

Adult Education in Poland – challenges and possibilities.

Education according to today's conception of ongoing training viewed as the key to a successful future is becoming for us a reason for hope that the twenty-first world really will improve. Adult education has had various functions¹ in Poland in recent decades, and it has gained a new and special meaning in this period of political change. It is and it should be a vector of society activity, activity that embraces training, supplementary education, improvement, re-qualification and self-education; all these processes help in gaining and updating knowledge, in shaping and developing desirable attitudes, skills, etc. We can also mention '*alokacyjna*' [from the Polish, 'without a location'], the emancipating function of adult education which prevents marginalisation (social exclusion), and which allows the individual to be autonomous and free from tensions and stresses connected with difficulties and which also allows for the activity and flexibility required during periods of change, enabling all of us to adapt to financial, economical, cultural and social changes.

Only ten or twenty years ago, highly civilised societies were based on foundations established during the economic development of the industrial society model. Nowadays we are heading for a society based on information, in which knowledge is wealth, information and data are elementary products, work is done at home in a diminished dimension of the working timetable, where maintaining partnerships (networks, systems of equality) is key, in which transport has been entrusted to the information superhighway (as opposed to the industrial highway), in which the scale of operation will be global and education will be based on state of the art technology and distance learning using computers and other media.

How can we ensure that Polish adults are prepared for a full and competent use of the possibilities provided by the civilization of a global information society?

I propose that this matter can be solved by:

- ✓ Diagnosing the educational needs of Polish people,
- ✓ Therapy to tackle educational shortages or even severe educational problems, e.g. national functional illiteracy², tackling and increasing the nation's low number of graduates (an average Polish town has twenty educational establishments, whereas any one rural area has only one) higher education (only 2% of the population have continued studying into higher

¹ With individual approach – substitutional and proper function; in categories of social functions – disseminating, integrating, adaptable (stabilising), progressive (innovative), conservative, economical, compensating, political, stratificational (distributional), prophylactic.

² 22% of young Poles are illiterate following elementary school, with no chance of participating in society and culture, 19,6% of people are half-illiterate. See Z. Kwieciński, *Wykluczanie*, UMK, Toruń 2002, p. 20

education), tackling difficulties in independent research problem solving, tackling ignorance of foreign languages information technology,

- ✓ Creating accessible educational opportunities that would give people professional, social, civic, linguistic, digital (IT), knowledge and abilities that would give them the will and ability to carry out their spare time interests,
- ✓ Shaping positive motivation that would be useful in educational activities and also as a lifestyle,
- ✓ Designing tools to measure the real needs of the job market, adapting educational opportunities to meet needs (18% unemployment in Poland as at 31 March 2003 , i.e. over three million adults without work!),
- ✓ Disseminating knowledge of finances and economics (e.g. with the aim of creating a small family businesses),
- ✓ Putting into practise more effectively educational and special programmes to soften and counteract the effects of unemployment,
- ✓ Creating conditions for an unconstrained, international, fluid labour force,
- ✓ Creating good conditions for cultural assimilation of migrating populations,
- ✓ Increasing finances for national education, and adult education,
- ✓ Involving commercial enterprises in educational activities, through a working legal system and a softened national taxation system,
- ✓ Reactivating or creating a greater number of so-called “open knowledge” centres (universities, modelled on the *Open University*, distance learning),
- ✓ Elaborating procedures of quality control (evaluation) of existing educational processes.

Statements such as “***Knowledge through learning***”, “***Action through learning***”, “***Learning in order to live together***”, “***Learning in order to be***”, or more dramatically “***Learn or die***”, or pragmatically “***Learning how to learn***”, or finally “***Learning without borders***” (both literally and metaphorically) are indications of continuous education (permanent education), i.e the notion of constantly raising the level of knowledge and skills, regardless of age, origins, gender or formal qualifications.

During the formulation process of teaching aims these statements are valid both in the subject microsphere and in the macroperspective of society as a whole. In a subjective dimension human activity becomes an imperative in the workplace, at home, in social life. Continued study throughout a lifetime implies a renewed approach to the contents and the methods of training and such a transformation of education at all levels, including adult

education, enables reformed education to open up to solve the above-mentioned problems and to create possibilities for everyone to learn and study (open education, a return to education, a second chance at education).

Since the 1960 a number of phenomena and processes that completely changed the face of the world have influenced the dissemination and realisation of continuous education. Among them are: technical progress, scientific development, production explosion; progress in medicine – we live longer (average life expectancy in the nineteenth century was 40, in the twentieth century it had increased to 70/80), we are ill less often and less seriously, there has been an increase in available spare time, mass-culture expansion (global village), easy, cheap, direct interpersonal communication, equality within society (in the sense of equal access to culture and educational heritage), education and training activities coming second to social and economic needs, , transformation of society from the industrial system to the global information, system.

Post-modern societies no longer believe that school can be an educational panacea. Instead, they are convinced of its educational deficiency. We can observe a major crisis in today's schools, a crisis in educational theory and practice, a crisis in the way society raises its children. Thus an awareness of the necessity to reflect society's changes by making investments in sectors of education other than schools, including informal sectors, has been postulated first among the intellectual elite, then among the economics and government elite. Nowadays it is not possible to confine knowledge gained during institutionalised teaching processes to the diploma, since it quickly becomes outdated. The speed of development in science is so fast that any diploma is outdated after 5 years. We have to ensure optimal conditions of lifelong education and training and of full personal development in each period of every individual's life. This does not mean giving individuals a complete knowledge, but to equip them with the ability to gain knowledge independently, i.e preparation for self-education. With regard to the present, education should have a function that frees, emancipates and shapes individuals to love life and others (Fromm), that shapes a conscious, creative and active individual.

The basic features of continuous education are:

- ✓ It should use its influence to embrace all stages of human life,
- ✓ It should be separate from the frameworks of general education (systematic education, permanent education, contemporary education, distance learning),
- ✓ It should provide a multiplicity of organisers,
- ✓ It should have many levels, it should be permeable,

- ✓ It should be generally accessible (in time and location),
- ✓ It should provide a multiplicity of organisational solutions and teaching forms,
- ✓ It should be flexible,
- ✓ It should provide the widest possible range of subjects.

Adult education should concern post-school and out-of-school ; it signifies the integral depiction of educational processes, both formal and informal, where the adults develop their skills, enrich their knowledge and improve their technical and professional qualifications or give them a new direction. Counselling and advisory services form an important part of educational activities - they facilitate and often enable better functioning in professional life, in local society, in the family, in the personal life.

The changes that have place in Polish adult education are precisely labelled by andragogical³ experts: decentralisation, internationalisation (“europeanisation”, globalisation), multiplicity of educational narrations, socialisation.

Decentralisation

In recent years there has been a a huge increase in the number of organisers , starting with private organisers; nowadays a further differentiation among them is occurring (educational activity is undertaken not only by schools or universities but also within the workplace, social associations, science and research institutes, corporations and educational foundations, local government and trade unions, churches and confessional associations, co-operations, trade associations, trade centres, cultural institutions , and on a private basis). The variety and constantly-growing number of organisers of out-of-school adult education signifies the growth of competition within the educational market. It is a highly positive phenomenon that prevents problems within the educational services.

Internationalisation

This process cannot be stopped. International student exchange programmes (Socrates-Erasmus⁴), schools and educational societies, research centres (Socrates – Comenius⁵), promoting foreign languages studies (Lingua⁶), open training and long distance training (Minerva⁷), adult education and ongoing education (Grundtvig⁸), comparison of educational

³ andragogical issues: the science of elderly people.

⁴ <http://www.socrates.org.pl/erasmus/index.html>

⁵ <http://www.socrates.org.pl/comenius/index.html>

⁶ <http://www.socrates.org.pl/ligua/index.html>

⁷ <http://www.socrates.org.pl/minerva/index.html>

systems (Arion⁹), quality improvements in professional training, adjusting opportunities to meet the needs of the job market (Leonardo da Vinci¹⁰), Phare, and others bring together more and more participants. The necessity of capital flow and being competitive on foreign markets forces corporation leaders and their personnel to maintain international quality levels. Hence the openness to Europe, to the USA, to the world. Foreign companies which invest their capital in Poland offer Polish employees pilot schemes of supplementary education in their own centres of professional improvement. This trend often fades away, following initial excitement at its workshops and training methodology. Foreign teachers are replaced by highly qualified Polish lecturers.¹¹ In connection with progressive globalisation, economic, scientific and technical developments, many challenges force the process of going outside national borders and searching for opportunities for international co-operation. Adult education policies are formed by four international institutions: UNESCO, OECD, the Council of Europe and European Commission at the European Union.

Plurality of ideological, political and philosophical-social trends

The multiplicity of educational narrations is a guarantee of pluralism and freedom of choice in a civil democracy. The last political system heavily politicised the adult education ideologically. However, according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, everyone has the right to freedom of thought, confession and beliefs. I think that, in accordance with that, a perceived multiplicity of trends creating tolerance and education respectful of autonomy, for “others” is necessary; it is necessary to create a state of kindness and interest in meeting and knowing others. Education should not enclose itself in a chosen philosophical or ideological system. It should be clear and apolitical.

Socialisation, educational microsystems

Adult education is changing from a traditional institutional level, regulated by legislation, to the local government sector and economical sector. This brings about the creation of educational microsystems – adequate for consolidating economic and social branches and sectors. These are systems of out-of-school education within various industrial

⁸ <http://www.socrates.org.pl/grundtvig/index.html>

⁹ <http://www.socrates.org.pl/arion/index.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.cofund.org.pl/cgi-bin/leonardo/idea/pl?id=glowna>

¹¹ See T. Aleksander, *Ewolucja systemu pozaszkolnej edukacji dorosłych w zmieniającej się rzeczywistości społeczno-gospodarczej*, w: E.A. Wesółowska (ed.) *Edukacja dorosłych w erze globalizmu*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe NOVUM, Płock 2002

corporations, banking, the military, the police, foundations and social associations, etc., of departmental systems of supplementary education and professional improvement.

I propose that it is necessary to devise procedures of pedagogical supervision and evaluation of work carried out by such institutions in order to avoid amateurism for which there can be no place or explanation in the education, including adult education. Each educational institution should give itself and its clients a competent and methodologically justified answer to seven questions with educational dimension: *for what?, for whom?, what?, who?, when?, where?, how?* and –importantly in the economic context of free market competition – *for how much?*

A reliable answer would undoubtedly contribute to the ***professionalisation and specialisation of adult educational institutions***. Companies, the work place, corporations, etc. create their own training centres (mainly professional but also for supplementary education and improvement) themselves, using their own lecturers (following appropriate training and methodological qualifications) for their own employees. Such activities have been effectively undertaken by Telekomunikacja Polska S.A. (Polish Telecommunication)¹², and also by a number of other firms that usually achieve very good financial results. Educational investments in a company's own employees can be justified by leaders and are simply profitable for those firms that hold on to the best staff, gain their loyalty and activity in efforts to reach the best efficiency levels of . Education should increase a company's competitiveness and attractiveness ; it should be a marketing strategy, a management method and it should help leading economic and social institutions. The end of governmental patronage and subsidy and the rules of free market made free recruitment possible. These institutions are built on the money of their organisers, and they are therefore independent of any ideological pressures. Tuition fees paid by the clients of educational institutions are payments for "goods" which here means knowledge of the highest expected value. As a consequence it leads to *autonomy and financial self-sufficiency* of educational firms. Changes in the educational market imply richer opportunities expressing themselves as a ***broad range of forms, contents and methods of out-of-school education***. In addition to the familiar lectures, courses and self-education have appeared counselling, exchange of experience with professionals (consultations, seminars, discussions, practical training, educational trips), exhibitions,

¹² Z. Szarota, A. Aleksander, *Innowacyjność metodyczna kursów pedagogicznych w systemie zakładowego kształcenia zawodowego w Telekomunikacji Polskiej SA*, w: J. Saran (ed.), *Edukacja dorosłych. Teoria i praktyka w okresie przemian*, UMCS (Marie Curie-Skłodowska University), Lublin 2000, p. 195-206

conferences, private research, scientific symposia, media education, congresses and educational tourism.

Change in education quality – is it an after-effect of the above mentioned trends?¹³

Are they changes for the better?

Unfortunately there is no rule. Sometimes the above mentioned trends are accompanied by problems: excessive advertising on the contents of training, inflated prices of educational services, negligent training programmes (out of date, without accreditation, evaluation or pedagogical supervision), low quality, lack of professional and educational competence among the leaders (lecturers, instructors, trainers, counsellors, teachers, tutors, etc.), black market in diplomas, trashy and poor educational environments, crisis of inherited educational institutions etc.

Another unfavourable and disadvantageous phenomenon of educational activity for Polish people is the lack of interest among most employees, especially from the civil service and in small enterprises, in motivating workers to improve their professional qualifications and to retrain, while under constant threat of losing their job. .. And so a few extras are needed – educational holidays, supportive bonuses, partial or even full refunds of expenses for studies or promotion.

Poles still do not have respect for education. They do not regard it in terms of categories of universal value, and do not appreciate how it can make life easier.

Contemporary adult education in Poland is generally based on two trends: diploma education and non-vocational education.

In the first of these trends the dominating forms are schools and courses that propose a formal education which ends with a diploma after exams are passed. The main factors for pursuing such an education are pragmatic motivation (it will be useful at work) and social motivation (promotion, professional aspirations).

People belonging to the second trend are guided by intellectual motivation. Even though this second trend doesn't bring proof or certification of acquired knowledge or skills, it is richer in organisational forms: seminars, lectures and discussions, clubs, libraries, entertainment and recreation, therapy, self-education.

¹³ See T. Aleksander, *Przykłady międzynarodowej integracji kształcenia dorosłych*, W: Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, MCCXXXV – 1999, Prace Pedagogiczne, Zeszyt 27, p. 97 - 105

Globalisation, necessary changes in production, growing unemployment, difficulties in gaining the means to live are issues that more and more people have to face in life, not only those who are passive or demanding, and they all demand more active employment policy and growth in investing in the development of necessary skills, later used at work.

This demand is met in a process of professional supplementary education that aims mainly to supplement education to reach a level demanded or required by law, and a process of professional improvement that is mainly modernisation, optimisation a process of broadening and widening of knowledge and professional skills. Professional improvement usually takes place during informal educational processes, during conferences, discussions, seminars, training or educational trips. Important forms of evaluating professional achievement are consultations, self-education, correspondence education, media educational opportunities (e.g. Open University with TV transmissions or video recordings of more interesting lectures).

What are, therefore, the challenges that Poland has to face? First of all - Poland must be “up to date”, a quick reaction process in the light of the changes that take place in the reality surrounding us, a process of increasing the tasks set adult education, since participation in adult education is becoming a guarantee of life and social success.

What are Poland’s possibilities? They are in fact very large. The potential of Polish people is very large. It only has to be freed, and the will to undergo a cultural and moral transformation has to be made active in Polish people. The path is to be reached via a process of acknowledging education as a treasure: a national treasure and a human treasure. As it was written in a UNESCO statement:

The idea of ongoing life education is the key to the twenty-first century. It goes beyond the traditional distinction between a basic education and ongoing education. It is linked to another idea, often put forward in the present day: the idea of an educating society where everything gives the opportunity to learn and develop one’s skills.

In taking on a new shape, ongoing education goes beyond today’s practises (...), and so it goes beyond supplementary education, improvement processes, retraining processes and adult professional promotion. Its primary function should be to create different educational opportunities for everyone, or offer them a second or even third chance, satisfying their hunger for knowledge or improving and broadening their training strictly linked to the demands of their professional life, including practical training.

To summarise, “Life-long education” should use all the opportunities that society can offer..¹⁴

The process of learning throughout one’s whole life is one of the keys to opening the twenty-first century and it is a result of active citizenship, and a condition of full participation in society.

An educational paradigm for contemporary educational systems, both formal and informal, is giving the tools of knowledge to the post-modern man, lost in relative values, with no authority, with his eyes focused on materials goods, which places more emphasis on “to have” than “to be”; this paradigm shapes in post-modern man the characteristics of cognitive personality, it is providing him with the preparation to function in an information society in which knowledge is capital, in which spiritual and humanistic values will regain a new recognition, in which egocentrism will be substituted by sociocentrism and solitude will be substituted with freedom that only knowledge can give.

¹⁴ J. Delors (kier.), Edukacja - jest w niej ukryty skarb, Report of International Commission for Education in the XXI century made for UNESCO, SOP and UNESCO, Warsaw 1998, translation to Polish: W. Rabczuk.