning, these institutions constitute a school system as long as their establishment, operation, or liquidation are regulated by the school law, which itself is a derivative of the common principles of educational policy and products of one leading idea. Nawroczyński (1981) wrote:

A politician will say: schools become a school system when they mold good citizens who serve the state with their work in peace time and with their combat skills and technical competence during war. A teacher will say: schools are only organizational forms. We are dealing with the school system only when these forms are teeming with pedagogical work, animated by one spirit and implementing ideals in common. (pp. 11-12)

The same Nawroczyński also voiced an opinion that “schools become a school system when they become a higher order whole. Taken together they are not merely a sum total of schools but a structure oriented towards (accomplishing) some goals” (Nawroczyński, 1981, p. 12). Referring to the views of and statement by the Marquis Condorcet of April 1792, he said that the most freedom-minded Constitution and most progressive legislation only create the possibility of freedom and equality. These objectives can be accomplished only through education. Hence, the significance of pedagogical issues in democracy and the necessity of establishing the school system towards educating enlightened and devoted citizens for the democratic state (Nawroczyński, 1981, p. 17).

There is no other way of equalizing life opportunities of citizens and ensuring the exercise of their rights except through giving them an opportunity to gain the best and highest education; everyone should decide for themselves where truth and where falsehood lies since the state authorities are always prone to falsify the truth for their particular interest. This was also stressed by Condorcet when he said that no public authority should have either the right or even opportunity to inhibit the development of new truths or impede the advocacy of theories inconsistent with its political direction or temporary interest (Nawroczyński, 1981, p. 20).

Another Polish education historian, Antoni Smołański, conducted a historical analysis of the origin of school authorities and the nature of their whole activity because it changed within the context of political and government-system transformations in Poland. He wrote that school was established first; it was only later that educational authorities appeared, especially in other countries, which sought to acquire a school monopoly (Smolalski, 1999). Supervision over schools developed as state-owned schools were established, thereby leading to the creation of national educational authorities. This process was begun by the French Revolution in the 18th century. Smołański regarded the Pole, Antoni Popławski, as the first school-authorities theorist, who was convinced that “educational authorities are indispensable but their power over schools should not be too great” (Smolalski, 1999). He suggested in 1780 that educational and school authorities be subordinated to the Commission for National Education “but only to the extent that they could not infringe on national interests” (Smołański, 1999, p. 7).

The Partitions of Poland destroyed the legacy of the Commission for National Education. Although Bronisław Trentowski believed that the state authorities should take care of the school system so that it would serve the nation, he opposed the state monopoly in education. He was also against the state’s interference in the operation of private schools. Under the Russian Partition, the educational system entirely eliminated the autonomy of schools, while in Galicia (the Austrian Partition), Józef Dietl recognized the autonomous school was only subordinate to the state with respects to the general goal of activity (Smołański, 1999, pp. 11-12).

After the rebirth of the Polish state in 1918, Stefania Sempołowska demanded that the Council for National Education [The Council] be set up in Poland apart from the Ministry of Education; the Council should be an elected collegial body and have the powers of the highest authority regarding pedagogical issues. She argued that "giving all power to a minister who was replaced with each new alignment of political parties puts education and upbringing at risk of fluctuations and alterations dependent on political change each time". In this respect three rules were to be followed: (1) independence of school authorities from the general administration, (2) independence of schools from political parties, and (3) elective management boards of educational institutions (Smołalski, 1999, p. 6).

It should be observed at this point that all decentralist tendencies, both in the area of managing schools and in pedagogical issues, have distant roots in the tradition of Polish educational thought. In each period when they occurred, however, they encountered strong resistance by state authority. As historical sources show, the teachers who were expected to be pioneers of democracy were often the entity that supported the state of affairs, slowed down democratization tendencies, and even, under totalitarianism, effectively destroyed them (Nawroczyński, 1981, pp. 41-42).

The beginnings of Polish infernal climb to the heights of educational pretense after World War Two

It is indisputable that an extraordinary development of the school system of diverse types and education levels existed after WW2. It began with the period of restoration of education from war damage, which provided conditions for a further development of education systems. The period lasted until the mid-1950s, followed by what is called "school explosion" or universal scholarization. The number of people educated by early and secondary education rose almost three times on a worldwide scale. Furthermore, the number of university students more than doubled, or even tripled in some countries (Kupisiewicz, 1995, p. 7).

This high rate of development of school networks, except for those in higher education, lasted until 1973, when it was suddenly hampered under the conditions of the fuel and energy crisis. This started a significant decrease in the pace of development of education, including higher education (i.e. the stagnation stage because many countries, including the wealthiest, reduced the funding for these purposes in the years 1973-1989) (Kupisiewicz, 1995, pp. 7-8).

The early 1970s in Poland witnessed insufficient progress in the spread of institutionalized education. Only 50% of children from 3 to 6 years of age were covered by preschool education in 1988, and only 43% of primary school graduates continued their education in high school. Furthermore, barely 10% of 19-year-olds were enrolled in universities for the first year. This was 4% less than in the late 1970s, indicating that the number of college students in Poland between 1979 and 1988 decreased from 500 thousand to about 350 thousand, by as much as 34%. Moreover, 80 % of those students graduated from general-education high schools, in which only 20% of eight-year primary school graduates continued their education. Consequently, universities turned out to be unavailable to a great number of talented young people in Poland (Kupisiewicz, 1995, p. 111).

Also clearly noticeable was the lack of about 5000 new educational facilities, with over 10 thousand operating facilities in desperate need of renovation; there were gross deficiencies in the provision of schools, since other educational institutions had appropriate equipment and teaching and study aids. Facilities unfit for further use housed 30% of kindergartens, 40% of primary schools, over 40% of high schools, almost 35% of vocational schools and school workshops, 35% of dormitories, 30% of special schools, and as many as 40% of long-term care facilities. The well-known universities, such

as University of Warsaw, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, and Jagiellonian University in Krakow, were also in a very unfavorable situation. As a direct consequence of the foregoing conditions, the teaching and education process decreased in quality. The school systems' personnel quality and quantity was also dramatically decreased: a deficit of 150 thousand teachers, a significant number of who did not have pedagogical qualification (over 40 thousand in 1988) or with low qualifications (over 79 thousand). The structure of teachers' qualifications enlarged and at the same time grew worse because many worked outside of their learned specialties (Kupisiewicz, 1995, pp. 112-113). Furthermore, low levels of teaching and educational results obtained by schools were reported, as well as the incompatibility of the content, methods, and organization of teaching/educational work. The inadequacies of the syllabuses and curricula were seen in their encyclopedism, historicism, cumulativism, uniformism, intellectualism, and lack of connection with life. Consequently, the possibility of working with talented students was increasingly limited, which caused numerous additional educational deficiencies (Kupisiewicz, 1995, pp. 114-116).

This was accompanied by polarized calls for reform to the educational and upbringing system and opposing demands "to leave school alone", which would be tantamount to freezing the existing and inefficient status quo. This demands for no reform would have certainly worsened the situation of the Polish educational system (Kupisiewicz, 1995, p. 118).

In the context of the observable deficiencies of the educational system, the "strategy for the continuing improvement of the school" was formulated in Poland. This strategy became the foundation for the restructuring of the school system: some of them were minor modifications while others meant fundamental changes in the organization, curricula, and personnel. With regard to some of the plans, changes were to be prepared by larger or smaller groups of education experts. Between 1973 and 2005, several expert analyses and three finished projects on school reforms were completed in Poland (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, p. 7). These projects were: (1) Report on the Condition of Education in the Polish People's Republic Warszawa 1973, (ed.) Jan Szczepański, (2) Expert Analysis on the Situation and Development of Education in the Polish People's Republic Warszawa 1979. PAN. Joint study, (ed.) Bogdan Suchodolski, (3) Education - A National Priority, and Education under Conditions of Threat, Warszawa - Krakow 1989 and 1990. Joint study (ed.) Cz. Kupisiewicz, (4) A Comprehensive Report on the Need for and Directions of School Reform. Authored by Cz. Kupisiewicz. "Głos Nauczycielski" 1996, (5) Strategy for the Development of Education in Poland until 2020. A Study by Cz. Kupisiewicz, in collaboration with Cz. Banach. Warszawa 2000. Mimeographed version, (6) A Draft Reform of the Education System in Poland.. Warszawa 1998. MEN, (7) The Main Theses of The Polish Teachers' Union concerning the Reform of the Polish Educational System."Głos Nauczycielski" 2000, (8) Smooth and Rough Roads of Polish Education between 1945 and 2004. Warszawa 2005. Joint study (ed.) Cz. Kupisiewicz., and (9) Strategy for the Development of Education in 2007-2013. MENiS. Warszawa, August 2005 (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, 8). [The Polish titles are placed at the end of Bibliography.]

The transformations initiated in People's Poland after Edward Gierek's group took power in December 1970 also included education, especially focusing on the school system as the leading element. The new political/party leadership decided to bring about reform to the inefficient educational system. This time, however, the preparation of the draft of thorough-going reforms was commissioned to a team of experts set up especially for this purpose. It was composed of the, then eminent, educational theorists and practitioners headed by well-known sociologist Jan Szczepański. The 24-member Committee for the Preparation of Report on the Condition of Education in the Polish People's Republic published an extensive and in-depth report in May 1973; it indicated the necessity of carrying out a reform and presented its major tasks and objectives (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, p. 10).

Underlying the work on the report were the inclinations of the political and administrative authorities of People's Poland towards an urgent need to spread high school education, and their resolutions concerning the necessity of fundamentally accelerating the process of socio-economic development across the whole country. The Committee initially analyzed such forms of the school system as would provide the optimal form of schooling at the high school level in order to guarantee education to citizens which would enable them to conduct optimal activities in all spheres of life (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, p. 11). All these were meant to prepare people for multifaceted professional, social, and cultural activities, as well as the primary purpose of continuing self-teaching. What then were the main theses of the demanded reform in preparation? The Committee assumed that education/upbringing is not, and could not, be exclusively the responsibility of the family and school, although the two institutions play a significant role in the process. Also important were the extracurricular and extra-school activities of the school and the appropriate professional training enabling one to achieve dynamic professional mobility. This indicated the need to continue lifelong training. In addition, this would be connected with the democratization of the training process at all levels of education. For those reasons, the Committee supported the scheme of an eight-grade primary school, a three-grade basic vocational school, a four-grade general education high school, and a five-grade technical high school. Moreover, the Committee believed that the optimal organizational and curricular variant would be one in which the mainstream eleven-year general-education school would eliminate the dual paths of school education for the young generation. The eleven-year school would be based on the widespread system of preschool education (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, pp. 12-18). It is therefore meaningful that the Committee strongly suggested that a full high school education be promoted among the Poles and that university education be widely popularized. These statements could not fail to be appreciated because they are greatly important for the present. We are living in the age of "various revolutions," including the "information revolution" which requires the flexibility of education to the ongoing transformations.

We cannot fail to regard the above-mentioned theses as continually relevant. Some of them still remain topical and are the subject of in-depth analyses carried out by multiple authors; for example, the one about the ongoing process of in-service teacher training or training students to self-educate (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, pp. 19-20).

While Poland's educational bureaucrats did not try to challenge the foregoing propositions of the Committee, they did not implement an educational policy that would be consistent with the aforementioned principles. With regard, however, to the division of the primary school into two tiers: the six-year primary school and three-year gimnazjum (junior high school), which was critically assessed by many intelligent and responsible teachers, the educational bureaucracy acted contrary to those theses, which greatly impeded the educational advancement of Polish children in small towns and villages (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, p. 20).

While the "Report on the Condition of Education in the Polish People's Republic" was highly assessed by specialists not only at home but also abroad, it was completely ignored by the Polish educational bureaucracy. There were no politicians ready to bear the burden of responsibility for a radical reform. They simply treated all the expert analyses and reports as a smoke screen to hide their unwillingness to begin radical educational reforms, rather than as a starting point for taking remedial measures in such an important field as the education of the Poles.

A continuation of the climb to the heights of bureaucratic unconcern and irresponsibility in the field of reforming the education of the Poles

It was only in 1978 that some well-known scholars in the Polish Academy of Sciences were again approached and asked to prepare a report on the current state of, and necessary conditions for the development of, the Polish educational system. The appointed five-member team headed by Professor Bogdan Suchodolski prepared the "Expert Analysis on the Situation and Development of Education in the Polish People's Republic". This small team, composed of Warsaw University professors, formulated five major theses, which can be assessed as the substantive centers of gravity of the "Expert Analysis". The first pertained to the teaching personnel and strongly emphasized that without comprehensively remedying the situation (from the doctrine of educating and in-service training of teachers and other educational personnel to decent conditions and terms of work and pay) it would not be possible to successfully carry out the planned school reform. Teachers should be persuaded to accept the reform and be prepared to implement all the consequent tasks, especially the curricular and educational ones. The second thesis spoke of complete democratization of the school system because the experts assumed that this meant implementing the actual rather than declared equalization of educational opportunities for all social groups in People's Poland. The third thesis stressed the need to restructure the school as an educational institution. The fourth thesis contained statements on the system of continuing and parallel education as the main directive on the thorough restructuring of the schooling system. The final, fifth thesis introduced the idea of building "the educating society" (Kupisiewicz, 1995, pp. 23-26).

The question should now be asked about how the recommendations and theses of the "Expert Analysis" were received by the educational authorities at that time. The experts did not openly settle the essential problem of the ten-year school as the structural core of the Polish school system. The plans of the contemporary educational authorities were not openly opposed, but their implementation would have lowered the education level of Polish society since it would shorten the time of general education from twelve to ten years. This was determined by the planned superstructure of the two-year specialization school over the ten-year school, whereas the outline of the former was not explicitly defined. Although the experts avoided the issue, the ministerial officials failed, luckily for the Poles, to carry out that project.

To sum up, the authors of the "Expert Analysis" presented an interesting concept of restructuring the educational system in People's Poland; they correctly showed its main problems and directions of development (apart from the 10-year school). However, they did not indicate or develop a list of specific objectives, the schedule of their realization, specification of necessary funds, or institutions and persons responsible for the project. Consequently, the educational authorities and bureaucrats did not have to implement the conclusions of the experts or take any remedial measures. This also allowed the authorities to invoke the experts' findings, which they did not intend to realize in daily practice (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, pp. 28-29).

In the trenches of bureaucracy at the Himalayan heights of inertia and simulation of activity

After nine years of feigned organizational-curricular and reformatory activity, a new 34-member Committee of Experts for National Education [KEEN] was established on February 25, 1987 by the Polish Prime Minister. It consisted of scholars of different specialties, representatives of the economy, technology, and cultural fields, and teachers representing major types of schools and educational in-

stitutions. The Committee was asked to prepare a diagnosis of how the contemporary system of national education functioned, as well as to give directions for restructuring the schooling system, especially schools of all types and levels of training. The final result of KEEN's work were two reports: (1) Education – A National Priority: Report on the Condition and Directions of Development of Education in the People's Republic of Poland (Warszawa – Krakow 1989) and (2) Education under Conditions of Threat (Warszawa – Krakow 1990). Moreover, KEEN published 30 partial reports on the condition of education and directions of necessary changes, and five position papers on the need for changes, improvement of the situation of the teaching profession, and improvement of vocational training and schools (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, pp. 31-33).

The Polish educational authorities did not utilize the foregoing studies and reports, although they often referred to their content. Sadly enough, a similar fate fell to the 1989 report Education – A National Priority; the Tadeusz Mazowiecki government recognized it as a significant achievement, but they did not use its findings at all. The next governments – those of Jan Krzysztof Bielecki, Jan Olszewski, and of Hanna Suchocka – behaved in an identical way, while the condition of Polish education steadily deteriorated because the education authorities were content with promises and insignificant alterations to the increasingly worsening situation in education (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, pp. 36-48)

Sources show that the actions of the bureaucracy cannot inspire optimism. However, because of the relevance of the assessments and recommendations made by experts, we hope that there is still time to make proper use of the recommendations. The sooner this happens, the better it will be for the whole Polish educational system. However, all this will be attained when the authorities put the verbal acceptance of the experts' recommendations into actions consistent with the recommended measures. It appears, though, that in order to do so, the relevant authorities, regardless of their political orientation, cannot confine themselves only to promises and petty alterations to the real situation (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, pp. 47-48).

In order to break the apathetic condition of educational bureaucrats, the "Outline of the Concept of the School System in Poland" appeared in May 1996. It presented the introductory material for discussion, together with opinions of eminent Polish specialists in pedagogical sciences, and the Annex. The driving spirit of the document published in the "Głos Nauczycielski" journal was Professor Czesław Kupisiewicz, who saw no other way of spurring on the educational bureaucrats except for shattering their self-satisfied contentment through the teachers' journal. This eminent expert in education saw no other way of shaking up the bureaucrats, but through a shock to stimulate university teachers and teacher-practitioners, who dreamt of opportunities to equal Western countries, by immediately implementing a well-prepared education reform. He wanted a breakthrough in the telling torpor of the officials' lack of imagination and reluctance to change anything (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, p. 50).

Professor Kupisiewicz referred, naturally, to the opinion of the Polish Academy of Sciences Research and Prognostics Committee [Poland 2000 Plus], saying that: "in the last two decades our school system lagged behind the reforms that were implemented in this field in the West at the same time /.../, particularly [behind] in educational permeability, which is an affront to liberal-democratic and humanist norms of equal start" for children and teenagers. The author concluded, therefore, that without a breakthrough concerning science and education, Poland would not stand a chance to catch up with Western countries in socio-economic and civilizational terms. A thorough and comprehensively thought-out reform of the educational system in Poland was the necessity of the day. Professor Kupisiewicz also enumerated the directions of the most urgent reforms: the goals of and conditions for the success of the reform, general principles of the operation of the school system, long-term

tasks, the strategy for reform, scenarios of educational transformations, and the responsibilities of the teachers and authors and implementers of the reform, with the division and also assignment of tasks to be realized. It should be added that opinions on the Outline were voiced by Professors: Jan Szczepański, Heliodor Muszyński, Stefan Wołoszyn, Wincenty Okoń, Czesław Banach, and Tadeusz Lewowicki (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, p. 55).

And how was the “Comprehensive Report” received by the Polish educational bureaucrats? The response was similar to the response to the expert reports and studies of 1973, 1979, and 1989. All in all, the report was met with interest; however, not as much interest was expressed by the Education Ministry as representatives of pedagogical sciences and a large number of teachers. The situation changed only in the late 1990s, when the Ministry of National Education trumpeted its own plan for restructuring the school system in Poland, and started to publicize it intensively (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, p. 68).

Nonsense and hypocrisy of the bureaucrats continued: the fanfare of the Ministry of National Education in 1998

In May 1998, the book *Reform of the Education System. A Draft* was published by the Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne Press. Triumphant fanfares were sounded announcing that this was the preliminary concept and starting point of the reform of educational system. It was presented in public in January 1998 in Poznan, and then developed into the Draft Reform of the Education System, shown in May of the same year in Krakow and Tarnow to the presidents of Polish universities, superintendents of schools, and to local government employees. The soloist part in the book was played by Education Minister Mirosław Handke, who sang paeans in praise of the reformers and the scope and extent of the planned reforms. He pointed out that:

discussion on the guidelines of the reform once again confirmed that the need for change was actually widely felt because even the most critical opinions did not challenge the necessity of carrying it out. What aroused emotions was the pace of the planned changes, their comprehensive scope, and the obvious question about the cost and ways of funding. It should be remembered that we suggested this schedule because we wanted to adjust the education reform to the great transformation of the state’s political system which will take place as of 1 January 1999. (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, pp. 70-71)

As Professor Kupisiewicz stressed, the ministerial initiators emphasized that the reform would be the road to achieving the following goals: to enhance the standard of education of the Poles by spreading high school and university education, to equalize educational opportunities, and to create conditions conducive to the improvement of the quality of education understood as the integral process of upbringing and training (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, p. 71).

When the triumphant fanfare and enthusiastic choirs of acclaim by the educational bureaucrats died away, the humdrum of daily life of schools and their teachers was felt. Firstly, the principle cause of restructuring the organization of the primary and secondary school system, combined with the liquidation of kindergartens and primary schools well-rooted in the local environments, including small establishments in villages, was the introduction of the new model of primary-school and high-school organization according to the 6 + 3 + 3 pattern. This entailed the reduction of the schooling period in the primary school from eight to six years, the adding on top of it the three-grade gimnazjum (junior high school), and the reduction of the schooling years in the high school from four (or five) to three years. Many organizational problems also appeared because it was not possible to separate primary

schools from junior high schools everywhere. Similarly, small village schools were in danger of being closed down. These phenomena were criticized for social reasons.

There were issues of financing the activity of educational institutions that faced the threat of being closed down due to inadequate funding from the education budget. In 2000, Poland allotted barely 3.2% of the budget for financing primary/secondary education, and 0.8% for higher education, while at the same time the figures in the European Union were 6% and 2% respectively (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, pp. 76-77). Moreover, many accompanying and unfavorable changes made themselves felt; these were more non-school factors, such as the state's social and financial policy, the system of educating and in-service training of teachers, expenditure on science, etc. Low interest in the reforms is another challenge for teachers, who did not recognize the ministerial plans as their own (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, pp. 83-85).

Unfulfilled expectations and hopes of the Poles

The Ministry of National Education's school reform, or rather a ministerial empty promise, did not meet the expectations of Polish society because, as Professor Czesław Kupisiewicz concluded, its object was not education, but only one of its departments: the school system, first of all primary and high schools. It is in order therefore to ask several questions at this point: (1) What is the current condition of education in Poland, particularly the school system as its leading department? (2) Can the 1998 ministerial reform improve this state? (3) If this should prove impossible, what needs to be done to remedy this (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, pp. 123-124)?

Extremely accurate answers to the first question can be gained from closely reading the diagnoses prepared in 1998 and 2001 by the Polish Academy of Sciences Research and Prognostics Committee [Poland 2000 Plus], by the Government Center for Strategic Studies, (May 2000), Polish Teachers' Union (2000), and by the authors of the Krakow-based Citizens' Declaration: Education for Development (March 2001). All these diagnoses emphasize in unison that the state of the school system in Poland during the years 1998-2001 is unsatisfactory and even tragic in the rural areas. This remark applies both to the scope and quality of educational training, as well as the conditions in which it is conducted. Access to education is also unequal because it favors children and young people from richer social strata. In general, this requires immediate and effective actions and necessary remedial measures.

The answer in the affirmative to the second question applies to the goals of reform only, i.e. the spread of high school education, equalization of educational opportunities, and improvement of the quality of education and upbringing, together with the conditions for implementing this process. However, the affirmative answer does not apply either to the conditions or resources with which the foregoing goals would be attained. This assessment stems from the fact that the 1998 reform was not prepared adequately and sufficiently enough in terms of concepts, personnel, infrastructure, organization, and funding.

With respect to concepts, the functions to be implemented by particular school tiers were not defined; consequently, appropriate criteria were not set and assigned to determine the choice and systems of educational content. At the same time, a rigid formula of the 6 + 3 + 3 structure was imposed on the school system. The need to restore and expand preschool education was underestimated and the teachers were not prepared for the implementation of new tasks. The organizational difficulties related to school transport determined by the liquidation and reductions of social functions of the school system were also underrated, nor were appropriate financial resources acquired or provided to implement the new tasks (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, pp. 124-125; Kupisiewicz, 2006a, pp. 138-139).

What did the bureaucrats do with Polish education and what are its chances of further development and indispensable advanced reforms?

When in 2006 Professor Czesław Kupisiewicz recapitulated the achievements of several decades of activities by Polish bureaucratic reformers and asked why, despite the lapse of so many years, they did not contribute to improving the situation of Polish science, schooling and higher education, the condition of which still leaves so much to be desired, he probably never suspected that another educationalist, Professor Bogusław Śliwerski, would write the following in 2013 in his book *Diagnosis of Socialization of the Public School System in the Third Republic of Poland in the Straightjacket of Centralism* (Krakow 2013):

In the Third Republic the systemic reform in education has not been completed: its indicator, announced in the early 1990s, was to be democratization, the socialization of the whole educational system in the public sphere. Nor has the revolution of the empowered subjects been finalized, i.e. the possibilities of social, individual and collective self-realization of the main actors of public education: students, teachers, parents, out-of-school youth workers, and allies of these institutions (for example scout instructors, chaplains, sports coaches, etc.). (Śliwerski, 2013, p. 301).

In his opinion, starting from the third post-Solidarity parliamentary term, the educational politicians - as members of the ministerial educational authorities - locked in their desks the ideas of education and Polish schooling, and thereby the model of the Polish school, for which they fought during the outbreak of the Solidarity Union revolution in late 1980 and early 1981, during the martial law and the subsequent political stagnation period, during the Round Table talks, and when the law on the education system was amended in 1991. But they did not forget everything because the Sejm (Parliament) finally confirmed compulsory education for six-year-olds in 2015.

Everything that happened in and with the Polish school system during the period of over 25 years of new Poland is only proof "of departure not only from the ideas and ideals of the new, free, democratic school but also [evidence] of the fear of implementing solutions, to create and promote which the opposition did not lack the courage under the quasi-totalitarian rule in People's Poland" (Śliwerski, 2013, p. 302).

However, after 25 years of building the state on the principles of the democratic system, Poland's educational system still resists these processes. In contrast, the election manifestos of the major Polish political parties still devote considerable room - albeit declaratively - to the schooling system and education. Life experience teaches the Poles that the educational system should change, but this never meant that it must find its significant position in different projects, dreams, expectations, or even demands presented by particular political parties. These programs strongly emphasized ideological differences, which their representatives wanted to include in the public school system in order to penetrate the natural educational environments such as for example the family or specific social groups. Thus, the dispute over the position, role, and formulas of training and educating children and young people did not disappear with the coming to political power of a particular party, but it intensified the needs to stress one's identity or discontentment (Śliwerski, 2013, p. 302).

The successive appointees to the post of the Education Minister knew that the scope of their job, its actual content, and, possibly, their most important dreams and expectations were defined only by the length of the ministerial term linked with the reshuffle in their political parties or with the execution of directives of the top ruling groups. They also realized that it did not always pay to change,

improve, or reform anything because their successors could begin by stopping or reversing their reforms anyway (Śliwerski, 2013, pp. 302-304). Moreover, "it did not /.../ matter whether one was in power or in the opposition, because the most important thing in the educational changes being introduced was to blot out the memory of 'predecessors' (defined as enemies, foreign element, etc.), their plans or actual achievements, gaining a feeling of satisfaction by belittling, deprecating, or destroying them " (Skarga, 2008, p. 24).

The above-mentioned Professor Śliwerski wrote a characteristic opinion on this subject:

For years we have had pseudoreforms, which are not only a declarative, fantasizing form of politically seducing the society with a better condition of its education in the future but which are also attempts to 'carpet-bomb' the 'rotten' /.../ structures and curricular-organizational as well as legal solutions in public education. (Śliwerski, 2013, p. 307)

The ruling political parties in Poland usually are concerned with "right" redefinitions/reevaluations, in accordance with what Bauman called the intention of the authorities to guarantee themselves "official fear" (Śliwerski, 2013, p. 308). Similarly, Śliwerski wrote that an indicator of the betrayal of the Solidarity Movement's 1980-1981 reform program is first of all: education/upbringing system dominated by political parties, stopping of decentralization of the educational system, depriving education of social supervision, pseudo-self-government in schools and in the educational system, curbing the autonomy of teachers, parents and students, and authorization of appearance and educational fiction. This stems from the fact that Poland's educational macro policy depends primarily on the war of ideologies, waged since 1991 by political parties, which use the education system for this purpose as a means of indoctrination and implementation of ideological programs. That is why the changing National Education Ministry authorities (not only as a consequence of elections won by the ruling grouping) try to attract many supporters to the ideology of the ruling party, but also manipulate the actors of education in accordance with the idea of political correctness. The achieved measurable effect is as follows: as a result of constant disputes and the top-down and centralist implementation or elimination of specific reforms or changes, the educational system is either weakened by the policies of those in power or the policies and the parties in power are defeated by the educational system (Śliwerski, 2013, pp. 308-309). Consequently, the school of the transformation years transformed itself from its status of an agency of the undemocratic state into an institution trying to helplessly and unsuccessfully free itself from the influence of new forms of ideological and political domination (Śliwerski, 2013, p. 309).

Are Legacies and Welder, therefore, right when they say that democracy is based on trust and erodes if trust is lacking (Legacies & Welder, 2012, p. 94)? In the conclusion of his fascinating book, Śliwerski writes that:

There is no sign that Poland's educational system will cease to be geared towards short-term interests and actions of the governing parties or political groups, because the existing process of de-statification of the educational system does not mean its de-partification and depoliticization. (Śliwerski, 2015, p. 603).

In this context it might be worth posing one more question asked by the same author: "What do the children, young people, adult learners, and their teachers need an army of officials for, who care mainly about themselves and have nothing to do with the needs and educational potential of Polish society?" (Śliwerski, 2015, p. 606). Mendel and Szkudlarek may just be right when they write:

Economics, social issues, law or education return to specialized government agencies and onto the desks of civil servants; the people leave the city squares and disperse into more or less reformed institutions. 'The political' of society, its openness to demands and their new combinations and the accompanying awareness of the arbitrariness of its construction then hides behind the 'politics' of managing parceled up and bureaucratically administered problems. (Mendel & Szkudlarek, 2013, p. 19)

Or perhaps US Ambassador to Poland, S.D. Mull is right saying that a great merit of democracy is that no one makes you believe what the government tells you (Mull, 2014, p. 41)?

What are we left with from the years of feigned reforms and empty rhetoric of educational bureaucrats?

We are left with the conviction about the necessity of re-reforming the Polish schooling system and higher education or reforming the ministerial reform of 1998. It should be an all-out enterprise involving not only the remaking of the system structure, but primarily the modernization of the content, organizational forms, methods, and means of educating. The second conviction is that reforms make the most sense if they have been prepared and implemented with the active participation of the central educational authorities and properly prepared teachers. The third conviction concerns the transformation of the system of training, retraining and in-service training of teachers, which should take into account the constantly changing social and economic needs. Fourthly, the country's political authorities should truly want and strive for reform as an obligatory continuing task. And finally, the reform has to be extremely carefully prepared in every respect (including funding) and has to gain active support from representatives of pedagogical sciences (Dudzikowa & Knasiecka-Falbierska, 2013, pp. 498 + 6 nlb; Kupisiewicz, 2012, pp. 301-303; Szymański, 2004, pp. 197-199).

It is certainly debatable whether all these open problems will possibly be solved because this depends on many different factors. Regrettably, Poland is not a country with ample financial resources. Moreover, those in power do not often muster the courage to put the difficult advice of experts into practice; sometimes it so happens that they even distort these recommendations with their own actions (Kupisiewicz, 2010, p. 195; Kupisiewicz, 2006b, pp. 118-123).

References

- Dudzikowa, M. & Knasiecka-Falbierska, K. (eds.) (2013): *Sprawcy i/lub ofiary działań pozornych w edukacji szkolnej*. Kraków: Impuls.
- Kupisiewicz, C. (1995): *Koncepcje reform szkolnych w wybranych krajach świata na przełomie lat osiemdziesiątych i dziewięćdziesiątych*. Warszawa: ŻAK.
- Kupisiewicz, C., (2006a): *Projekty reform edukacyjnych w Polsce*. Warszawa: IBE.
- Kupisiewicz, C. (2006b): *Szkoła w XX wieku*. Warszawa: PWN.
- Kupisiewicz, C., (2010): *Szkice z dziejów dydaktyki*. Kraków: Impuls.
- Kupisiewicz, C. (2012): *Z dziejów teorii i praktyki wychowania*. Podręcznik Akademicki, Impuls, Kraków.
- Leggiewie, C. & Welzer, H. (2012): *Koniec świata jaki znaliśmy. Klimat, przyszłość i szanse demokracji*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej.
- Mendel, M. & Szkudlarek, T. (2013): *Kryzys jako dyskurs i narracja. Konteksty edukacyjne*. In: *Forum Oświatowe*, no. 3, pp. 13 – 34.
- Mull, S.D. (2014): *Tajemnice są potrzebne*. In: *Tygodnik Powszechny*, no. 29, p. 41.
- Nawroczyński, B. (1981): *O szkolnictwie francuskim*. Warszawa: PWN.
- Nowak, E. & Cern, K.M. (2008): *Ethos w życiu publicznym*. Warszawa: PWN.

- Radziewicz-Winnicki, A. (2001): Jubileusz 5 – lecia powstania Kwartalnika. In: *Auxilium Sociale – Wsparcie Społeczne*, nos. 19/20, pp. 9 – 11.
- Regulski, J. (2012): Rozwój samorządności w Polsce. Próba przewidywań. In: *Wizja przyszłości Polski. Studia i analizy*, t. III: Ekspertyzy. Eds.: B. Galwas & L. Kuźnicki: PAN Komitet Prognoz “Polska 2000 Plus”. Warszawa, pp. 229 – 235.
- Skarga, B. (2008): Rewolucja zawistników. In: *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 30 – 31 August, p. 24.
- Smołalski, A. (1999): Historyczne podstawy teorii organizacji szkolnictwa w Polsce. *Zagadnienia administracji edukacyjnej*, t. 3. Kraków: Impuls.
- Szymański, M.J. (2004): *W poszukiwaniu drogi. Szanse i problemy edukacji w Polsce*. Kraków: Akademia Pedagogiczna.
- Śliwerski, B. (2013): *Diagnoza uspołecznienia publicznego szkolnictwa III RP w gorszej centralizmu*. Kraków: Impuls.
- Śliwerski, B. (2015): *Edukacja (w) polityce. Polityka (w) edukacji. Inspiracje do badań polityki oświatowej*. Kraków: Impuls.

Other Polish titles of the reports referred to in the text

- Drogi i bezdroża polskiej oświaty w latach 1945 – 2004*. Warszawa 2005. Opracowanie zbiorowe pod red. Cz. Kupisiewicza.
- Edukacja narodowym priorytetem oraz Edukacja w warunkach zagrożenia*. Warszawa – Kraków 1989 i 1990. Opracowania zbiorowe pod red. Cz. Kupisiewicza.
- Ekspertyza dotycząca sytuacji i rozwoju oświaty w PRL*. Warszawa 1979. Druk powielony w PAN. Opracowanie zbiorowe pod red. Bogdana Suchodolskiego.
- Główne postulaty Związku Nauczycielstwa Polskiego w sprawach reformy polskiego systemu edukacji*. “Głos Nauczycielski” 2000.
- Raport o stanie oświaty w PRL*. Warszawa 1973, pod red. Jana Szczepańskiego.
- Reforma systemu edukacji w Polsce. Projekt*. Warszawa 1998. MEN.
- Strategia rozwoju edukacji na lata 2007 – 2013*. MENiS. Warszawa, sierpień 2005 (Kupisiewicz, 2006a, 8).
- Strategia rozwoju edukacji w Polsce do roku 2020*. Opracowanie autorskie Cz. Kupisiewicza przy współpracy Cz. Banacha. Warszawa 2000. Druk powielony.
- Syntetyczny raport o potrzebie i kierunkach reformy szkolnej*. Opracowanie autorskie Cz. Kupisiewicza. “Głos Nauczycielski” 1996.

About the Author

Prof. Dr. Ryszard Kucha: University of Social Sciences, Łódź (Poland). Contact: rysiek441@wp.pl

