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YOUTH ABOUT SCHOOL: INDICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

THE IDEA OF SCHOOL

The attention of educators has always been focused on educational reforms, so there are many concepts of school. Basically, school discourse is based on three main paradigms that underpin educational reform strategies. They include criticism of the traditional school built on the assumptions of Herbart's pedagogy, an attempt to replace the conventional school with alternatives in order to improve the existing model of the school institution, which, in turn, is meant to lead to the construction of a new model for modern times.

The issue of the essence of school changes has been addressed and taken up by many school theorists, for example: Suchodolski (1974), Kupisiewicz (1985, 2006, 2010), Klus-Stańska (1994, 2008, 2018), Śliwerski (1998, 2015), Nalaskowski (2002, 2017, 2022), Sysło (2003), Kowalski (2010), Morbitzer (2011), Dylak (2013), Mieszalski (2013), Nowakowska-Siuta (2014), Kwaśnica (2015), Szymański (2016), Michalski (2016), Nowosad (2018), Madalińska-Michalak (2018, 2020), and Budajczak (2021). Polish and foreign scholars (DeVries, 2000; McLeod, 2007) of school and education often refer to the works of Bruner (1960, 2009, 2010), Wygotski (1971), Piaget (1977), but also Illich (1976, 2011), Toffler (1998), Gardner (2002), Pinker (2002, 2005, 2018), Robinson (2010), Tapscott (2010), Dryden (2011), Bendyk (2016), or Spitzer (2022).

Scientists are trying to predict which way to follow. Theoretical analysis allowed them to distinguish three main categories of scenarios concerning the future of school. First of all, there are conservative scenarios (status quo), which are the

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continuation of current trends (bureaucratization and marketization of school). Secondly, there are scenarios based on strengthening the social position of school and its autonomy as a public institution and educational organization (renewed perspective). Thirdly, there are scenarios in which the collapse of school and the transition to informal education (school disintegration) are anticipated (Szymański et al., 2016).

Traditional/conventional school is an institutionalized model of education in which the educational institution is the basic element “with simultaneous, continuous improvement of the goals and content implemented by this model, as well as the methods, means and organizational forms of didactic and educational work used in it” (Kupisiewicz, 2010, p. 17).

The alternative model of education based on unconventional solutions is difficult to explain etymologically in an unambiguous way: “Some educators are most tormented by the adjective ‘alternative’, which evokes associations with something uncertain, counter-cultural, untested, marginal, separate, unconventional, unscientific” (Melosik & Śliwerski, 2010, p. 12). Numerous initiatives of alternative education are closely related to the ideas of flexischooling and homeschooling (Ray, 2015; Davis, 2011; Berkowicz, 2021) or even deschooling (Meighan, 1993; Smulska, 2009; Ivan Illich, 2011).

Flexischooling is based on negotiating, by parents and the students, the range of home and institutionalized learning areas. Homeschooling is the implementation of home education process by eligible persons.¹ Deschooling, as understood by Ivan Illich, is a complete de-training of society. At this point it is also worth recalling Clive Harber’s concept of toxic school, understood as a tool of oppression (Smulska, 2010): “Educational activity can be understood as a kind of ‘constructive criticism’. It expresses disagreement with a specific type of educational activities, with a simultaneous proposal of using other solutions within them” (Nalaskowski, 2001, p. 73). “Despite numerous initiatives of alternative education that have existed in the world for over a century, school, supported by its traditional ‘obviousness’ is still relatively well-off and is treated as an indispensable element of social life and a condition of cultural continuity” (Klus-Stańska, 2008, p. 8). Due to the legal status of compulsory education and the obligation to study, the existence of school is a necessity. It is stipulated in the Act of 7 September 1991 on Education System, Chapter 2, Article 1991 on the education system, p. 18. Education in Poland is compulsory until the age of 18; therefore, the emphasis should be shifted from the legitimacy of the existence of school to the problem of researching the evolving role of this institution.

¹ <https://www.gov.pl/web/gov/uzyskaj-zgode-na-edukacje-domowa>

It is worth embedding the study of the evolving role of school as a social institution in the theory of social representations. It is difficult to predict the future of school without prior diagnosis, which should precede all predictions. Otherwise, there is a risk of a dissonance between assumptions and reality, between theory and practice. According to Zuzanna Zbróg (Zbróg, 2016), quoting the opinion of Ivana Markova, social representations can be treated, among others, as theories, concepts or ideas containing emotions, attitudes, beliefs and opinions of members of a given community. She also believes that “diagnostic studies on the structure and content of social representations of the school in a given community seem to be the starting point for considering school transformations” (Zbróg, 2016, p. 244). The social representations of school are related primarily to earlier school experiences of teachers and students, from the time when they were students themselves, but also to the representations present in the public sphere, in the media. Zbróg points out different dimensions in the study of social representations of school. They are the external and internal environment of school. The internal sphere consists of entities that make up school, i.e. social facilities existing in the education system. “This dimension is most often described as related to the study of teachers, university students – future teachers, students, interpersonal relations between parents, teachers and students. This dimension would include research in the form of sample problem questions: What are the social representations of school among different groups of school communities: students, parents, teachers, management, administration staff?” (Zbróg, 2016, p. 242).

According to the theory of social representation in the context of three main strategies of educational reforms: deschoolarization, alternative and continual improvement of school, it seems justified to examine and describe how contemporary youth, as the main subject of the education process, perceive school.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Research on young peoples’ opinion about school is rare and, as a rule, it aims to determine whether young people like school (Piaskowa, 2019), without determining what school is for them. It is examined what features an ideal school should have, so we obtain a proposed but not the actual image of school, as seen by young people (Ombudsman for Children, 2021).

The aim of the research was to determine what young people think about school in its present shape, what school is for them, whether the idea of traditional school has actually worn out, whether it is possible to give up conventional school and replace it with other forms of education, whether it is possible for students to

come to school voluntarily, i.e. without being compelled, or whether the abolition of compulsory education is a good or a bad idea.

The second goal of the research was to decide whether the respondents' statements about school are related to their interest profile, which is manifested in the choice of a specific field of study.

In addition, the aim of the research was an attempt to formulate postulates for all those who exert an influence on the broadly understood functioning of the school institution.

PROBLEMS, VARIABLES AND INDICATORS

Based on the goals set, the following research problems were formulated:

1. What is school for students?
2. Can conventional schools be abandoned and replaced with other forms of education? If so, what forms of education could replace conventional schooling?
3. Is it possible for students to come to school of their own accord?
4. Is the abolition of compulsory education a good or bad idea?
5. Is there any relationship between the students' interest profile and their opinions and judgements about school, and what are they?

Appropriate variables were established on the basis of the formulated research problems:

1. Students' declarations about what school is for them.
2. Students' opinions on abolishing conventional school and replacing it with other forms of education.
3. Students' opinions on voluntary school attendance.
4. Students' opinions regarding the abolition of general compulsory education.
5. Student's profile (type of students' interests).

Then the variable indicators were determined:

1. Students' declarations about what school is for them were indicated by their answers to a collective question listing the following options: a meeting place with other students, a place for conversations and discussions with teachers and other students, a place of intellectual development, a place that offers an opportunity for development, a place for undertaking various activities (scientific, social, civic, cultural, sports), a place to pursue one's own interests, a place to spend time in an interesting way, an unpleasant duty, a place of stress and tension, an investment in the future.

2. Students' opinions about the abolition of conventional school and replacing it with other forms of education were indicated by their written statements declaring the possibility of resigning from conventional school.

3. Students' declarations regarding voluntary attendance at school are indicated by their written statements whether it is possible to come to school without being forced to.

4. Students' opinions and judgements regarding the abolition of compulsory schooling are indicated by their written, judgmental and justifying answers to an open-ended question.

5. The interests profile was indicated by respondents' confirmations of enrolling in university courses in specific fields (computer science, physical culture education, medicine, pedagogy).

SAMPLE

The initial criterion for the selection of the study sample was students' interests. The focus was on two groups with humanistic and social interests as well as with scientific interests. The study sample consists of 903 high school graduates studying at university in the first year in the following disciplines: computer science (INF) – students of engineering courses in computer science ($n = 265$); University of Physical Education (AWF) – students of sports and physiotherapy ($n = 207$); medicine (UM) – students of medicine ($n = 58$); pedagogy (PED) – students of pedagogy and special education ($n = 373$). The above data are presented in Table 1, categorized by interest profile and gender.

Table 1. The number of respondents in each category of the interest profile and gender

Interest profile	No. of respondents	Female <i>n</i>	Male <i>n</i>
INF	265	32	231
PED	373	346	26
AWF	207	104	101
UM	58	35	23
Total	903	517	381

Note. Five did not indicate their gender.

In all analysis, the respondents' interest profile was taken into account in order to check whether it differentiates the respondents' opinions and judgements about school.

METHOD

The methods used in the study were a diagnostic survey and the analysis of the content of the respondents' written statements about school, adequately to the formulated research problems. The purpose of content analysis was to identify and classify properly the content or meanings of specific language configurations. A set of categories was constructed, and then the number of statements assigned to the appropriate category was counted. For the reliability of the analysis, the method of competent judges was used. The qualitative study was performed in accordance with the qualitative data coding procedure. To determine whether there is a relationship between the respondents' interest profile and their opinions and judgements about the school, the chi-square (χ^2) test of independence was used. The applied methodology, in line with the research in the issues undertaken, is deeply embedded in the literature on the subject (Nachmias & Nachmias, 2001; Ferguson & Takane, 2003; Silverman, 2012; Bauman, 2013; Creswell, 2013; Juszczuk, 2013; Kubinowski, 2017).

RESULTS

The results obtained from a group of first-year university students were diverse in terms of interest profile. They showed that for them school is primarily a meeting place with other students (i.e. a dominant), but also a place for intellectual development. In these categories, the statistical significance of the interest profile was observed. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. What was school for students? High school graduates' perspective

What was high school for you?		INF	PED	AWF	UM	<i>p</i>	T(x,y)
Meeting place with other students	<i>n</i>	216	248	154	46	0.0002	0.1109
	%	81.51	66.49	74.40	79.31		
Place for conversations and discussions with teachers and other students	<i>n</i>	129	171	89	25	0.6347	0.0331
	%	48.68	45.84	43.00	43.10		

What was high school for you?		INF	PED	AWF	UM	<i>p</i>	T(x,y)
Place of intellectual development	<i>n</i>	149	189	86	41	0.0002	0.1109
	%	56.23	50.67	41.55	70.69		
Place offering an opportunity for development	<i>n</i>	123	151	82	18	0.1262	0.0605
	%	46.42	40.48	39.61	31.03		
Place for undertaking various activities (scientific, social, civic, cultural, sports)	<i>n</i>	61	145	75	25	0.0001	0.1154
	%	23.02	38.87	36.23	43.10		
Place to pursue one's own interests	<i>n</i>	74	70	47	15	0.0525	0.0702
	%	27.92	18.77	22.71	25.86		
Place where you can spend time in an interesting way	<i>n</i>	84	115	52	20	0.3357	0.0465
	%	31.70	30.83	25.12	34.48		
Unpleasant duty	<i>n</i>	57	28	39	7	0.0000	0.1353
	%	21.51	7.51	18.84	12.07		
Place of stress and tension	<i>n</i>	73	100	67	13	0.3700	0.0448
	%	27.55	26.81	32.37	22.41		
A future investment	<i>n</i>	80	63	34	13	0.0002	0.1129
	%	30.19	16.89	16.43	22.41		
Other	<i>n</i>	8	3	11	2	0.0124	0.0834
	%	3.02	0.80	5.31	3.45		
No answer	<i>n</i>	0	1	1	0	0.5839	0.0353
	%	0.00	0.27	0.48	0.00		

The respondents chose the answers from the presented categories which represent a register of constitutive features of the school.

When asked "What is school?", the respondents most often answered that school is a meeting place with other students. For IT, pedagogy and medical students, school is (in the second position) a place of intellectual development. For AWF students, the second indication was that school was a place for conversations and discussions with teachers and other students, while for the rest of the group this feature was in the third position. In the case of school viewed as a meeting place with other students and a place of intellectual development, highly significant correlations were found between the frequency of indications and the subjects' profile interests. A vast majority of medical students treat school as a place of intellectual development (70.69%), compared to 41.55% of AWF students, respectively.

A definite minority of respondents define school as an unpleasant duty. Here, significant differences in the frequencies of the answers given in individual groups of respondents were noticed. This category was indicated most often by IT students (21.51%), and the least often by pedagogy students (7.51%). When asked whether it was possible to give up conventional education and replace it with other forms of education, the majority of respondents replied that it was not possible. The profile of respondents' interests in this case did not differentiate the answers. On the other hand, it is clear that in open-ended answers to the question "What other forms of education could replace a conventional school?" the respondent's profile matters. The mixed model, i.e. combining education at school with online learning was most often indicated by AWF students – 7.73% and students of pedagogy – 4.02%. 1.13% of IT students chose the Finnish model as an alternative. On the other hand, 1.45% of AWF students believe that only primary education should be provided in a conventional form. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Could conventional schools be abandoned and replaced with other forms of education?

Do you think would it be possible to give up conventional school and replace it with other forms of education?		INF	PED	AWF	UM
No	<i>n</i>	147	237	123	38
	%	55.47	63.54	59.42	65.52
Yes	<i>n</i>	62	66	28	13
	%	23.40	17.69	13.53	22.41
No opinion, I don't know	<i>n</i>	14	8	4	1
	%	5.28	2.14	1.93	1.72
Finnish model first and conventional school next	<i>n</i>	3	1	0	0
	%	1.13	0.27	0.00	0.00
Only primary education in a conventional form	<i>n</i>	0	2	3	0
	%	0.00	0.54	1.45	0.00
Different possibilities to choose from, i.e. combining school education with online learning, mixed model	<i>n</i>	2	15	16	1
	%	0.75	4.02	7.73	1.72
No answer	<i>n</i>	38	52	37	5
	%	14.34	13.94	17.87	8.62

An attempt was also made to determine whether it is possible for students to come to school voluntarily, without being forced. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Is it possible for students to come to school voluntarily?

Is it possible for students to come to school voluntarily?		INF	PED	AWF	UM
YES	<i>n</i>	185	268	137	44
	%	69.81	71.85	66.18	75.86
NO	<i>n</i>	58	89	66	13
	%	21.89	23.86	31.88	22.41
No answer	<i>n</i>	22	16	4	1
	%	8.30	4.29	1.93	1.72

Most of the respondents in all categories of the interest profile believe that yes, it is possible to go to school without being compelled. The responses are independent from the study profile. The respondents' opinions about the abolition of compulsory schooling were also examined (Table 5). Most respondents thought it was a bad idea. The answers do not depend on the study profile.

Table 5. Is the abolition of compulsory education a good or bad idea?

Is the abolition of compulsory education a good or a bad idea?		INF	PED	AWF	UM
Good	<i>n</i>	107	152	77	17
	%	40.38	40.75	37.20	29.31
Bad	<i>n</i>	153	217	126	40
	%	57.74	58.18	60.87	68.97
No answer	<i>n</i>	5	4	4	1
	%	1.89	1.07	1.93	1.72

In open written statements, the responders justified their opinion "Why this is a bad idea." These responses were multiplied. A detailed analysis of the content of these statements made it possible to distinguish eight categories of justifications, and assign the statements to appropriate categories. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Effects of the abolition of compulsory education

Effects of the abolition of compulsory education		INF	PED	AWF	UM
Poor condition of society, social stratification	<i>n</i>	72	105	72	17
	%	27.17	28.15	34.78	29.31
Lack of elementary knowledge (primary school compulsory)	<i>n</i>	43	36	16	13
	%	16.23	9.65	7.73	22.41
People's laziness and unproductivity	<i>n</i>	17	37	31	3
	%	6.42	9.92	14.98	5.17
Deterioration of family conditions (parents' irresponsibility)	<i>n</i>	11	17	5	3
	%	4.15	4.56	2.42	5.17
Negative political effects (decomposition of the system)	<i>n</i>	6	5	10	1
	%	2.26	1.34	4.83	1.72
Youth abstaining from education	<i>n</i>	19	48	38	6
	%	7.17	12.87	18.36	10.34
Negative consequences of too much time	<i>n</i>	8	2	11	1
	%	3.02	0.54	5.31	1.72
Alienation (social isolation)	<i>n</i>	3	0	0	0
	%	1.13	0.00	0.00	0.00

AWF students (34.78%) most often indicated the risk of even greater social stratification and, the generally poor condition of society. Medical students most often indicated the lack of elementary knowledge (22.41%). People's laziness and unproductivity, young people giving up on education, negative consequences of too much leisure, and negative political effects (eroding the system), were most often indicated by AWS students. Concerns about the deterioration of the family condition were most often expressed by students of medicine (5.17%). Only IT students indicated alienation (1.13%), social isolation and a sense of isolation from society. Identifying certain categories of negative effects of abolishing compulsory education depends on the respondent's profile.

DISCUSSION

The opinion that school is not necessary for one to have a fulfilling and successful life is fashionable and popular. The results of the research clearly showed that this is not true and that school should stay. Nobody has come up with anything else to replace it yet. School, as a relational-normative reality, is important for social life and the development of society. School is a space of direct and multidirectional interactions and interpersonal relations, it is one of the most important spaces of live communication. It is obvious that school is no longer the only platform for real contacts for today's youth, the only place where information about the surrounding world is obtained. The real world is mixed with the virtual world, in which students prefer to spend more and more time than at school. The real school space is not able to compete with virtual spaces but it is possible to make the didactic improvement, as Aleksander Nalaskowski puts it, the instruments, because it will strengthen and make direct contacts more attractive, which is so valuable. The results of the research revealed a great need for meetings, confrontations and interaction. Thanks to them we discover our own dispositions, we get to know ourselves, our possibilities. Aleksander Nalaskowski draws similar conclusions, writing: "School remains the function of a peer agora. Almost 100% of students, when asked what they miss most during a pandemic, indicate the lack of contact with their friends.... The virtual world is not yet able to satisfy the herd instinct, which, according to all psychological concepts, at a certain age is even a psychological need" (Nalaskowski, 2022, p. 164). Irena Piaskowa also draws attention to this fact. In the study entitled "How do students see school and how could they see it?" she states: "Students would like school to be not only a place of study, but also a meeting place, for which there is, unfortunately, no time during short breaks between classes. They would like school to make it easier for them" (Piaskowa, 2019). The research also confirmed the thought of Lev Vygotsky: "Social interaction is the source and driving force of learning."² Therefore, the place and space where these direct, valuable interactions take place is important. Since this category is a dominant feature, it is worth looking at the school space in order to design it in such a way that is conducive to multidirectional interactions – and competent teachers should be guides in this space. So school is a modern Agora – the centre of social life. "In addition to the cognitive and educational processes taking place in it, what counts is its infrastructure, equipment, colors, architectural order, the sounds of breaks and classroom management. All these determine the polysensory

² <https://pieknoumyslu.com/lew-wygotski-7-najlepszych-cytatow>

nature of the didactic instrumentation” (Nalaskowski, 2022, p. 141; see Nalaskowski, 2002).

School is still a place of intellectual development for young people, this category was indicated by the respondents in the second place, right after the meeting place category. This proves that young people come to school with the hope for development. Hence, every effort should be made to maintain and strengthen the school’s mission in this respect.

Recalling the three paradigms that form the basis of educational reform strategies, we can conclude that the solutions to research problems are in favour of school being improved as needed. Attempts to replace the conventional school with alternatives to it, in vast majority of cases, are not appreciated by the respondents. According to the respondents, dismantling school or the abolition of compulsory education would have many negative effects. Back in the 1980s, in a study titled *Paradygmaty i wizje reform oświatowych*, Czesław Kupisiewicz pointed out the catastrophic socio-economic and cultural consequences of eliminating school.

Therefore, the most likely scenario regarding the future of school is the one based on strengthening the social position of school and its autonomy as a public institution and educational organization. At this point it is worth recalling the words of Bogusław Śliwerski, who claims that, in fact, it is not transforming school for the sake of transformation only. After all, we want to experience reality, according to which today and tomorrow, the individual and the society need something different from the process of education, different from what was required of them yesterday or two hundred years ago. However, there is something in common in this temporal perspective of perceiving the essence of education – school should be a place where human and their humanity mature (Śliwerski, 1998).

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YOUTH ABOUT SCHOOL: INDICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

SUMMARY

There are many concepts of school. They are subject to constant transformations, depending on current conditions. In most cases, school theorists are critical about school. They indicate a number of necessary changes and obligations without presenting ideas on how to achieve them. Are we really dealing with the devaluation of this social institution? What do young people think about the school in its present shape? What is school for them? The article presents the results of a survey conducted among first-year university students ($N = 903$). The research covered first-year university students studying computer science, physical education, medicine at the medical faculty, and pedagogy. Apart from the diagnostic survey based on the register of constitutive features of school, the method used in the study was the analysis of the content of the respondents' written statements about school. The qualitative study was performed in accordance with the qualitative data coding procedure. To test whether the profile of young peoples' interests, expressed in the choice of a specific field of study, differentiates their statements about the role and importance of school, the chi-square test of independence (χ^2) was used. The respondents most often answered that the school is a meeting place with other students and a place of intellectual development. The frequency of indications of these categories is significantly related to the profile of the subject's interests. Therefore it may be concluded that direct interactions in the school space and confronting others educate most effectively.

Keywords: youth; changes of school; practice.

MŁODZIEŻ O SZKOLE – PRZESŁANKI DLA PRAKTYKI

STRESZCZENIE

Istnieje wiele koncepcji szkoły. Podlegają one ustawicznym przeobrażeniom w zależności od aktualnych uwarunkowań. Teoretycy szkoły w większości przypadków odnoszą się do niej krytycznie. Wskazują na szereg koniecznych zmian i powinności przy jednoczesnym braku pomysłów na sposoby ich osiągnięcia. Czy rzeczywiście mamy do czynienia z dewaluacją tej instytucji społecznej? Co młodzież sądzi o szkole w jej obecnym kształcie? Czym dla niej jest szkoła? W artykule przedstawiono wyniki sondażu przeprowadzonego wśród absolwentów szkół średnich ($N = 903$). Badaniem objęto studentów pierwszego roku studiujących informatykę, nauki o kulturze fizycznej, medycynę na wydziale lekarskim oraz pedagogikę. Obok sondażu diagnostycznego opartego na rejestrze konstytutywnych cech szkoły, metodą zastosowaną w badaniu była analiza treści pisemnych wypowiedzi badanych na temat szkoły. Opracowanie jakościowe odbyło się zgodnie z procedurą kodowania danych jakościowych.

Aby zbadać, czy profil zainteresowań młodzieży, wyrażający się w wyborze określonego kierunku studiów, różnicuje jej wypowiedzi na temat roli i znaczenia szkoły, zastosowano test niezależności chi-kwadrat (χ^2). Badani najczęściej odpowiadali, że szkoła to miejsce spotkań z innymi uczniami oraz miejsce rozwoju intelektualnego. Częstość wskazań tych kategorii pozostaje w istotnym związku z profilem zainteresowań badanych. Stąd wniosek, że bezpośrednie interakcje w przestrzeni szkoły, konfrontowanie się z innymi, kształcą najefektywniej.

Słowa kluczowe: młodzież; przemiany roli szkoły; praktyka.