

Humanitas University Research Papers. Pedagogy, pp. 37-50

Original article

Received: **28.02.2019**

Accepted: **28.04.2019**

Published: **10.06.2019**

The sources of financing the publication: **University of Rzeszów**

DOI: **10.5604/01.3001.0013.2203**

Authors' Contribution:

(A) Study Design

(B) Data Collection

(C) Statistical Analysis

(D) **Data Interpretation**

(E) **Manuscript Preparation**

(F) Literature Search

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ON THE NEED OF CHANGE IN THINKING ABOUT SCHOOL AND ITS *CAUSATIVE POWER*

INTRODUCTION

School is being written about and elaborated on a lot. The subject of school appears at various conferences, debates and, above all, in the media, in the time when major periods concerning its participants come. Milestones for education are school reforms, difficulties and crises, but also students' high achievements in exams, competitions and contests. Discussions concerning school arise when it faces important tasks and expectations of the society, which prove to be extremely valuable in terms of the democratization of life. Frequently, however, the debates and disputes tend to disregard the issue of the "hidden curriculum" and "everyday school life," whose activities directed at the comprehensive development of students have been limited over the years, despite the guaranteed autonomy (see Dudzikowa, 2001). For a lot is being recommended or required, whereas the school entities are rarely listened to and respected, hardly ever coming across trust and understanding. School and teachers are frequently criticized without reflecting on the conditions in which they work and realizing the sources of the difficulties they face.

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In the face of the school reforms that are being implemented, as well as those already introduced, it seems appropriate to ask the following questions: What is the school reality that constitutes the result of the transformations? What kind of school do we need? What kind of school are we fighting for, struggling to plan further reforms? What criteria should their effects be measured with? Isn't it the time for the school to look more critically at itself and change the criteria for assessing the results so that they are more applicable to everyday life? Isn't it the time to change the way we think about the school from its entities' perspective, who are to engage consciously and responsibly in supporting the development of students, preparing them for further education and life?

I found the outlined problems significant concerning the debate on another dimension of school, which should be a catalyst for development, not a spore for critical states (Kwieciński, 1995, pp. 243-244), and on developing different criteria for evaluating school effects. For, according to S. Palka (2016, p. 35): "Education is to serve the citizens or to be a tool for shaping the citizens' lives," and it is where its *causative power* should be seen. Therefore, it should shape the emancipational and critical attitudes of students. Speaking of school, what I mainly mean is the primary and secondary public school. The article is based on the author's own considerations, experiences and results of research conducted over many years, hence it is impossible to present the methodological assumptions separately. These research was mainly constituted by surveys conducted within a few or even over ten years among students and teachers of various types of schools, both in the city and in the countryside, in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship and the neighboring provinces. For the credibility of the considerations, the author's works describing the highlighted problem were quoted. Many years of reflection, experience and empirical research conducted among school entities (Kocór, 2006, 2010b, 2014, 2016a, 2016b and others) confirm in many respects **the thesis concerning the superficiality and short-sightedness of school activities**, which for years has been encouraged to implement top-down instructions recommending **concern for its official role** disregarding its developmental potential and its personal and socio-cultural inside. Other studies (Kocór, 2006, 2007, 2010a, 2011a, 2012c, 2012d, 2012e and others) confirm the conviction that what still prevails among teachers is the affirmation of school reality, the adaptability of thinking and the belief in their causative power (see the didactic and educational effectiveness), **a low level of constructive criticism**, which hinders the developmental changes in education and constricts overcoming institutional barriers. Therefore, I attempt to describe the above-mentioned problems and indicate the consequences of instrumental-adaptive way of perceiving school in terms of scores, ratings and evaluation, certificates, diplomas, instead of life competences. Acquiring such skills results from an internal conviction and creative involvement of all school entities, so that a system can be created through consistent and long-term actions and transformations.

THE SCHOOL AND ITS ASSUMED ROLE

In almost every state and society, education and school go through various ups and downs. There are difficult, breakthrough periods related to introducing reforms, changing the system or the ideological foundations for education. In the academic literature, the notion of school is defined very broadly as a continuous education system or as a set of institutions of a certain type and level functioning in a given place and time (Banach, 1997; Kruszewski, 1987; Kwieciński, 1995; Radziewicz, 2003; Smarzyński, 1987; Schulz, 1992 and others, including Kocór 2010b, 2012e), but also as a specific institution – a primary or secondary school in a given town. What is then meant is both the building along with its material equipment and the organization. The school is also elaborated on in the socio-cultural dimension, taking into account the working culture of its employees, their values, attitudes and mutual relations. Thus, the school has both a formal and an informal dimension – the latter referring to its personal, community character. For it constitutes an institution, a set of institutions established to meet the educational needs and aspirations of the society. On the other hand, it is a social system (Sawisz, 1989; Szymański, 1988, 2013) composed of various entities. It is a group of people cooperating with one other to achieve common goals, values and aspirations. These are the ideological assumptions of the school. In a democratic society, which has been shaped in Poland for over thirty years now, the school is an environment based on dialogue and the cooperation of students, teachers and parents, although their scope, level and quality are different at different times and places. **The activities of school are to result from the needs and expectations of the society**, which should provide favorable conditions and atmosphere. Then, what occurs is *democracy in education* and *education in democracy*, or *education for democracy* focused on dialogue, cooperation, partnership and **educational leadership understood as managing the potential**, motivating to establishing goals and objectives, making aware of the possibilities of realizing them in particular conditions, with involvement and responsibility for their effects and quality (Kwiatkowski, Michalak, 2010; Mazurkiewicz, 2011; Madalińska-Michalak, 2012 and others). The school is therefore to look after the physical, mental, social, moral, aesthetic, polytechnical development and the life direction of students (Smarzyński, 1987, p. 8). It is to prepare them for further education, career choices and, above all, for **a valuable life** in both an individual and collective dimension.

The aforementioned problem is related to the established functions of school in terms of education, upbringing and care. The following functions can be enumerated: educational and professional orientation, cultural, environmental, socialization, preventive, therapeutic, diagnostic and, in a broader sense, research, work organization, control, axiology, innovation and reform, as well as other functions defined by experts in more or less detail (Banach, 1997). What they form is an inseparable circle of activities aimed at a particular ideal, a pattern. The implementation of one of these functions is only possible under the condition of fulfilling others, recognized

as significant, such as: diagnostic, preventive, innovative functions (Kocór, 2012d, pp. 259-270). Thus, the intention of the school is to teach, educate and provide care for the student where appropriate. The school is supposed to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of pupils, support their development, trigger their potential, but also help and support in difficult situations, teach students to cope with them, reach for help and support of others, etc. It should give students the basics of life's knowledge and encourage to broaden and deepen it, shape important skills and attitudes assuming that today a diploma once obtained is not enough and lifelong learning is of special significance. Therefore, students should be motivated to continue learning and perfecting themselves.

The school is also supposed to teach good organization of work and the right use of free time so that it serves both physical and mental regeneration, as well as comprehensive development. In the era of the electronic media, there is an urgent need to educate people on how to use the Internet in a reasonable way, to make them aware of both its possibilities and threats. It is important to diagnose the needs and the personal and environmental potential of students and the school, both as an institution and a socio-cultural system. Hence, the diagnosis and criticism of the actual condition seem to constitute a pre-requisite for any further actions, including: preventive, therapeutic, compensatory, corrective, improving school and its activities.

However, even the most ambitious goals and the resulting functions and tasks focused on the students' needs and the expectations of the democratic society are impossible to achieve without understanding and agreement, as well as trust and responsible involvement of pupils, teachers and parents. It is therefore necessary that the school and family complement each other in educational, teaching and caring activities, correct mistakes, support each other and search for better solutions. Hence, it is important to develop dialogue and cooperation on the principles of **educational partnership for development**.

In a democratic society, education constitutes a common value, in the realization of which its entities engage consciously, creatively and responsibly. Is it the case as far as our society is concerned? Is the school education directed at the development of individuals and communities, or is it often *attributing culture with illusive effort* (see Kwieciński, 1986), disregarding and destroying potential? Is the contemporary Polish school creating conditions conducive to achieving goals aimed at students' learning and life competences, instead of artificial notes, scores in tests and grades on diplomas? The aforementioned questions constituted a starting point for further discussion concerning, according to the author, the role of school which still proves to remain instrumental and adaptive in many respects, despite the democratic changes that have taken place.

INSTRUMENTAL-ADAPTIVE THINKING AND THE PHENOMENON OF OSTENSIBILITY AT SCHOOL

What influences the functioning and development of school, are factors related to it both directly and indirectly. They refer to the characteristics and behaviors of its entities, to school as an institution and a learning organization, as well as to its broader context, culture, law, politics, economics, economy and the attitudes of the society. These are subjective and non-subjective conditions, pedagogical and non-pedagogical determinants, which are described in other works of mine, and I want to refer primarily to the years of research on teachers' adaptation and instrumentalization (Kocór, 2006, 2010a, 2011a, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c).

The title of the article emphasizes the need to research and release the developmental potential of the school, mainly through changing the educational thinking of teachers and other entities concerning the assumed and the actual role of school, and switching from the adaptation-instrumental attitudes to the emancipational and critical-creative ones. The author has been worried about **the short-sightedness of school** and **the instrumentalism of its entities** related to work focused on artificial procedures and bureaucratic requirements, while neglecting the objective of shaping the personality and values of pupils, and directing their potential for development.

As evidenced by own study, a *bulk* of older teachers educated in accordance with the idea of the *pedagogy of moulding* still think in terms of the previous system affirming the work of school and its functioning (Kocór, 2006, 2010a, 2011a, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c and others). Such a state is aggravated by the *pedagogy of power*, which is still present in today's teachers training, in which prevailing methods are aimed at remembering content that prove to be vague and useless as far as future professional work is concerned (for more details see: Kocór, 2011b). As a consequence, in many respects what is being dealt with is *a school of pretence* (Kwieciński, 1986), *theatricality of behavior* (Janowski, 1995), *faith in the myth of its own functioning* (Dudzikowa, 2001), its causative power and teachers' authority (Kocór, 2006, 2010a, 2011a, 2012b, 2012c). The problem of ostensible activities at school is described by a number of researchers, among others: Z. Kwieciński, H. Kwiatkowska, J. Rutkowiak, M. Dudzikowa, M. Czerepaniak-Walczak, B. Śliwerski, T. Szkudlarek, D. Klus-Stańska, T. Pilch, E. Potulicka, M.J. Szymański. A majority of today's teachers has limited educational influence on pupils – their conscious participation in school education, motivation to learn and work on themselves, since the *internal authority* fails (as voluntary submission to influence).

What also indicates instrumental thinking and adaptive attitudes in education is the school reforms, which prove to be poorly-thought, poorly coordinated and pedagogically invalid. These are often changes for change's sake, rather than for the sake of high-quality educational services and, according to the title of the Ninth National Pedagogical Congress, preparation for valuable life. The history of Polish

education shows, in many respects, the short-sightedness and the superficiality of activities aimed at the official role of school and teachers, favored by politicians and education decision-makers. These include tests, examinations, certificates, reports and other official documents, in higher education, in turn, it is qualifications (National Qualifications Framework, Polish Qualifications Frame), artificial promotion procedures, periodic assessments and measurement of educational results, which, in the case of students' social competences, are difficult to determine. The contemporary school system is still based on the official role that its entities perform, the control and evaluation, which has more of reporting meaning, rather than shaping and developmental. As a result, pupils, as well as university students, often learn by heart things that prove to be useless in real life, memorize them and forget as soon as they leave school to gain professional and life knowledge from scratch. Hence their qualifications are to a large extent "artificial," instead of manifesting themselves in responsible and effective actions, i.e. competences. Therefore, many students struggle to "jump" to the next level of the school ladder, to score points in tests and exams, to get a high grade, which does not always confirm their competences. Thus, if *the institution replaces a person* (Janowski, 1995), disregarding his or her needs and possibilities, values, beliefs, ambitions, when both the student and the teacher do not find conditions conducive to achieving their own goals and aspirations, their reluctance, sense of powerlessness, disappointments, negative behavior increase, and a *vicious circle* is created. Reluctance to school may therefore result from contradictory values, conflicting expectations and the lack of dialogue of its entities. It happens frequently that a student behaves at school according to the teacher's requirements, and outside the official school and class life he or she behaves in a completely different way. More authentic attitudes and behaviors occur during school breaks, in the corridors, on the school playground, at home or *online*, where it is common for pupils to vent their negative emotions, aggression, intolerance, taunt colleagues. Therefore, it is possible to follow A. Janowski (1995) and elaborate on the *theatricality of behaviors*, the instrumental, non-reflexive performance of certain roles, and even faking the effort to learn at school (for: Kwieciński, 1987), often targeted at unsuitable content, artificial marks and diplomas, test scores, not for acquiring life competences. It is disturbing when the everyday school activities and procedures (rituals) are not much focused on the genuine needs of students and the society, whose causative power should be perceived in education to release the potential directed at development and progress. This is the case when school is too concerned about the formal and organizational side and its institutional dimension, and disregard its socio-cultural sense, ignore the pupils' needs and the so-called *educational depth* (supporting development, preparation for further education and a dignified life). It is disturbing when a student or a teacher acts against their beliefs, when they perform activities and implement changes they are not convinced to or which they find incorrect or harmful. This is called a contradiction of roles, *an internal conflict*, that can be related to a low sense

of validity and legitimacy of teaching, learning particular things, taking tests and exams, where it is important to *fit in the answer key*, rather than have an individual approach to a problem and develop the creative potential that it reveals.

What constitutes both the reason and, at the same time, the effect of the school activities being characterized by extreme officiality and *short-sightedness* (at every level) and the instrumental attitudes of its entities, is a low level of critical thinking, the affirmation of the familiar reality and the adaptive awareness. Own study reveals that a vast majority of teachers, educated both in the previous and, alarmingly, in the current system, affirms the work of school, their own role and educational authority (i.e. influence). They refer to the teachers' approaches towards the functioning of school, its bottom-up changes, as well as reforms, the functioning of the form teacher and the student council, and to teachers' professional competences according to both students and teachers (Kocór, 2006, 2011, 2010a, 2012a, 2012b and others). The research proves that teachers tend to formulate positive declarations, highly evaluating the school and their own role in it. They perceive themselves as an educational authority, whereas the students have quite a different opinion, they are more critical and there are about 25-30% differences in the opinions of both parties (Kocór, 2012b, 2012c). When asked about the changes expected in education, they frequently replied with the following question: "What can I do as teacher? It is the politicians and educational decision-makers that introduce change. The teachers are degraded into objects, no one takes our opinion into consideration while planning reforms." These words confirm the helplessness and lack of trust in the policy of change. A similar conclusion could be drawn from the research conducted just before the introduction of the 1999 reform (Kocór, 2006) and after years of its implementation (2010b and 2014), when the teachers' resistance increased several times as a result of the experience related to the reform which they were not convinced to.

THE NEED FOR CHANGE IN THINKING ABOUT SCHOOL AND ITS CAUSATIVE POWER

The emphasized problem concerning the fact that what frequently prevails at school is the **adaptive thinking** and the **instrumentalism of its entities** focused on artificial procedures and *short-sightedness* of their actions, requires internal, mental changes. It often goes hand in hand with thinking how to get a good grade, obtain signature in a subject, complete a semester, how to organize a contest, a school ceremony, a parents meeting, how to include the events in a report, how to document the activities in order to get praise and promotion. Such activities the school often associated its *causative power* with! Interviews conducted with teachers prove that a majority of them are aware of the role, which contradicts their internal beliefs, and the excessive formalism in school. Therefore, there is a twofold problem con-

cerning a *conflict of roles* and an *internal conflict* of school entities, who can neither resist the unreasonable or socially detrimental changes nor unite and build a better education of tomorrow.

What also requires change in thinking about the causative power of school is teachers' high self-esteem and their claiming that the school correctly performs the assigned functions, raises a wise, creative and responsible individual (see Kocór, 2006, 2007b, 2010a, 2012b and others), as various research and studies prove the crisis in the functioning of school in many areas, mainly within its educational, care, innovation and reforming functions and a downturn of its very essence (see the works of Kwieciński, Dudzikowa, Janowski, Śliwerski or the famous book by J. Juul entitled *Schools in Crisis* (2015)). Teachers' affirmative thinking makes the need for change imperceptible and constitutes a barrier difficult to surmount. Thus, I do believe that school is not able to oppose unreasonable reforms effectively (in the sense of constructive criticism) and develop bottom-up until changes in people occur. This proves **the need for mentality changes** that have marked the Polish school for many years, making it helpless in the face of the questionable school reforms that have more political than pedagogical implications. Many teachers still expect the students to perform their commands dutifully, to listen and nod, to show humility and sit quietly in the classroom, considering such attitudes to be good or even exemplary. However, the students who ask a lot of "strange" questions and *do not fit in* the key of the so-called *right answers* are perceived as difficult, problematic, with various annotations in the class register, bad grades for missing notebooks and homework, and various forms of resistance. Although there are derogations from these adaptive and instrumental practices in a number of schools considered as *islands of constructive resistance*, where critical and creative teachers work, building good atmosphere for *educational partnership*, it is still a lot that needs to be changed in thinking about the school and its *causative power* (not artificial evaluation and requirements, rituals). Thus, do we really need rights, obligations, diagnosis, evaluation, changes, democracy, dialogue, partnership for their own sake, if their goals are not directed at realizing genuine needs? What will we need them for, if they do not constitute the driving force for development?

Educational partnership for development requires emancipational and critical thinking about oneself (students, teachers, parents) and the surrounding reality, as well as the readiness for changes directed at a better school, better education and a better life, both in the individual and community dimension. Partnership in a democratic school requires equal rights, but also a thorough knowledge about one another, mutual trust, respect and appreciation, creative fulfillment of tasks, whose authors are all the entities, conscious and responsible involvement in achieving goals and values, which the parties jointly treasure and accept. Educational partnership for development does not stand for blaming the other party, pointing out mistakes and deficiencies in students, teachers, parents and making judgments, as the diagnosis and pedagogical evaluation constitute only the beginning of coherent and respon-

sible actions in order to trigger the developmental potential of school that lies in its entities and in students' local environment. It is pupils, teachers and parents who are the partners of education, and who should be truthful and honest with one another, being aware of their own potential, competence, and recognizing even small achievements. Partnership at school also means critical, creative and responsible commitment to the implementation of the values shared by the people in charge. They are to trust teachers and work on that trust, which has been lost as a result of the policy of inadequate changes and educational reforms. Own research on stress and support at school proves school entities' little confidence in themselves. In difficult situations, neither students nor teachers perceive each other as supportive and they rarely depend on each other (see Kocór, 2016a). The topic requires deeper elaboration and explanation in the search for the sources of crisis of students' trust in teachers. It also entails the postulate of professional selection, assessing the effects of school work with qualitative life criteria, rather than official scores in test, grades at a diploma, a place gained in a competition or in a school ranking. Skillful, motivated and creative teachers should be the pride of a school and an example for the less experienced colleagues. In the teachers' working environment, they should become support and development leaders, setting an example of good masterful work, a sense of satisfaction and professional fulfillment. In order for teachers' attitudes to transform from the instrumental-adaptive into emancipational and critical-creative, it is their education that must change and become more thoughtful (as a conscious, creative and responsible process of becoming a competent teacher). Therefore, it is necessary to change the way of thinking about the school and attitudes of the society, which will recognize the developmental potential and the citizens aspect in education, make use of it in order to create better conditions and atmosphere of work at school and teachers' personal satisfaction.

CONCLUSIONS AN RESEARCH INSPIRATIONS

The author's research, considerations and experiences related to school and teachers have led to the conclusion that the short-sighted policy of changes in education is still focused on the affirmation of the existing reality and the instrumentalism of its entities, who tend to care more about its official aspects rather than prepare students for life. Despite democratic transformations, it is the instrumental-adaptive attitudes that prevail over emancipational and critical-creative attitudes in education (Kocór, 2006, 2012b and others). What is disturbing is little trust, responsibility and commitment in education based on partnership for the development of individuals and communities. Therefore, what kind of change does the school need? Undoubtedly, as the title suggests, the most significant are the changes concerning thinking about school and its causative power, i.e. fulfilling its functions and tasks aimed at reaching the school of a better future and a better future for school as an institution, but

also its *soul*, the inside, or its personal and social dimension. What seems crucial here is the understanding of what dialogue, partnership and cooperation are and what purposes they serve. And the objectives are to support pupils in their efforts to become a better citizen and a better human. The school is supposed to foster autonomy and critical thinking, so that its entities can perceive the substantive need for changes in themselves and in their surroundings. Good education and a good school are to move towards better conditions and lead to a better, more valuable life (the one of a dignified human being and highly civilized societies), but it is its developmental potential that should be released, not ignored, neglected or limited as in the case of recent school reforms. This is the responsibility of pedagogy as a field of study concerning education in a lifelong, formal and informal sense, but its achievements should be effectively applied in the school practice. There is a need to perceive it in a systematic way and shape it from different perspectives (see the works of K. Duraj-Nowakowa, 2005, 2011). Researchers need to open up to partnerships with educational practitioners and decision makers (Kocór, 2018a, b). It is S. Palka (1989, 2018) a who has been arguing the need for years, focusing on the research attitudes of teachers-practitioners and the practical orientation of researchers-theoreticians, postulating combining different approaches for a better school. Thus, every symposium, conference, debate concerning the condition and development of school should take into account the initiatives of researchers and practitioners, educators and politicians in order to search for common approaches and arrangements. However, it depends on the enlightened, bold and integrated educators to what extent education will remain *in their hands* and how many reforms and changes for their own sake will be allowed.

The essence of the considerations is the awareness and the postulate of looking for other, more valuable criteria for assessing the work of school and the achievements of both students and teachers. The words of C. Banach (1997, p. 97) may constitute a guideline: "School – a valuable social device, is a social system with considerable durability, but the one that requires a continuous diagnosis of the assumed and implemented functions. It must be the subject of social assessment and expert valuation, employing both school and life criteria." In this search, it is worth initiating **qualitative research** that show the hidden identity of school, its aspirations, values, desires. The so called **soul of the school** consists of the values and priorities of students, parents and teachers, but also difficulties, limitations, stereotypes and contradictions. Thus, what criteria should we measure school and education with? What are the results of research on school as a place for students' learning and development, as well as the place for work and development of teachers? To what extent is the school a source of stress for them, and how much help and support in difficult situations does it provide? These questions may constitute an inspiration for further interpretations of school everyday life, in which partnership and leadership signify the creative use of the developmental potential of school. The conducted analyzes have led to the conclusion that what must be changed is thinking about the school,

which, thanks to the educational partnership, will become a pleasant place for learning, work and development, but also a source of satisfaction, where students will be pleased to attend classes happily, but also consciously and responsibly.

How then should we safely move towards an individually and socially valuable **school and teacher of tomorrow?** Undoubtedly, this is a difficult question requiring broad penetration, arguments and searches, while the answer is not unambiguous and concise. What might also constitute a signpost in the search for a better school and education conducted by researchers, educators, practitioners and education decision makers is a famous book by J. Jull (2015) and the author's conversation with C. Schumman entitled *Towards the School of Tomorrow*, in which the Danish educator J. Jull (2019) advocates: "What is urgently needed at schools is a paradigm shift, which means that trust in the competence of a child will be in the central position. The confidence that children interact willingly not only with parents, but also with teachers. According to the old paradigm, pupils are to do what the teachers say, and in this way deserve their trust. Now we want to trust them from the very beginning." How much are teachers aware of the need to trust in students' competences? What can be done for students, teachers and parents to trigger their developmental potential? It is a subject for elaboration on the direction of *school* changes, as well as a theoretical and practical problem requiring scrutinization from various perspectives.

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ON THE NEED OF CHANGE IN THINKING ABOUT SCHOOL AND ITS CAUSATIVE POWER

Keywords: school, pupil, teacher, instrumentalism, adaptiveness, change, development

Abstract: The undertaken subject is the reflection on the established and actual functioning of a school. The author seeks answers to the questions: Does education in democracy reach its a deep goal, and if not then what obstacles does it encounter? Still, a disturbing and difficult barrier to eliminate is the faith in the myth of self-functioning, own perpetration power, instrumentalism and “theatricality of behavior” of its subjects. Using the results of years of research conducted proposes the application about the need for change in thinking about school.

O POTRZEBNIE ZMIAN W MYŚLENIU O SZKOLE I JEJ *SPRAWCZEJ MOCY*

Słowa kluczowe: szkoła, uczeń, nauczyciel, instrumentalizm, adaptacyjność, zmiana, rozwój

Streszczenie: Podjęty temat jest refleksją nad założonym i rzeczywistym funkcjonowaniem szkoły. Autorka poszukuje odpowiedzi na pytanie: czy edukacja w demokracji osiąga swój głęboki cel, a jeśli nie, to jakie przeszkody napotyka? Wciąż niepokojącą i trudną do wyeliminowania barierą jest wiara w mit funkcjonowania szkoły i swoją sprawczą moc, instrumentalizm i „teatralność zachowań” jej podmiotów. Posiłkując się wynikami od lat prowadzonych badań, nasuwa się wniosek o potrzebie zmian w myśleniu o szkole.