

Schools as an answer for the blanks in the student's development - the invitation to redefine the core values in education

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to return to the roots of education and redefine its' core values. Based on Fielding's and Dorczak's theories I'm strongly convinced that today's apparent success of Polish educational system in fact somehow is not the best opportunity for full and deep student's development. There is strong need to return to the primary ideas of education and to redefine the values which became the basis of today's education.

In my article the path for this reflection pursues through the Fielding's theory, which distinguishes two different ways of thinking about education. One, in which the basis of education are strongly grounded on market perspective called High Performance Schooling, and another called Person

Centred Education, which - in contrast to a market-led perspective- could lead us to the democratic fellowship, fulfilling life and finally to the better world.

I compared the theoretical part of my article with the Polish school reality through the short research.

In the final results of my work I proved that there is absolutely no need for complete resignation from one of mentioned perspective. In the same time we can't skip any of them as well. However we should be particularly careful with glorifying High Performance Schooling –the situation which takes place in today's educational reality. There is great need for finding proper balance between both of these perspectives. What is more, taking both of them into account, simultaneously not forgetting about core values and primary ideas of education, probably we can mul-

tiply educational success in many diversities surfaces, what is proven in my article.

Keywords: education, development, values in education, students

Introduction

As long as in Polish schools one can still find desks with the inscription „if bored, add a carriage” together with a drawing of a long train snaking next to it, as well as lessons ended 5 mins. Early with the statement “OK, go, you’ll never be anybody, anyway”, than discussion on education and its organization seems to be still relevant.

Frequently undertaken, this discussion has resulted in the Polish education system being, according to PISA studies, one of the best in the world, but it hasn’t found a cure for the increasing number of train drawings and 40-minute lessons. Is it worth caring about it, since we are doing so well? Or are we really doing so well, seeing that the train drawings are getting ever longer and there are still classes where both students and teachers eagerly wait for the bell to ring.

Motivated by the above observations, in this essay I would like to give some thought to basic principles underlying education. Not convinced by the above-mentioned ranking successes, I would like to base the first part of my studies on Fielding’s and Dorczak’s theories. Both of them suggest a return to the roots of education, a definition of its prime values and a reflective approach to educational leadership as a tool of managing in education. In the second part, I would like to compare the conclusions

drawn with the reality around us, and finally confront them with an opinion poll taken among of upper grades of Cracow secondary school.

Urgent need for retuning the roots of education

In one of his texts, Dorczak mentions the fact of multiple education reforms, which have miraculously led the Polish education system to the very heights of European rankings, noticing simultaneously that its least reformed area is actually its management. The conviction that it is necessary to introduce management staff and school administration, which arise in early nineties remain unchanged to date (Dorczak, 2015b). Can this situation explain these surprising successes, despite the simultaneous overall aversion to education by many students and teachers?

The above situation could be compared to that of boat, in which so much attention has been paid to safety regulations, that the need for navigation has been completely omitted. The boat, provided with the best possible equipment results in the destination being completely forgotten.

The problem created by the lack of a “philosophical compass” in the context of education is tackled in a text by Fielding (Fielding, 2006a, p.349). In a following text, he emphasizes that a new chapter of democracy has begun – not only that within a particular country, but also that among nations, who are an inspiration to one another (Fielding, 2012). Education must become an answer to arising questions, ideas, possibilities and threats (Fielding, 2012; Mazurkiewicz, 2011).

The success of the Polish education system in the form of high PISA results may be treated as illusory as the creation of a boat with guaranteed total safety, but navigating blindly without a set destination and without any adjustment to changing winds (OECD, 2014).

The defining and achievement of a real educational success, shown by mutual teacher's and student's satisfaction, would be possible only after a certain reflection of concepts, enabling us to perceive education's real objectives. According to Dorczak, a return to the basic sense of education is a must. He points out that it is impossible – though tried for years – to directly transpose the rules of management theory to education. Even the concept of leadership, which distances itself from the hard aspects of management, is regarded by him as being insufficient for educational purposes. He calls for the creation of a new theory of educational leadership – one that would take into account all aspects specific to education (Dorczak, 2015a; Dorczak, 2012).

It seems that such an in-depth analysis of the education process, a redefinition of its aims, as well as a return to the base of the sense of education with an attempt to interpret it in the context of present reality, plus a subsequent creation of an education leadership theory, taking into account all the specificity of education, would be the only means of achieving real success. The tasks of returning to the roots, interpreting the sense of education in today's context and showing alternative ways of understanding education are attempted by Fielding, whose texts present the concept

of two ways of thinking about education and comparing them. One of them, High Performance Schooling, is directed by market needs, the other, Person Centred Education, concentrates on creating a democratic community (Fielding, 2011). I will try to describe them briefly, in order to relate them to Polish reality on the base of my research.

Two ways of thinking about education

Describing both approaches, Fielding remarks the apparent difficulty in differentiating them at first view. While the two approaches may initially seem to be similar, in reality they have different principles, points of reference and aims, due to which they lead to radically different effects (Fielding, 2006a). This makes their profound understanding and deciphering all the more necessary.

The reason for the misunderstanding and seeming similarity is that in both approaches the student, and thus his achievements and the student voice, are apparently of key importance. However, the reasons, for the emphasis on the student, his achievements and his voice are completely different (Fielding, 2011; Fielding, 2006b). Using a similar set of terms, the approaches seem to be alike, which is why one is liable to miss fundamentally different basics, causing radically different school practice. (Fielding, 2011; Fielding, 2006a).

According to Fielding, student voice is currently at the crossroads and in need of a choice of direction. (Fielding, 2011)

The main differences between High Performance Schooling and Person-Centered Education

High Performance Schooling perspective means, according to Fielding, understand education in the context of market needs. School becomes a tool enabling the student's subsequent establishment in the work market. The individual is, in a certain sense, a client of the school, which should equip him with the necessary skills. This approach can be considered from both the individual and collective perspectives.

In the individual perspective, the basic indicator underlying the education process is the question about the kind of work the student wishes to obtain thanks to his education. Individual ambition is thus the decisive factor (Fielding, 2011).

In the collective perspective, on the other hand, the basic question will be how we can learn from each other to achieve better outcomes (Fielding, 2011).

To sum up, the basic idea of High Performance Schooling is answering market needs, from both the individual perspective (seeking the way of obtaining the best possible employment) as well as the collective one- to develop the most effective schools achieving the best results.

The Person Centred approach is an alternative to the above way of thinking. Aimed at creating a democratic community rather than answering market needs- this approach can also be considered from an individual and a group perspective. However, in this case the author replaces the term "individual" by "personal" and "collective" by "communal" (Fielding, 2011, p.9-10) This may reflect the transfer

of emphasis from "functional relations" to "personal relations", as more widely described in one of the cited text (Fielding, 2006a, p.351; Fielding, 2006b).

In High Performance Schooling the idea of a community as a group has been replaced by a set of individuals. Individuals can interact with one another and influence the system in order to increase effectiveness. One can say that a person as such doesn't count, but only the achievement of a result.

Personal is used for the sake of the functional.

Exactly the opposite situation would be found in Person Centred Education, which assumes the existence of a community and turns towards a person as such. Here functional relations are used for the sake of the personal.

The basic determinant in the personal perspective is the question, what kind of person would the individual like to become, while personal development becomes the conditioning factor. Seen from the communal perspective of this approach, the key issue is how to build an inclusive, creative society. The conditioning factor is then common responsibility for a better future (Fielding, 2011).

As can easily be seen, the two approaches lead us to entirely different perspectives. Though both take student voice into account and put the emphasis on students' achievements, these terms are defined very differently in the two approaches, due to which they lead to completely different outcomes. Educational success means therefore something else in each of the two approaches.

The idea behind High Performance Learning is to meet market needs. School's

task is to enable the individual to enter market reality in the most effective way and to make students as attractive as possible to future employers. The students, on the other hand, expects that the school will professionally impart him skills and knowledge, resulting in achievements permitting him to position himself in the market. According to Fielding, the result of this interpretation of education (serving and fulfilling market needs) has been that High Performance Schooling is dominated by the important role of results. These are checked using measurable criteria and highly standardized tests. Good results permit individuals to arrive at higher positions in the job market (the goal of education from the individual perspective is achieved), giving educational institutions a confirmation of their activity, popularity among future clients and prestige (Fielding, 2006a).

Here, however, one can risk two disquieting observations resulting from this approach. One of them concerns the organization of the education process and its basic assumption, the other relates directly to the student as a person in the course of development.

As described by Ball, this approach leads to a sort of role inversion. Despite ostensibly being aimed at the individual, it is not the school which works for students, but, paradoxically, the students serves the school. Bal states that the school is not interested in the student as a person, but only as a supplier of high marks (thus lifting the school in rankings) (Fielding, 2006a).

Moreover the student is subordinated to the market. The child's development and the realization of its potential take

second place to the acquisition of skills useful in the market. Natural interests and the forming of a responsible human being are less important than answering market needs. In this approach the student is a key value in education only insofar as it is his education which pennits us to fulfill market needs.

High Performance Schooling puts the student at the center of attention only because he and his education will strengthen the market. He and his achievements will permit the school to realize its potential as a prestige institution, which in turn will draw others to build their position at this particular institution. Similarly, student voice will be significant only if by listening to it the school becomes more accountable and a more effective learning institution (Fielding, 2011). Students' achievements are defined as high test result and acquired measurable skills and knowledge. Non-measurable achievements or those not valued in the market, are not taken into account.

One can risk the statement, that despite being theoretically placed at the center of education, the student is in reality a more catalyst for overriding market ideas.

According to Dorczak, this approach is unfortunately the dominating one in the present thinking on education. Both authors suggest that Person Centred Education an approach which really places the student as a person at the center of education and takes upon itself his holistic development as a Human Being, is in some ways an alternative to the dominant High Performance Schooling.

This problem is metaphorically described by Dorczak. While acknowledging that the formation of educational

leadership is a kind of return to the roots, he compares the actually dominant model of education leadership to Ancient Greece, saying that it is more like Sparta than Athens (Dorczak, 2015a).

The danger of the overwhelming predominance of market-led orientation

The search for the most effective way of enabling young individuals to prove themselves in the job market, the concentration on obtaining crucial skills and knowledge and the fascination with benefits flowing from acquired prestigious positions all mean that somewhere on the way sight has been lost of the original primary element of education: the child. While the student is still ostensibly at the center of education, in reality he is merely a tool used to achieve entirely different goals. Continuing the thought of Dorczak and Fielding in this text I would like to point out the necessity of returning the student to the center of education as its key value.

I would like to mention two consequences of such an action.

Firstly, placing the student, as a person, at the center of the education process means paying attention to his natural needs, opinions and desires. The school would not impose its rule of a strict hierarchy of skills and knowledge based on market needs.

It is the student's natural interests, talents and expectations which would dictate the dynamic of the education process. Putting the child in the center we must ask what

it expects.

Moreover, when listening to the child, the school should go a step further and reflect upon the student's chosen path, seeking together with him an answer to the question, why he made this choice.

I am writing about this because I fear that in many cases the market approach described above may not only dominate in schools, but also be deeply rooted in Young People's way of thinking. Seeking to establish themselves in the market and obtain the best possible education, they support the idea of High Performance Schooling, which, while instrumentalizing students also opens the path to a career. The need to adapt to present-day reality, the desire for prestigious positions and fear for one's future and assurance of material needs have brought a change in students' way of thinking, causing the question "who would I like to be?" to be replaced by "Who do I need to be to cope with the future?". Natural interests, dreams and talents are becoming secondary to those which may be useful when entering the market and establishing one's social position. Seeking to assure his good start in the job market, the student silently agrees to his own instrumentalization by the school, implicit in High Performance Schooling. This allows him to achieve success while being, more or less consciously, threatened instrumentally by the surrounding reality. Sacrificing his natural desires in order to satisfy market needs, the student assures his future safety while agreeing to be a kind of tiny

component of a great machine. Position in society is more essential than realizing oneself.

Is reality so pessimistic? I hope to try to answer this question through my research.

Students' conscious decisions as a crucial challenge for schools

One way or another, I believe that that school should on the one hand listen to the child's natural voice, but also keep a hand on the pulse, in order to avert students' complacency and provoke them to reflect on their chosen path. The key element is, I believe, that students must be conscious of the decision they are taking.

If a young person wishes to fulfill market needs and attain a significant social position and material gains, even if this means abandoning, partly or wholly, his natural interests, than the school should give him the possibility. However the school's key task must be to provoke reflection in the student about the choices he is making: are they compatible with his opinions and needs, do they give him a chance of a happy and fulfilled life, or are they merely an attempt to gain social acceptance while "losing" oneself.

The school's basic role should thus be to install awareness. Young people should be free to choose the path they see as the most sensible for themselves. Whether it satisfies social expectations and fulfills market needs, or completely the opposite, the school should respect this student's choice and help him form his life project.

Protecting students' conscious decision seems to be the school's key role. Instilling awareness in young people will save them from an overwhelming feeling

15 – 20 years later, when they look back and sadly contemplate that having attained everything they could, they did not in reality live their own lives – they had become an answer to somebody else's project and they had lost their individuality and real selves while becoming small cogs in a big machine.

What, in your opinion, school should give to everybody?" – The research among students

The research which I carried out seems to confirm the thesis mentioned above.

For the purpose of my research, I formulated the following question: "Some people use to consider that school should serve students, allowing them to realize themselves and meet their individual needs. How would you interpret this statement? What, in your opinion, school should give to everybody?"

I asked 50 students attending the 1st grade of one of Cracow's colleges to answer the above-mentioned question.

I have divided the answers which I received into two groups corresponding to Fielding's theory. I present the results in the tables below. Due to my observations, it was possible to remark both ways of thinking among students' answers – one which corresponds to the High Performance Perspective described by Fielding, and another following the Person Centred Learning perspective.

In their answers, some of the students were following the market-led perspective. It could be noticed that some of the respondents were focused on high marks and good results, which would bring them to high positions in the market place or in

future education. All of these people expect an approach to education consistent with High Performance Schooling. To il-

lustrate this situation the answers of this group are presented in the table below.

Table 1 Students’ answers corresponding with High Performance Schooling
Source: own findings

TYPE OF PER-SPECTIVE	STUDENT’S ANSWERS
High Performance Schooling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The knowledge which I’ve acquired during the lessons (not studying by myself at home) should be sufficient for passing all tests. • Safety, a place for studying, educational aids, efficient equipment for students’ use • School should teach(provide us with) the things which are going to be useful in our future, and skills which are going to be used by us in adulthood • Knowledge – certainly teaching should be corrected / practical knowledge/ the teachers should be replaced with more qualified ones/ grants / food for everybody (e.g. apples) • Knowledge/grants/ lack of stress/ qualified teachers / respect for everybody • Possibility of suitable work afterwards • In my opinion school should ensure the possibility of a job, even if it wasn’t related to the class profile • It should prepare us for passing final exams with satisfactory marks, without studying a lot at home • School should offer preparation for future life and work • It should provide students with suitable formation, thanks to which they will find future jobs or continue studying

Source: own study.

However, there was a wide range of answers corresponding to the Person-Centred Learning perspective. Their answers are shown in the table below.

Table 2 Students' answers corresponding with Person Centred Learning

TYPE OF PERSPECTIVE	STUDENT'S ANSWERS
Person centered Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding, motivation and support in achieving goals • School should adapt its activities to groups of students with similar needs • School should give the opportunity for the self-realization and freedom in expressing views • Primarily schools should give students a widely-understood satisfaction. The evaluation system works incorrectly- benefits from good marks are vague whilst punishments (in school as well as in our own estimation) are very strong. All of the typical teenager's stress is based on the quantity of the tests planned for a particular week. School is based on fear and a disastrous evaluation system, which needs to be modernized • School should give the opportunity to develop students' hobbies and passions, for example there should be additional activities devoted to literature (ex. fantasy) (...) They could take place in the library after the lessons. If the topic could turned out to be uninteresting, the aim of the additional activities could be changed • School should give diverse skills e.g. the ability of public speaking, (...) opportunity for developing students' hobbies and passions through additional activities. • School should give safety and new ways for developing • It should deliver knowledge. Thanks to that, our nation could develop and flourish. It should give the opportunity for development, primarily students' minds and logical thinking, but also artistic and physical skills. It should give support and motivation to learn. • I think that school should be more flexible (especially when students are older). It should support students' strengths, not only try to teach students useless skills. • School should give the opportunity for development to all students (at least it should try to achieve this goal) • School should give the opportunity to develop students' interests. It should give the information about courses and run a wide range of workshops. It should give students the opportunity to realize themselves

Person centered Learning

- The opportunity to develop and realize students' interests. It should encourage to learn, not only punish for failures
- School should give the opportunity for development. It should transfer knowledge and real-life experience. It should teach not only what is in books but also prepare for life. School should give the opportunity to develop students' passions and interests
- School should give the opportunity for developing. Organizing workshops and assisting in developing individual's possibilities
- School should give the opportunity for developing. Every student has a right to develop particular skills and school should, enable this
- School should give chances for developing student's talents.
- There should be opportunity for developing in someone's particular direction, chosen by himself.
- School should give opportunities for every student's personal development. Instead of working in 30-person groups, there should be small groups focusing on particular aspects for development
- I think that schools should give the opportunity for development adapted to the student's particular needs.

Source: own study.

It is particularly interesting that there are almost two times more students who emphasize individual development, individual goals and space for developing particular passions, hobbies and talents.

There are two conclusions which can be drawn from this situation.

Firstly, there is a strong supposition that the school's program is overly crammed with the aspects which conform with High-Performance Schooling requirements. This situation results in

students' deep need for expressing their uniqueness and fulfilling their individual passions, wishes and their own idea for their development.

Secondly, we should take into account that my research was made among 1st grade students. It could be that at the age of sixteen, just starting their education in secondary school, teenagers are still able to think about their personal development more than about strict market demands. It seems that they can still value

“themselves” (their ideas, passions, way of thinking) beyond the imposed market rules, and the High Performance Schooling perspective resulting from them. It maybe that this situation could change for students attending higher classes.

Summarizing my research I was able to distinguish two more groups of answers.

In the first of these groups, the students were focusing on everyday problems, which affect their school reality and which, in their opinion, should be solved. Even though this is not directly linked to the aim of my research, I am obligated to present those results as well, in order to give the full results of my research.

Respondents pointed out the following problems:

- stress/compulsion/unjust marks/

grades (7persons)

- impractical knowledge (5 persons)
- safety (3persons)
- low level of education and incompetent teachers (2 persons)
- unexplained material (2 persons)
- inequality in access to education (1 person)
- the need for learning at home instead of acquiring knowledge during lessons (1person)
- poorly equipped schools (1 person)
- friendships (1 person)

The last group of students’ answers should attract our attention. Some respondents, in their statements, had ideas in conformity with both perspectives (High Performance Schooling and Person Centered Education). The results are presented in the table below.

Table 3 Students’ answers corresponding with both of the perspectives

TYPE OF PERSPECTIVE	STUDENT’S ANSWERS
BOTH PERSPECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It should teach useful things, which are helpful in future life • Support in achieving goals, motivation and understanding. Educational aids • School should provide the knowledge, respect, justice and it should educate • Schools should ensure for everybody the possibility to understand the core curriculum. It should arouse interest and motivate to learn. It should teach, bring values to students’ lives, increase respect, teach how to live with others. Simply, people who are part of school should share their interests, knowledge, experience, culture and advice with each other • School should primarily provide access to knowledge but also support. Every student who has a problem, should be able to talk freely with the his tutor. School should also give a sense of safety and space for developing hobbies

Person centered
Learning

- I think that schools should give the opportunity for development by organizing special hours/additional lessons/courses, and private lessons (run by school)
- I think that school should bring us to the good starting point for the future life. It should prepare us for adulthood, bring us up and give chances for spreading wings and gathering knowledge
- Primarily it should give practical knowledge (...) More opportunities for diverse development
- School should give grants to the best students and it should teach how to live – not only useless things
- School should prepare students for independent life in the future and help in realizing their passions, hobbies and developing useful skills
- Schools should give the opportunity to study in many different, diverse fields, it should teach things which are useful for the future
- School should give practical knowledge, opportunity for realizing passions. Teach ability of working in groups. It should prepare for future work, learning how to find our good and bad sides
- Schools should have an individual attitude to each student and give knowledge

Source: own study.

As can be seen, around 25% of respondents mentioned in their opinions aspects corresponding to both High Performance Schooling perspective, as well as those based on the Person-Centred Learning perspective.

This situation seems to be very positive. As was mentioned in the theoretical part, there is absolutely no need for complete resignation from either one of the two perspectives, described by Fielding. However, we should be particularly careful with glorifying High Performance Schooling –the situation which is preponderant in today's educational reality. There is a great need for finding proper

balance between both of these perspectives.

As can be noticed from my research, a wide range of first grade students still look for the possibility for personal development in schools and a space for developing their passions or finding their own way of living. School absolutely shouldn't have the right to marginalize those needs and focus on market-led orientation at the expense of personal perspective and individual searching of the way for finding fulfilling life.

However for those who look for skills, which will bring them to the best position in the market place, schools should also

be an answer.

It means that schools nowadays are standing before a great challenge of how to become an answer for all blanks in the student's development.

Conclusions

School should be the answer for all (often invisible) blanks in today's world. It could be say that school should fill the blanks – it should supply what is missing.

Following this way of thinking we can deduce schools' duties in the light of three blanks – three gaps, which should be filled by schools.

First, as an absolute priority, school should support students' conscious decisions and shouldn't allow them to be subject to the temptation of becoming an answer to social expectations and social pressure. The awareness of the choices (even if they are in line with the market-led perspective) can give students the chance to undertake their own, thought-out life, which is not somebody else's project.

Secondly, the school's duty is to transfer knowledge and teach a wide variety of skills, including those which will help young people to find a position in the market place. If someone decides that his life is to be an answer to market needs, the school should provide him with the opportunity to achieve full education and obtain a high quality of teaching, enabling him to achieve the best position in the market.

Finally, school should acquaint students with a variety of passions and interests. It should encourage students to develop their own natural potential, but also to discover completely new fields for development. The passions – those marginalized by surrounding reality, by a focus on the market-led perspective, by a preference for the career and by strict High Performance Schooling rules – should find in school the space for being developed.

How are students otherwise to make well-informed decisions in a world so dominated by market-led orientation that it leaves little if any possibility to seek other solutions?

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