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Report from the 6th All-Poland Pedagogic Congress, 17–19 September 2007, Lublin

Kultura i Edukacja nr 5, 147-155

2008

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REPORT FROM THE 6TH ALL-POLAND PEDAGOGIC CONGRESS, 17–19 SEPTEMBER 2007, LUBLIN

Between 17 and 19 September 2007, in Lublin, the 6th All-Poland Pedagogic Congress took place. It was organized by Polish Pedagogic Association and two universities, namely MCSU in Lublin and The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. The Programme Committee was chaired by Prof. dr hab. Joanna Rutkowiak, dr hab. Dariusz Kubinowski, Professor at UMCS, and Rev. dr hab. Marian Nowak, Professor at KUL, were the Chairmen of the Organizational Committee.

The plenary addresses and comments of members of semi-plenary sessions were joined by one common subject Education – morality – public sphere. Long and thorough work of Organizers, proceeding the discussed event – resulted in a rich programme, original in terms of content and form, of three day meeting of 371 people (as that was the number of the enrolled to a list allowing for voting, mentioned in a separate part of the report). As usual, the Congress' deliberations were inaugurated in a form of plenary deliberations.

The session of platform papers was opened by the addresses of the Chairman of Polish Pedagogic Association, Prof. dr hab. Zbigniew Kwieciński, on the need for critical literacy, and of the Chairman of the Pedagogic Sciences Committee of PAN, Prof. dr hab. Tadeusz Lewowicki, whose speech organized the subject called Pedagogy in the face of (im)morality of public sphere. Both Authors, in their addresses referred to the most important discourses of the contemporary humanities of the turn of the centuries which appeared in the Euro-American civilization, and, in this context, tried describing Polish problems, which emerge within the space outlined with three title notion categories: education – morality – public sphere. As a receiver of those addresses (since it is difficult to resign from personal and

individual reception of texts), I paid special attention to the problems I could call as – paraphrasing the title of a work¹- “hot” problems of the area outlined by the subject of the Congress.

Prof. dr hab. Zbigniew Kwieciński encouraged the members of the Congress to focus on – as announced by the address’ subject – such problems as:

- “backward” political and historical consciousness of the Poles,
- shortages in traditional functions of the school (the reconstruction, adaptation, and emancipation ones) in the world after the fall of big narratives,
- tensions connected with religion education in Polish schools, and others.

The mentioned problems may be regarded as indicators of a low level of critical literacy of groups responsible for education, and also for the quality of functioning and effects achieved in education system institutions. It is a pity that it was not said clearly that educationalists and pedagogy cannot feel exempt from responsibility for such a state. An accurate diagnosis of the low level of critical literacy of education subjects and being convinced of the need for critical literacy may directly translate into evaluation of practice of education not only in the education system but first of all into the evaluation of practice of academic education in the range of pedagogy of professionals of more than a hundred pedagogic specialities and specializations. The level of critical literacy achieved in educational institutions may be a good source of evaluation of the quality of their work in the world which is characterized by the increased level of risk – as Ulrich Beck convinces.

Prof. dr hab. Tadeusz Lewowicki applied a method of seeing the area outlined with three category notions (education – morality – public sphere) from the angle of “common good”. In his address, the following claims describing the reality have been cited:

- on alienation of power,
- on emigration of people, the both external and internal ones,
- on transferring from a society of goals to society focused on means,
- on deepening the distance and discrepancies between ethics and morality, as well as pedagogy and education, and others.

These claims constituted a context justifying the conclusion on good preparation of pedagogy for producing knowledge in the world after the fall of the big narratives. In this case, it is worth mentioning that this opinion was expressed by

¹ It refers to a work of the expert nature, prepared by the members of KNP PAN, the publishing of which coincided with the date of the Congress: *“Hot” problems of education in Poland. Expert evaluations and opinions (“Gorące” problemy edukacji w Polsce. Ekspertyzy i opinie)*, T. Lewowicki (ed.), Warszawa 2007, Committee of Pedagogical Sciences of PAN (Komitet Nauk Pedagogicznych PAN), University of Pedagogy of Polish Teachers’ Union (Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna ZNP).

the Chairman of KNP PAN, who had this function in the years 1993–2007 and at that time he initiated many diagnoses of pedagogy state and evolution in the breakthrough process of political system transformation and radical culture change. Thus the meaning of these words seems to be different than of those spoken by the ones observing the process of changes of social education practice and the process of paradigmatic change in producing scientific knowledge on education from narrow and partially seen view of particular sub-disciplines and speciality knowledge areas arisen in the lively process of differentiation of scientific knowledge on education.

My attention was especially drawn to a thesis reminding pedagogic thinking of education of its “obligation” category. It seems, however, that referring to this category in a circle of which a number of educationalists positively become parts of so called “postmodern discourses”, related to the criticism of the modern world and pedagogy connected with this world, which offered producing effective doctrines of educating people (by target-oriented processes of upbringing and education) of definite quality, useful for realizing Enlightenment idea of “progress” is an act of courage.

A debate on the meaning and legitimization of normative sentences in pedagogy and the status and role of pedagogy (mainly in a form of doctrines, ideologies, hidden programmes and methodologies) deeply divides the circle of contemporary Polish educationalists. However, I would like to draw one’s attention to the ambiguity of the categories of “obligation” and remind that talking about obligations is justified not only in Polish pedagogic tradition² regarded as the classic of pedagogy but also in the works of great contemporary Western philosophers, e.g. in the works of Hannah Arendt³ and in the theory of communication of Jürgen Habermas, which is so often cited as a reference by the supporters of postmodernism discourses.

² In Poland, the works on these issues, written by Kazimierz Sośnicki, Stefan Wołoszyn, and other specialists in the humanities especially constituting a part of the tradition of Kazimierz Twardowski Lvov-Warsaw school have not lost its meaning.

³ The quotation: “The qualifications of a teacher are based on the knowledge of the world and abilities to convey it to others, but their authority is based on taking responsibility for the world. For a child, a teacher is a kind of representative of all the adult inhabitants of the world, pointing at its various details and telling a child: “This is our world” (H. Arendt, *Między czasem minionym a przyszłym. Osiem ćwiczeń z myśli politycznej*, Translated by M. Godyń, W. Madej, Warszawa 1994, pp. 225–226). My attitude to this issue is proven by the fact that this quotation constitutes a motto for a *general pedagogy* course book I wrote. Maybe the relations between the following notion categories need some rethinking: obligation – responsibility – involvement – participation, and a concept of a “decent man”, cited by the address’ Author.

I believe that these two platform opinions were rather corresponding instead of contrary ones – as it was understood by some participants of the described meeting.

The next three papers had been prepared by philosophers, which may be interpreted as a sign of establishing of the return of pedagogy to philosophicality after excessively and unnecessarily prolonged period of instrumental usage of pedagogy reduced to producing doctrines (a doctrine), becoming a part of the positivist orientation (positivist paradigm). These opinions were joined by the accepted ethical-moral view in regard to examining varied relations between education and the public sphere.

Prof. dr hab. Jan. P. Hudzik entitled his speech as Education: a thing on building bridges between experience and imagination, and a point of departure in his speech was a thesis on the tension which grows between “experience” and “imagination”. He also convinced that leading to “understanding” is the best strategy for overcoming this tension. In this context, the conclusion claiming that education in the conditions of democracy has to be favourable for creating competences useful for people so that they could understand themselves and the world, was totally justified. Among many competences listed by the Author of the text there were the following ones: most generally speaking a manner characterized by involvement and activity, disposals of mind open to a dialog, feeling of responsibility, and readiness for mediating between the public and personal.

Also, important and interesting were the Professor’s deliberations on the public sphere after 1989, which he described as an area of two rationalities and two types of language representation (ideals – postulates) meeting head-on, which in contemporary pedagogy may become apparent as a dispute over the language of a dialogue on education. For me, the most valuable in this speech seems to be the showing of context of justification for the postulate saying that searching for arguments is an important task of pedagogy, and the dialog on “pedagogic sense of education”⁴, as well as forming of two detailed postulates: 1) on unity of teaching and education, 2) accepting a criteria of “the quality of life” as a criterion for purpose values of educational processes, and not only a publicized instrumental criterion of knowledge and practical competences.

Dr hab. Leszek Koczanowicz, Prof. DSWE TWP discussed the problems relating to the subject of Ethics of democracy. The text of this speech corresponded

⁴ The address’s Author did not define this idiom, thus, it is possible that my understanding of “pedagogic sense of education” (these are the interpretations of “pedagogy” as a social educational practice, made in the context of scientific knowledge on education) distorts reading of intentions of Prof. Hudzik).

mainly with the idea of the 2nd All-Poland Pedagogic Congress, the participants of which met in 1995 in Toruń on the subject of *Democracy vs. Education: Teaching and Education*. It differed from that meeting in terms of shifting the stress on the first part of this title. The author of this speech assumed a long time view of experiences related to democracy (from the world of ancient Greek states-cities to contemporary times).

This multi-centuries experience of people, connected with practicing of democracy as executing power, creating social structure and building proper institutions for supporting the defined order was summed up by him in an amazingly true sentence, whose meaning may be expressed in the following words: people knew what democracy was although they could not live in it, but today, they live in democracy without knowing what it is. I have understood it as a very clever and catchy definition of the state of crisis of contemporary democracy.

Such abbreviated identification of the problem allowed the Author of the speech to focus on comparison of the two types of organizing society (on the example of Athens and Sparta) so as to create a proper context for analysis of democracy in the cognitive, concerning political sciences and philosophical views. The former one allowed to identify endemic threats to democracy as a type of social order, and the two of them were regarded as the most important: 1) the anomaly of legitimization, 2) totalitarianism. In a philosophical view, there was an incredibly important constative to say that democracy is a system organized in an “empty space”, where there is no centre of power, I would add in the light of my experiences – there is no centre which would appropriate a monopoly for “the truth”⁵ (or made a successful attempt at such an appropriation).

In this context, the thesis saying the following is justified: democracy cannot be defended by institutions only, as it is a form of life of people of a particular place and historic time, the core of which is constituted by the fact that ethics combines (unites and gives common sense) actions of people with social practices and functioning of institutions the existence of which is regarded as a condition for democracy. Thus, the only bond combining these three spheres of social functioning may be an “ethical project”. The question of the required shape of education which is favourable for building, lasting, and defending democracy through involvement of people into building and realizing of a defined ethical project remained open.

⁵ I presented this problem in the work: T. Hejnicka-Bezwińska, *Historia wychowania, cz. IV (Oświata i pedagogika pomiędzy dwoma kryzysami, Kielce 1996, p. 50.*

The subject of deliberations of Rev. Prof. dr hab. Andrzej Szostek was the school, discussing the subject called Moral education at school: a key to a programme of upbringing of an adult citizen. In the first part of the statement, those educational practice elements were identified which are mostly connected with moral education and they were mentioned as such: form periods, religion/ethics, teaching subjects with a special emphasis put on the role of liberal arts subjects, and the example of a teacher. This fragment was completed with quoting of a constative being a part of a proverb saying that the words teach but the examples are appealing.

This maxim referred to contemporary educational reality where for tens of years we have been observing a phenomenon of a negative selection to the profession of a teacher, as well as marginalization of teachers' professional training in terms of realizing of upbringing programmes, including teaching within the scope defined by a plan and curriculum of school subjects. The Professor's statement was completed with forming of a series of precise postulates, which could be regarded as a programme for school repair.

In my opinion, they could be only an introduction to a discussion, requiring, on the one hand, a deepened legitimization for forming them, and giving some thought to the situation in which, despite the obviousness and common consent as to some postulates, still, they are not realized.

The plenary deliberations were completed with a statement of a team of young researchers from the MCSU Special Social-Pedagogy Unit, which, directed by Prof. dr hab. Maria Chodakowska, carried out empirical researches and presented their results, filling by this the common subject of attitudes towards morality in the public sphere of future creators of their various areas. The researched object was constituted by opinions, beliefs, and values of students – as future creators of “morality in a public sphere” of the following fields of studies: journalism, law, medicine, pedagogy, and areas concerning political sciences. It is difficult to cite the incredibly interesting results of the empirical research done in the short report from the 6th All-Poland Pedagogic Congress.

Regarding them as highly general, it may be claimed that they manifest quite significant changes in recognizing things moral/immoral by future creators of morality in a public sphere, in comparison with ethic values recognized and realized before, assuming the generation criterion or ethos criterion. They also reveal a phenomenon called by the speakers as “empty pedestals” of patterns and models believed in the past. The author of the concept of those researches and their organizer announced continuing the researches on a representative sample so that she could verify these very interesting data and information achieved in the research which may be regarded as a pilot study.

The plenary deliberations were continued on 19th September, and a part devoted to merely a few minutes report from deliberations in semi-plenary sessions, submitted by Chairmen of these deliberations or their deputies was a significant part of the report written by me. Such reports were submitted by:

From the 1st session – *What community?* – Prof. dr hab. Andrzej Szahaj,

From the 2nd session – *What justice?* – dr Maria Reut (instead of dr hab. Andreea Folkierska),

From the 3rd session – *What culture?* – Prof. dr hab. Lech Witkowski,

From the 4th session – *What relations?* – dr hab. Astrid Męczkowska,

From the 5th session – *What paradigm?* – Prof. dr hab. Bogusław Śliwerski,

From the 6th session – *What educational policy?* – Prof. dr hab. Elżbieta Alina Hałas (instead of Prof. dr hab. Stefan M. Kwiatkowski),

From the 7th session – *What future, What school?* – Prof. dr hab. Zbyszko Melosik.

The reporters expressed their content referring to the course of discussions in their sections, some of them decided to particularly highlight and emphasize the involvement of some persons in the deliberations. They also shared the opinion that a debate in semi-plenary sessions should be rather treated as an attempt for opening for the great number of problems, aspects, and cognitive views, presented on the occasion of consideration of persons debating in particular sessions and searching for answers to questions asked by Organizers of the Congress.

Due to the fact that the semi-plenary sessions were held simultaneously, a single person cannot submit a report from that part of the deliberations. The editor-in-chief of the *Culture & Education* – Prof. dr hab. Ryszard Borowicz, had an idea of supplementing this report with the reports of the participants of the deliberations in some semi-plenary sessions. This remark also justifies the succinctness of my information referring to the discussed sessions and allows me for moving to the last part of the report, including more general remarks, and, at the same time, more subjective, though also the choice of the discussed issues of particular authors' speeches, as well as their interpretation were burdened with subjectivism.

However, every participant of this important event, namely the 6th All-Poland Pedagogic Congress, looks at particular sequences of this meeting through some kind of a filter (glasses) of one's own cognitive structure, yet possible to be discovered by a receiver as it can be reconstructed on the grounds of formerly written authors' texts. Talking about my view, I could say that it is a cognitive view of general pedagogy.

To sum up, I believe that the 6th All-Poland Pedagogic Congress was – similarly to all previous Congresses – a significant intellectual event and a great under-

taking and organizational test, for which the Organizers have deserved great recognition.

Looking at the said event in the context of experiences from the previous congresses, joining the ethic aspect into the area of the debate on education and public sphere is a novelty. The frames of congress debate, outlined with the three key notion categories (education – morality – public sphere), in my opinion, strengthen the change of the research subject of contemporary Polish pedagogy (when compared to traditional pedagogy), already registered in contemporary lexical resources (encyclopaedias, dictionaries, lexicons, and course books).

Such a wide subject of the Congress was beneficial also for integration of the academic group dealing with the issues of education in various cognitive views and within different science disciplines, being beneficial, at the same time, for overcoming, metaphorically speaking, the “walls” arisen in a dynamic process of differentiation of pedagogic knowledge. During the 6th Congress, the union between pedagogy and philosophy was particularly highlighted, which may be interpreted as an indicator of full consent to restoring to pedagogy one of the aspects of the traditional triad: philosophicality – abstractness – historicity of science knowledge on education. It would appear that the historic orientation was represented least in this Congress, which can be confirmed by the missing upbringing historians’ circle in this meeting, while the circle dealing with the history of pedagogy did not mark their presence in this area at all.

Also, an awaited organizational form of significant limitation of debate participants presenting their whole prepared speeches was successfully tried. Replacing papers with forming only the main thesis of the speech really allowed some time for discussing, though the time turned out to be too short for deepened discussion respecting the principles of rational discussion. Also, there has been some unsatisfied feeling referring to the quality of communication and reaching the consensus of the debates participants in which I could take part.

The declaration of the Congress’ Organizers saying that in the current calendar year there will be an after-congress book published, including the texts of plenary deliberations, introductory texts into semi-plenary deliberations, as well as selected speeches from semi-plenary deliberations, was well acclaimed.

Similarly to previous congresses, there was a minor participation of subjects of education outside the circle professionally dealing with producing and publicizing of knowledge on education, thus possible receivers and most important verifying persons of such knowledge, such as: teachers and educationalist (graduates of different specialities and specializations of academic education within pedagogy), local government members, politicians, representatives of educational administra-

tion of various levels, and representatives of various departments existing in the public sphere.

The permanence of this phenomenon encourages to reflect that we deal with marginalization of educational issues in organization of social life at simultaneous declarations of many subjects that these are the most important issues for the present and future. This phenomenon may also be interpreted as deepening the distance and discrepancies between what is offered by the ones producing knowledge on education and this is what is expected by other subjects of education.

The awareness of this weakness of meetings of the All-Poland Pedagogic Congresses nature was present in the speech of the Chairman of the PTP, whose opinion closed the deliberations, but it also included an announcement that the next Congress will be held in 2010 in Toruń by UMK, and personally by the Dean of new Pedagogic Department in this University – Prof. dr hab. Aleksander Nalaskowski. The message for its Organizers is to be constituted by the words of a poet, Adam Asnyk: *To aspire for a new life.*