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## Does Today's School/Education Respond to Society's Needs and Expectations of Reality and the Future?

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### Abstract

**Objectives of the research:** The aim of our study was to show that education, although rooted in the past and drawing heavily from the present, especially in modern times, is focused on the upcoming future, on preparing for life in a future marked by rapid changes in the development of civilisation and the hopes, threats and challenges associated with it.

**Research methods:** A critical analysis of scientific/research texts was carried out.

**A short description of the context of the issue:** The everyday reality of our lives increasingly proves that there is a great need for the harmonious and comprehensive development of the personality of children and young

people. Living in a world of constant re-evaluation and clearly articulated tendencies close to ethical relativism, in a world of ecological threats, chaos in the field of beauty criteria and rapidly increasing diseases of civilisation at the end of the twentieth century (no less so two decades later), people must have a clear and distinct perspective on what they should be aiming at, on which values they should base their lives and how they should live as free, rational and responsible beings (Śnieżyński, 1999, p. 27).

**Research findings:** The modern school becomes a place of creating needs related to the future as well as a place for locating the intentional expectations of young people and their parents in relation to functioning in reality and in the future. School has become an institution that is required to prepare young people well for life/social functioning in an unknown future.

**Conclusions and/or recommendations:** At this point, one should ask whether the institution of a modern school is able to equip a young person with everything necessary to experience success, generally speaking, so that they will not be excluded or marginalised in the global world (Rzymelka-Frąckiewicz, 2020, pp. 93–108; Rzymelka-Frąckiewicz & Wilk, 2014, pp. 83–94).

**Keywords:** schooling, education, school, social development, contemporary educational, cultural and health needs

### **“School” – a response to social, political and economic needs**

When analysing individual education systems over the decades, we discover an undoubted dependence. “In each epoch, education was adapted to the needs of shaping a specific ideal of man” (Sawisz, 1989, pp. 80–81), in accordance with the policy and needs of the state, which from the beginning of compulsory education took upon itself the burden of creating and maintaining the education system, while ensuring control over its content. The school system was and still is important from the point of view of the state because it guarantees the upbringing (or, more broadly, socialisation) of children and adolescents in accordance with the needs and adopted assumptions in economic, social or political terms.

In principle, the education system has always been a reflection of the needs of the times, the realities of the time. When examining the history and content of individual educational reforms in various countries, as Anna Sawisz (1989, pp. 18–19) notes in her book, *School and the Social System*, it is easy to see how the school system was always adapted to the current needs of the state. Industry and other branches of the economy require workers who are able to quickly acquire the necessary qualifications. An awareness of such a need makes it necessary for the creators of the school system to respond quickly to new needs.

Urbanisation and industrialisation, associated with the industrial revolution and the beginnings of capitalism, interrupted the “peaceful” course of life: citizens existing without the universal, compulsory institution of schooling. Masses of people were forced to abandon their homes and farms and move to the cities to work in industry. The factory created a need for a large, disciplined workforce and determined a different way of life for which those working in households or a workshops were not prepared. There was a need to form a new type of worker. The factory established a new type of worker, but above all it created the need for a new educational model, for a new social institution: a centrally created and centrally managed universal school for the masses.

Today, the school system must respond to the new challenges of an extremely fast-changing reality. It must mould human beings capable of realising themselves in these times. Within the social contexts outlined above, there is undoubtedly an essential challenge for educational institutions to educate individuals who are active, creative and able to adapt to changing circumstances (Puślecki, 1999, pp. 7–10). The challenge of contemporary people, at a time when democracy and the free market are firmly establishing themselves, is to create a new personality ideal. The task is to create a new model of civic education, a concept of a citizen that would be considered adequate for today's reality (Melosik, 1998, p. 35). Today, education is about preparing children and adolescents – as well as adults – to take an active part in a process of change that often has an undefined direction and that often surprises us (Radziewicz-Winnicki, 1999, p. 22).

Education has almost always been a response to the requirements of new inventions and technologies. Thus, the state responding to innovation sets new educational goals for the education system. Education produces people according to the direction in which a society is heading. It is the schools that prepare people (or at least should do) for the necessary social changes or innovations at crucial moments. It is the schools that engage people in the wider social system, educating the citizens of the state and training the skilled workers of the economy (Sawisz, 1989, pp. 122, 5). The execution of this interest may seem closest to the traditional description of education, centred on knowledge acquisition and transmission, yet the essential difference lies in the functional subordination of knowledge to modern, technological civilisation, writes Lech Witkowski (1991, p. 134). Even the students' diligent mastery or the schools' coercive enforcement of knowledge that does not conform to the industrialising ethos of civilisation can give rise to a sense of inferiority, condemning to spiritual mutilation and developmental retardation and making the school an alien creation, itself developmentally backward (Witkowski, 1991, p. 134). Dynamic changes in one social system require an immediate reaction in another. Contemporary changes in the economic sphere must cause the education system to adapt to liberal conditions (Bielska et al., 2005, pp. 52–65). The education system must keep pace with new technology and techniques so that young people entering adult life can function flexibly in reality without remaining on the periphery of social functioning.

### **The foundations of the “third wave” – the post-industrial era**

According to the well-known concept of the American sociologist and futurologist Alvin Toffler (1974a), we are standing on the threshold of the third wave. Today's reality reveals a crisis of second-wave institutions: from health care and education, through the value system to local government structures. We face the challenge of creating third-wave institutions. According to Toffler, the rapid development of civilisation causes

a legitimate psychological shock in established societies, which consists of complex phenomena that accompany the process of change. These include transience, the short-lived nature of human relationships due to the constant change of residence, contact with other people, things rapidly losing value and the constant reshuffling of organisational frameworks of life, norms of behaviour and ideas. Everything that has so far been permanent and important in understanding one's place in the world is replaced by values of a fleeting, doubtful and unreliable nature. The profound difficulties of adapting are intensified by the onslaught of novelty, unexpected, surprising events, the cause of which is the rapid development of science and its proposed applications.

In the new society, standard mass culture will give way to a diverse means of information exchange. Everyone will be able to transmit and not just receive information. Also, the standard production of identical goods will be replaced by short series of products manufactured on demand. The factory will cease to be the main centre of social life and a model for other institutions, including the school. Thanks to computers, there will be no need to travel to work. It will be possible to work in one's own home at a time convenient for everyone. Long-distance communication will replace transport. The transfer of work to the home will result in a change in the family model and a strengthening of human ties in local communities. The home will take on a whole new meaning, once again becoming a place to live and work, as well as fulfilling educational, medical and social functions, argues Toffler (1974a; cf. Bell, 1976, pp. 43–51).

In the new era of tomorrow, machines will be in charge of execution and people will be in charge of supplying the necessary information and ideas. Therefore, the technology of tomorrow will require people to think critically, be able to find their way in a new environment, make connections and see sense in a constantly changing world. People educated following the rules of the old system – poorly educated, only able to perform routine tasks, obey orders and submit to superiors for little money – will become redundant. Educating the future, according to Alvin Toffler (1974b, pp. 435–468), requires changing the organisational structure of the education system, revolutionising curricula and promoting and

strengthening orientation towards the future. Curricula should include future-orientated subjects, such as logic, philosophy, computer programming, probability theory, aesthetics or the basics of communication. An important postulate is to draw a strict line between teaching facts and teaching skills. The school of the future is to teach not only facts and how to use them, but also to prepare for outdated ideas to be rejected and replaced with new ones. Introducing a diversity of education types will increase one's chances on the labour market. This principle calls for a move away from universal, standardised, identical teaching for a multitude of people to individualised, diverse, specialised education (Toffler, 1974b, pp. 435–468).

Observing the performance of the current school, Alvin Toffler is convinced that “we are still stuck in a ‘factory’”. If we are still teaching children as if we want to adapt them to factory work – giving them repetitive tasks and ordering them to do as others do – nothing good will happen. We are operating on the basis of the programmes we created in the 19th century, when business wanted to industrialise people from a young age. Schools were then created as copies of factories (Żakowski, 2009).

Under capitalism, the school was a response to the need to create and reproduce a new workforce, where the education system, as a set of specialised institutions instilling certain cultural elements in individuals, fulfilled two basic functions: the production and recreation of the institutional conditions of their own existence and the survival and reproduction of so-called cultural self-will (Bonsunowska-Kuśka & Radziejewicz-Winnicki, 1993, pp. 33–35). According to Pierre Bourdieu's theory, the school system, having been created by the ruling classes, imposes on the rest of society by means of “symbolic violence” the body of cultural patterns in force, the definition of the complete, educated man (Sawisz, 1978, pp. 242–244). Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1991) ask where decisions are made about the form of the social order and who decides on the transfer of the valid version of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Morrow & Torres, 1995, pp. 19–38). These questions are relevant to the transformations in the education system dictated by the pace of the transformation of social reality. It is worth considering whether the current

education system is beneficial to individuals' acquisition of the competences of modern civilisations: a sense of agency, responsibility, creativity and autonomous action. Who is responsible for the curricula and are they aware of what competences the post-industrial reality requires? Who really decides on the applicable definition of reality in the education system?

Undoubtedly, today's reality calls for us to be increasingly aware of and committed to the purposeful construction of our future on the basis of social, educational, cultural (Wilk, 2022) or health development (Dworak, 2020). Any attempt by young people to reproduce the life patterns of their grandparents or even their parents' generation should be regarded as insufficient. The unpredictability of tomorrow makes it impossible to apply the solutions that have so far been known and common (Bauman, 2000). Not only should new universals be found, but they should also be constantly searched for to be relevant to the constantly changing reality.

The new techniques and technology must be followed by the education system so that young people entering adult life can function easily without remaining on the periphery of social functioning.

### **The value of education – is education generally worthwhile today?**

The value of education in our times is rapidly increasing, a natural consequence of the transition from lower levels of civilisational and technological development to the realities of the information society, a world based on knowledge. In an increasingly complex social reality, one cannot understand the world and "be oneself" in this world without adequate knowledge. A person who does not understand the world, who does not understand social problems, who does not read many important phenomena of contemporary culture becomes more or less excluded, incomplete and condemned to vegetating on the periphery of contemporary life in limited, "primitive" circles. At every step, they feel their lack of competence and inability to act, which, after all, depends on previous educational achievements. They cannot get a well-paid and

prestigious job, they have no chance of a decent salary and they are unable to realise themselves professionally. Personal fulfilment is also questionable, as hardly anyone is prepared to associate, even socially, with a functionally illiterate person, who has virtually no background or resources with which to gain sympathy and recognition from others. Well-educated people, on the other hand, have many advantages. First and foremost, the profound personal knowledge gained through careful education, professional work and participation in culture gives them the feeling of being full members of modern society (Szymański, 2013, p. 152).

Education has an ever-increasing significance for one's social positioning. It determines one's chances of taking up professional activities and meaningful work (Gerlach, 2010; Kwiatkowski, 2012), of participating in social life and contemporary culture, of functioning in one's family and of achieving success in life. It is indispensable for successfully solving one's personal problems, forming one's identity, self-acceptance and self-esteem and rationally creating a sense of meaning in life (Szymański, 2013, p. 153).

In modern society, an increasingly high level of education is becoming the norm, writes Mirosław Szymański (2013). The universality of education, which has been strived for since the Enlightenment, mainly concerned the basic level and primary education; it became increasingly extended to secondary education and now also applies to post-secondary and higher education. Societies are becoming richer and can afford to realise people's educational aspirations and related life plans more fully. In turn, a universally high level of education in society is seen as a factor of further development of the economy and various areas of culture (Szymański, 2013, p. 154).

The value of education is not limited to certain periods of life. It is no longer the case that concern for education relates to childhood and youth, the years spent at school and primarily devoted to study. Today, everyone from preschool children to pensioners should be active in education. Very rapid scientific and technological progress, dynamic social and economic change, turbulent political life and ever-newer facts, events and phenomena in culture are factors that make it necessary



to react and adapt to change. Thanks to lifelong learning, people can change their occupation (1) and the nature of their work, improve themselves professionally (Wołk, 2009), react to rapid social and technological changes and new phenomena in the world of culture (Szymański, 2013, p. 155; Bratland, 2019).

According to Andrzej Radziewicz-Winnicki (2004, p. 26; cf. Mazurek-Lipka, 2012), in information societies with the highest level of development, the situation has already arisen in which completing a university degree is no guarantee of a more favourable professional position, but it is also an observable truth that whoever has not completed a university degree today has relatively poor chances in the competition for a qualified job. It is definitely better to have an education than to be completely deprived of the chance to meet life's needs at an appropriate level. Today, education not only allows access to the labour market, prestige, income or power. In modern societies, education is also one of the basic mechanisms for determining an individual's social value (Dolata, 2013, p. 18). Thus, the school is becoming a place that now and, in future, will determine the face of the world, societies and individuals. The family, despite all its educational power, will be limited mainly to building the emotional foundations of development. Intellectual, social and civilisational development, while impossible without it, will in future be solely the work of the school (Pilch, 2016, p. 192; Pilch, 2001). Without schooling and education, we are deprived of the possibility to function independently in society.

### **In summary – we once again ask the most important questions**

It is worth considering whether the current form of the education system is conducive to individuals acquiring the competences of modern civilisations: a sense of agency, responsibility, creativity and autonomous action? Who is responsible for the education system and the content being taught? Are they aware of what competences the present and the future require? Who truly decides on the prevailing definition of reality in the education system? Because it is undoubtedly education and

the value of education that determines our chances on the labour market and our place in the hierarchical structure of society. Who is responsible for the curricula and are they aware of what competences are required by reality and the near future. Who decides (or should decide) the current definition of reality in the education system?

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