

Readiness to Change Towards More Balanced, Personalised and Creative Education

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Abstract

A more flexible approach to education and readiness to make changes, necessary more than ever before, appears nowadays to be an element of high importance if any real renewal and improvement of education is to come into existence, as expected by a variety of stakeholders (participants of education, schools, higher education facilities, employers). Ken Robinson (Robinson, Aronica, 2015) perceives the need of change in the nature and direction of educational reforms. He proposes a more holistic approach “which carries about the variety of talents in all our children.” This requires education to be more balanced, personalised and creative. The objective of the paper is the presentation of theoretical and empirical aspects of education focused on pupils. The analysis covers the dimension of readiness to change of the persons who prepare to perform the role of teachers, that is those on whom the qualitative change in education will depend in the future. The questionnaire study included 136 subjects, participants of postgraduate studies, with rich occupational experience, preparing to perform the role of teachers. The study employed the Change-Ready Scale by Kriegel and Brandt (1996). 7 categories were measured which all make up the method of carrying out own work: inventiveness, passion, self-confidence, optimism, taking risk, adaptability, and tolerance to uncertainty. The results of the study encouraged the initiation of actions for promotion of personalised education, adjusting it to the needs and possibilities of anyone, practical application in daily life.

Keywords: Readiness to change, Balanced education, Creative education

Introduction

The modern civilisation challenges, including the progress of technology in daily life applications, strongly affect the perception of the world by the current generations- people of various ages (younger and older), people of various professions. Education is one of the areas that are subject to strong transformations, and on one hand related to intense development of the new media realm, new technologies, on the other hand related to continuous changes within the school and the education system. The process of the reform of the education system that is being implemented in many countries (including Poland) concentrates in a small degree on the achievements of humanistic and social fields: pedagogy, psychology, sociology, philosophy, with economy and political and commercial aspects being more recognised.

Shalberg (2011), studying educational systems in many countries, noticed that what they share is high similarity. Teaching curricula are more and more standardised to comply with the international studies of achievements of disciples, who worldwide learn from the materials provided by global suppliers. Educational reforms in various countries are also implemented in accordance with similar templates. So the path to changes in the education systems is copied, which I call the Global Development of Educational Reforms or GERM. It is like an epidemic that spreads and infects education systems with viruses. It moves owing to experts, media and politicians. Educational systems make use of politicians to infect further countries. In consequence, schools fall ill, teachers do not feel well and children learn less.

Ken Robinson (Robinson, Aronica, 2015) concludes that the nature and direction of educational reforms have to change. He proposes a more holistic approach “in which varied talents of all our children are cultivated”. This requires education to be more balanced, personalised and creative, sensitive, community-oriented (Robinson, Aronica, 2015, p.13).

These views are not isolated. Gardner (2009) also wrote about this perspective, with much attention paid in his publications to the issues of developing the capacity of the individual, accenting the need to adjust the curriculum to the preferences of the learners and their methods of perception of the reality. The notice that we all learn in a way characteristic of the individual person, whose recognition and understanding are conducive to effective learning and achieving successes, resulted in the increase of the role of individualisation in the attitude to the learners. Each individual has a specific potential that should be discovered and properly shaped.

Raport Polska 2030 (Boni, 2009) states that individualisation of the teaching process with high standards maintained as regards the expected results of the education must be one of the directions in the education system reforms. (...) One school model, one teaching method for all make the school not being good for anybody. The times are coming to the end of “mass” education of children pursuant to one curriculum (...). To this day, most Polish schools are far from the implementation of the personalised education concept, which essentially means that the school makes an effort of adjusting to varied needs and pre-dispositions of disciples, and was not focused on the adjustment of each disciple to the offered educational model.

The small fragments of the texts quoted here present a new trend of the modern times, which we can simply ignore or take a closer look at and apply – possibly – an approach to education different from the current one. For me, they were a strong impulse to look for better ways of working with pupils and transforming the modern school towards the idea of the school concentrated on pupils (Kuźma, Pułka 2014, 2015), that is personalised, creative, balanced.

A lot has been written about education in schools, and discussions about its shape are still going on. Those who study social sciences agree that changes are a constant. In the area of education, they come out every 10 years more or less, because the face of the world and the reality around us change. For this reason, the objective of this paper is to recognise and

describe readiness for change in the group of the persons who are preparing to perform the role of teachers. What I currently perceive as the feature of the school reality is the need to be closer to pupils and their parents, closer to life experience, daily needs of the educational personnel and local community. However, the school is expected to be something more than a place that reacts to the needs of the committed entities, and its modern role is to transversively develop the minds with educational activities, creating unity in diversity, and not unity through multitude of aspects / eclecticism that dominated in the post-modernist world.

Theoretical Background

The overview of the current achievements and theoretical concepts in the scope of pedagogy allowed the conclusion that we now face polarisation of views – from the initial concentration on negative aspects: pathological conditions of individuals, groups and communities, dysfunctions and disorders in behaviour, to a group of positive views of the concentration on skills, talents, development of children, youth and adults. According to Szmidski and Modrzejewska-Świągulska (2003), it is high time to balance the proportions in pedagogical studies and theoretical considerations between the pedagogy of lack and deficiency and the pedagogy of development and growth. These authors stipulate more attention to be concentrated on health, skills, talent, wisdom, creativity and other human virtues and development resources, similarly to what was proposed by the positive psychology.

Szmidski concludes the Polish academic pedagogy resembles the condition of the Western psychology at the time of the appearance of stipulations of positive psychology on the verge of the 21st century. Similarly, the mainstream pedagogy is mostly occupied with illness, and not health and development. This current of pedagogical research, paying more attention to human resources, skills and talents, creativity and life wisdom, on which education programmes may and should be built, I call the pedagogy of development or growth. It is easy to notice that I am referring to the well-known metaphor by Abraham Maslow (1990), used in the famous classification of human needs (Szmidski & Modrzejewska - Świągulska 2003).

In the recognition of the need to create positive pedagogy, the need of the orientation on personalisation of education and balancing of the development of each individual are also worth accenting. I think that the time has come in Poland to discern the needs of stimulation, development of each individual, irrespective of their initial resources (talent, strengths versus deficits, weaknesses). The recognition of common pupils who are neglected every day and are somewhat bypassed due to their lack of problems and the ability to cope. The time to create a situation for improving every individual without comparing them against others, but only with themselves and with what they achieve in the work with other people. The time to perceive the changes that occur in the life environment and balancing the development of each individual in various levels. The time for a creative life full of openness to challenges, gaining new experiences, while maintaining sensitivity to everything that is happening around. This way of thinking about upbringing and education results not only from theoretical premises (found in the literature), but also from my personal experience and the inspiration of the Nordic countries, mostly Finland, where the principle of equality of each pupil in access to the education is common. The same attention of the teacher is deserved by a child with development deficits, an able child, and a child average in everything: everyone is perceived and has the opportunity to self-realise. The inner strength of the individual is being developed in the school, along with the feeling of creativity, the knowledge of oneself, so that each pupil could achieve well-being and high quality of life. With this approach, everyone is growing and not simply standing in one spot.

In the Polish system, normality and correctness of functioning is one of the neglected areas of being in the community. Support is provided for two extreme groups of pupils: those with deficits / lacks, and those talented / skilled. This is why the belief is strong in me about the need of emphasising the fact of neglecting those who are “ordinary”, who generally cope well and have no problems; and this is why the idea came up to indicate the need of the same care being dedicated to everyone, and developing and supporting all pupils.

In the Finnish system, the support of balanced development and competencies of all pupils as members of the school community is the priority task of the modern school. To have the pupils feel happy in the school, they need to be ensured with the meaning of the world around, the capacity to manage daily life, the skilful choice making, as well as the feeling of being important for those around (being listened to, noticed, loved) (Halinen 2016). The school is to provide the tools to achieve the coherence of these elements so as to enable the capacity to find one’s place in the new changing world. The new curriculum of the Finnish educational system emphasises transversal competences, that is the competencies that allow the skilful use and application of the gained knowledge and skills and sharing them. Obviously enough, it is good to be in some subjects (mathematics, history), but it is not enough. One has to be able to share this and apply (Halinen 2016). For this reason, the new Finnish educational curriculum includes the new perception of learning and teaching, and a move one step ahead.

The new core curriculum places an emphasis on transversal competences in instruction. A changing society demands more and more transversal skills and competences. Therefore, it is important that each subject promotes transversal competences. The aims set for transversal competences include thinking and learning to learn, cultural competence, interaction and self-expression, taking care of oneself and managing daily life, multiliteracy, ICT competence, working life competence and entrepreneurship, participation, involvement and building a sustainable future. The aims of transversal competences are specified in the national core curriculum. Education providers are able to further define them according to their individual areas of emphasis. Transversal competences are always taught, studied and assessed as part of the different subjects. Thus, the school not only has to respond to the changes in the world, but is expected to be the creative factor of the changes (Halinen 2016). In the next part, I concentrate on the education of the teachers, because this group becomes the centre of the attention in the current process of the reform. F. Mayor has to be quoted here with what he stated in 2001: “We should have teachers who see to progress in each child and attempt to valorise the potential of every person, because each one of them is a unique personality” (Mayor 2001, p.300). Let us then see the empirical reality in this respect.

Methodological Aspects of Studies

One of the important links of the transformation in the educational sphere is the education of teachers, that is the persons who directly affect educational microsystems in their local communities. The aspects of the effective feature constitute the continuous subject of pedagogical discussions, probably never fully solved, so the more abandoned (Kwiatkowska, 2005). In present times, the necessity of an approach to education more flexible than ever before and readiness for change appear to be elements of high meaning, if the real renewal and improvement of the education is to be effected.

The change I am referring to does not mean disassociation from the current achievements of the science and knowledge. In my understanding, it is always inseparable with continuity. Cz. Banach (1997) perfectly phrased this concept and the presence of these phenomena: Continuity and change should be the basic premise in the development of the Polish educational system. Change without continuity is the revolution leading to the regression in

the development of the educational system, as well as of the science. We face this phenomenon exceptionally often in the reformation of the education in Poland. However, the world of patterns, copying gave to be left behind to prevent the enslavement of the teacher. The passage from the survival style to the development style is the condition sine qua non of the reform of the school focused on the disciple. Thus, availability and systematic updating of teacher competencies of all levels is one of the challenges, as the quality of the education depends on the quality of the staff and its dedication Banach (1997).

I do interpret change and I refer to the proposal of R. M. Kanter, which defines and identifies change with the process of the analysis of the past for the purpose of carrying out such measures in the present time that would bring about specific results in the future. Changes are apparent in various walks of human life, and we also perceive the changing characteristics in both the context of the changes in the individual affected by various situations and the scope of the differentiation of individuals. Helen Bee (cited in Brzezińska, 2000) listed three categories of changes: universal, change shared within the given group, and individual changes. Universal changes are most common and related, although relatively, with the age to which specific features are attributed that result from biological and social determinants. Shared changes exemplify the characteristics of the persons in the specific community or group. This means that they constitute the result of experiencing similar events as well as taking part in similar social situations, which must lead to some characterological community. Individual changes basically refer to the meaning drawn upon during the development of unique individual experiences. Unique factors bring them about that affect only the given individual.

In the empirical study I assumed the measurement of readiness to change in the light of self-assessment by the persons preparing to perform the role of teachers. I formulated the problem in the form of the settling question: Are candidates for teachers ready to change towards the education concentrated on pupils and build the educational environment friendly to everyone?

The study was conducted with two groups of students, candidates for teachers. I completed the first study in 2011, with the procedure repeated after 5 years (in 2016) with two groups of students. 136 subjects (candidates for teachers) constituted the first group, the participants of postgraduate studies with extensive professional experience. In terms of gender, the group was composed of 94 women and 42 men. The second group of 100 students of the second level of studies, preparing for the role of teachers, included 96 women and 4 men. The studies were conducted with Readiness to Change Questionary by Kriegel and Brandt (1996) translated by Paszkowska-Rogacz, Tarkowska (2004). The questionnaire features 7 categories that may the method of performance of own work: inventiveness, passion, self - confidence, optimism, taking risk, adaptability, and tolerance to uncertainty.

Results

The results of the studies of the students who prepare to perform the role of teachers of 2011 and 2016 are given in the following table:

Category	Low level		Optimal level		High level	
	N/%	N/%	N/%	N/%	N/%	N/ %
Inventiveness	131 (96%)	67	4 (3,3%)	32	1(0,7%)	1
Passion	131 (96%)	46	3 (3%)	35	2 (1%)	19
Self - confidence	119 (88%)	45	15(11%)	46	2 (1%)	14
Optimism	80 (59%)	49	40 (29%)	30	16 (12%)	21
Taking risk	105 (77%)	58	26 (19%)	37	5 (4%)	5
Adaptability	103 (76%)	26	31(23%)	68	2 (1%)	6
Tolerance to uncertainty	129 (95%)	46	3 (2%)	43	4 (3%)	11

Inventiveness

Inventiveness people can make use of any situation for their own purposes and do “something out of nothing”. They can reach the proper sources and resources to implement their plans. They perceive various methods of action and creatively approach even stereotypical issues. They know that every problem may be solved and the difficulties inherent to it are a challenge for them and a value in itself (Paszowska-Rogacz, Tarkowska, 2004). In the first group of the candidates for teachers, 3.3% of the subjects achieved the optimum result in this category, with 32% in the second group.

The low result was achieved by 96% (Group 1) and 67% (Group 2) of the candidates for teachers, which means that these people most often prefer common, routine methods of action. 1 candidate in each group achieved high result, which suggests that these persons overlook simple and obvious solutions, thus causing more work for themselves than necessary.

Passion

Passion is the type of energy that strengthens all other features. People with passion more rarely become bored and tired. At the threshold of difficult tasks, they do not feel fear, but rather are full of energy and enthusiasm. The optimum result in this category was achieved by 3% of the candidates for teachers in Group 1 and 35% of the subjects in Group 2.

Low result was achieved by 96% and 46% of the candidates for teachers, respectively. Very high result, signifying the tendency to continuing pointless stubbornness, was achieved by 1% of the candidates in Group 1 and 19% of the 2016 Group.

Self - Confidence

Self - Confident persons trust their own skills and capacities: 11% (2011) and 46% (2016) of the subjects had this feature. It is one of the higher results in the measurement of all features concerning readiness to change.

Low result was achieved by 88% persons preparing to start performing the role of the teacher and 45% of the subjects studied after 5 years, which suggests lack of faith in own capacity in the subjects. The high result in this scale was achieved by 1% and 14% of the candidates for teachers, respectively, which may suggest that these persons have strong self-confidence.

Optimism

The feature of optimism highly correlates with readiness to accept change. Optimists present positive, and sometimes straight out enthusiastic attitude to all kinds of new experiences. In the studied group of the candidates for teachers, the optimum result was achieved by 29% and 30% of the candidates for teachers. One may assume that these persons perceive various opportunities around, positively interpret the reality, and believe that time is in their favour. Despite passing time, we have noticed a similar percentage result for both groups in the study. The low result in the scale was achieved by 59% of the candidates in Group 1 and 49% of the candidates in Group 2, which is a group of persons with pessimistic perception of the reality around and lack of the mood to initiate action. The high result in the scale may signify the lack of the skill of critical thinking; it was achieved by 12% students in 2011 and 21% in 2016.

Taking risk

Taking risk people regard live to be a great adventure and love challenges. They are continuously in motion and they cannot stand stagnation. They are usually creators of changes and initiate innovative actions. They work effectively in the environment of “storms and whirls”. This feature was apparent in 19% of the students in Group 1 and 37% of Group 2. The low result was achieved by 77% and 58% of the candidates for teachers, respectively, and the high result was achieved by 4% and 5% of the subjects. Low results prove lack of interest in uncertain situations, whereas high results mean recklessness tendency.

Adaptability

This capacity includes two components: flexibility and resilience. Flexibility allows easy adjustment of the person to the varying requirements of the surroundings. Resilience is the future which makes people not succumb to failures and perceiving errors as carriers of educational values. They do not care much about their own status and function Paszkowska-Rogacz, Tarkowska (2004). The optimum result in this category was achieved by 23% (2011) and 68% (2016) of the candidates for teachers. The low results were achieved by 76% of the students and the 26-person Group 2. One candidate in 2011 and 6 candidates in 2016 achieved high results, which may signify superficiality and low commitment to the action.

Tolerance to Uncertainty

The only certain thing for the persons with this feature is that nothing is certain. They accept this condition, knowing that new and surprising things may appear in the implementation of any plan. As they do not expect quick solutions and simple answers, they show high patience and do not make hasty conclusions. The optimum result in this category was achieved by 2% and 43% of the subjects. The low result, which means withholding, abandoning certain actions due to the lack of perseverance, and the feeling of uncertainty, was achieved by 95% of the subjects in Group 1 and 46% of the subjects in Group 2, while difficulties in finishing the task and making final decisions May characterise the persons who achieve high results, that is 3% and 11% of the candidates who took part in the study.

Summary

The resulting empirical data present the candidates for teachers basically ready for changes (32% of the subjects). The candidates studied in 2016 showed the optimum results in 6 out of 7 measured features, first of all being self-confident, knowing their own talents, strengths, being capable of generating ideas and employing them effectively, being optimistic about the reality, the environment, and featuring high adaptation capabilities. There are a number of fears about the implementation of the new concepts, high uncertainty about undertaking

action, thus aversion to any risk. This element may be slightly disturbing, as accepting risk is the immanent part of creativity. Unique, many a time completely surprising situations occasionally require the teacher to accept risk. However, the candidates for teachers preferred known paths and proven solutions in this area. The result in the study of the candidates for teachers in 2011 was at the level of 10%, which correlated with the data of the Finnish researchers, while 5 years later (in 2016) readiness to change increased to 32%. It is very good as the trend is positive.

How do active teachers perceive changes in the education?

When becoming acquainted with the problems of changes towards the education concentrated on pupils, I also tried to examine teachers active in their profession, based on the experience of cooperation with teachers, for example during the pre-experimental study that I conducted in 2013 (Pułka, 2013). The studied group included 15 female teachers of classes 1 to 3. In two measurements (pre - test and post - test), taken after a six-month interval, I have not perceived any changes in the perception of the content of teaching various subjects as a result of the implementation of the new model of art education for able children, but readiness and openness of the teachers to the implementation of the novation was high. The features of the study declared very high openness to improving one's own workshop in cooperation with various institutions. However, these persons declared that their readiness would not be unconditional. The improvement of the workshop is the activity for which teachers have little time due to the conditions of their occupation (time, economy, psychological, organisational constraints), which strongly affect their commitment and quality of their actions.

In the studies of teachers in 2018 (for comparison purposes, I will also refer to 15 randomly selected teachers), major variation of opinions as regards changes in the educational system was noticeable. The teachers who were pessimistic about changes stated that they constituted significant threat to their jobs and even if they tried to strongly commit to the work, inevitability of losing a job is the experience very close to them. The changes implemented without consultation of proposals with them, without taking account of their needs, make that they do not want to participate in it and prefer to withdraw and wait. The group of neutral teachers indicate that changes are their daily bread, and they work as they did before, because it is the teacher–pupil relation is important, and not that change of the system. They indicate chaos and overload of pupils, as a result of which children learn less, but the teachers do not feel any improvement or worsening of the situation. The persons with positive attitude to the changes acknowledge the opportunity to the elimination of the persistent supervision of the work of teachers, the continuous oversight (“I feel as if imprisoned”), and the opportunity for larger support for the teachers who do want to improve and develop.

In Finland, every teacher who intends to improve their competences and develop in the field of interests or passions benefits from additional support in the form of a day off for development, financing of selected courses and trainings, and the possibility of sharing experiences in the platforms dedicated to specific groups of interests, profiled for the needs of the recipients. The cooperation of practicing teachers is also very often conducted through contacts with university-level facilities and including teachers in their projects, viewing them as partners, and not only as recipients of specific scientific proposals. The participation of this type allows mutuality and cooperation that are fully active and committed.

Teachers in Poland require, however, first of all support, appreciation and elevation of the importance of their profession on the part of decision makers, superiors and parents. On part of the pupils, they need the natural good relation of the master–disciple style that, amidst a variety of quite often divergent expectations, is neglected in daily caring. The teachers are ready and open to changes towards the personalised, sensitive and balanced education (focused on pupils), and they perceive them themselves, which is manifested in a number of

grassroots initiatives. They implement various changes: substantive, methodological, organisational. Strong grassroots initiatives appear, with more and more schools implementing the innovative methods of the education process under the influence of creative teachers who are open to changes, thus opening the space for action not only for themselves but most of all for pupils, their parents and the local community. There are too many of them to quote all such measures, most probably not all being described. However, one of the grassroots initiatives comes in the form of edu-changing teachers, those super-professionals, whose actions are referred to in their website.

Discussion

Changes should be started from one's own milieu. The community of teachers did this with students during their practical exercises, and teachers during their daily meetings with students and work at school.

All national-level changes in the education system in Finland are always started with teachers, with listening to their opinions about the need to make the changes, their concepts, and then wider debates and developing joint premises. This direction is a perfect pattern to follow, as the changes related to the given environment should always be consulted with it for the effective implementation to occur.

Continuous support for teachers is very important in this process. The studies of the Finnish teachers of various types of schools (805 subjects) are very interesting in this context, as described by Bakker, Demerouti, Schaufeli, Verbeke (2003, 2004, 2007). They showed that the resources in support of teachers reduce requirements and effectively lower the subjective feeling of overload with occupational duties. The most important resources in support of teachers in their work with students included: the support on part of the superior, innovativeness, appreciation, positive feedback, and good organisational climate and the workplace. Finnish teachers form one of the most effective educational environments. Their students achieve one of the best results of education in the supranational dimension. Sharing good practices and presenting model solutions is definitely worthwhile.

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