

International and National Perspectives: A Critical Examination of Polish Education and the Philosophical, Historical, Theoretical, Governmental and Educational Reform Initiatives in Changing Pedagogical Strategies Impacting Classrooms in the Future

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to discuss ideas presented in the book titled *Educational Reform in National and International Perspectives: Past Present and Future* edited by Czesław Majorek and Ervin V. Johanningmeier, Polish Academy of Sciences Publishing House in Cracow, 2000, pp. 311 (paperback). The authors succinctly describe important international and national perspectives and implications relative to philosophical, historical, theoretical, governmental and educational reform efforts in changing societies as well as pedagogical and emerging classroom initiatives.

Eighteen papers, the result of a review of about 120 articles presented at the eighteenth annual meeting of the International Standing Conference for the History of Education which was held in 1996 in Cracow (Poland), are brought together in this volume. Although the papers are written by 22 scholars from 10 different countries and from four different continents who not only explore what political and economic changes from the eighteenth century to the present have meant for education but also how educators have acted upon such changes the title of the book is somewhat misleading because: 1) one third of the inclusions are authored by Poles and are about Polish problems and 2) there are no contributions from India, China and South America. Moreover, the fact that all of the papers are written in English does not add to the international flavour of the publication.

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to discuss the book's international, national and related implications and perspectives specifically pertaining to philosophical, historical, theoretical, governmental and educational reform in changing societal structures, pedagogical and futuristic emerging classroom initiatives.

Theme Format

The book is divided into five themes – related parts that are basically unrelated: Part I - Philosophical and Historical Foundations of Educational Theory, Part - II Government and Educational Reform, Part - III Education in Changing Societies, Part IV - Pedagogy and the Classroom and Part V – Education Outside the Traditional Classroom. Moreover, Parts – IV and V are evenly covered, however, the remaining ones are not.

Half of the six articles written by Poles focus on the current state of education in Poland, and the other three deal with different historical periods. Czesław Majorek (Recent Education Reform in Poland and New Research Perspectives in the History of Education) complains about the awful state of history of education research in Poland. According to him, Polish historians for the most part pursue a “practical orientation” in their work, and only an active interest in “pure theory”, (that he does not clarify), can rescue them. Is he referring to descriptive or to predictive theory? Mirosław J. Szymański and Theresa Gumuła and Stanisław Majewski's articles' Polish Education in the Period of Changes and Changes in Teacher Training During the Political Transformation in Poland are different than the ones that they delivered at the International Standing Conference because they contain material that was published after 1996 suggesting that additional thought was given to the matters under consideration. Barbara Łuczyńska (The Need for Secondary School Reform in Galicia: The Basis of the Teachers' Professional Movement, 1867-1918) relates how dissatisfaction with secondary school education in nineteenth century Galicia lead to the creation of the Higher School Teachers Association enabling teachers to voice their opinions on educational matters for the next 55 years. We are not made aware as to whether or not teachers' associations existed in either the Russian or the German parts of “Poland” during the same era. Kazimierz Puchowski (Collegia Nobilium Societatis Jesu: Education of the Political Elite in Poland, 1746-1773) narrates the importance of the Jesuit nobles colleges in the education of political elites in Poland during the Age of Enlightenment. As a matter of interest, a wide range of subjects were taught in these institutions such as: Polish history, fencing and dancing. Physical education historian Ewa Kałamacka (The Christian Youth Association “Polish YMCA”, 1923-1939) gives an account of some of the activities of The Christian Youth Association which was noted for its pluralistic programme. However, Kałamacka fails to speculate as to why the Association has not been revived.

Three Issues Emerge – Independence (Political and Institutional – Participation – Marxist Doctrine

Three issues emergence from nine of the twelve non-Polish contributions: 1) independence (political and institutional), 2) participation and 3) Marxist doctrine. **First**, Anthony Potts (Aspects of Institutional Academic Life) relates how governments in Australia have, at least since the 1960's, tried to control tertiary education. From 1966 to 1988 Australia had a twofold system of higher education consisting of universities and colleges of advanced education. Colleges of advanced education were subject to tighter government regulation and administration. The Potts paper focuses on the individual working lives of some academic staff in one of Australia's oldest colleges that is located in Bendigo and covers areas such as: academic recruitment, induction programs and institutional history. Unfortunately, Potts provides the reader with little information about his research methodology. Johannes H. Jordan (Schooling in Changing African Societies: Before and After Independence, 1950-1996) falls short in his examination of the major changes in education that came about in a number of African countries following their independence because he does not compare his findings to similar situations outside the African continent. James L. Leloudis (A Classroom Revolution: Graded School Pedagogy and the Making of the New South) writes about the introduction of graded schools in North Carolina which coincided with the cash exchange and free labour economy of the post civil – war south. (It would be interesting to know how other southern states altered their educational systems during the same period). **Second**, Erwin V. Johannigmeier (Criticism and Reform: The Reconfiguration of Education and Schooling in the United States, 1942-1983) mentions that there were numerous attempts at educational reform in the US that in truth were tries at restoration. Public education was invented in the nineteenth century for the needs of an industrial society. Nevertheless, US citizens now live in an information (post-industrial) age and therefore their requirements are quite different than their forefathers. Martti T. Kuikka (Education Policy and Alternative Pedagogy in Finland, 1950-1990) weighs the development of reformist pedagogy – the methods of Montessori, Steiner and Frenet – in Finish education from 1950 to 1990 that lead to a considerable amount of political disputation. The difficulties of youth and child deviance in late nineteenth century Ontario and the numerous solutions to it are treated by Margret A. Winzer Wayward Youth in Late – Nineteenth Century Ontario: Social and Educational Solutions. Industrial institutions that were legislated in educational settings were intended for youth with deviant behaviours. These schools soon became associated with special education complexes that served blind, deaf or mentally retarded students. It seems that public institutions did not want wayward children any more than those with disabilities. The author's article would have been more interesting if she had provided us with some information about how youth and child deviance were dealt with in other parts of Canada. Karen L. Riley, O.L. Davis Jr. And Marcella Kysilka (In the Image of the "Fatherland": The Origins and Operations of a German School in the United States Department of Justice Internment Camp at Crystal City, Texas during World War II, 1943-1946) describe the functioning of a school attended mostly by US citizens of German descent. The school in question differed from public schools in the US. (As a matter of interest, the article is not really about educational reform). **Third**, Elena Rogacheva (The Educational Legacy of Pragmatism and its Influence on Early Soviet Educational Reform) writes about John Dewey's influence on early soviet educational reform and the revival of interest in his views in Russia today. But, can his educational theory, which involves the

notion of democracy, ever really be successful in a country with a very deep-rooted authoritarian tradition? The Education Reform Act of 1988 which has to do with the insertion of a National Curriculum for all state schools in Wales and in England is discussed by Terry Haydn Control and Resistance: The War of School History in England and Wales, 1984-1996. And his primary interest is in the manner in which history is taught: social history versus dates, facts, heroes and national triumphs. The question as to how history is currently taught elsewhere is never brought up.

Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this article was to discuss ideas presented in the book titled *Educational Reform in National and International Perspectives: Past, Present and Future* edited by Czeslaw Majorek and Ervin V. Johanningmeier, Polish Academy of Sciences Publishing House in Cracow.

In conclusion, the publication merits reading – particularly if one is interested in Polish education. Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that all of the articles came into being as conference papers that are not always the best of origins.

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