

УДК 371:304.4

AREAS OF EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS IN VIEW OF DEMOCRACY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF OPEN SOCIETY

Alicja Anna Kotusiewicz

*Faculty of General Pedagogy Higher School of Pedagogy
Polish Teachers' Association in Warsaw
Smulikovsky Str., 6/8, 00–389 Warsaw, Poland*

The paper identifies the dialectic dependence of society and education.. It emphasises the role of education in social life as the primary source, profound and real basis of human needs and a means of world perceiving, learning and interpreting. The author makes an attempt to recognize the basic educational issues connected with the perspective of democracy and the development of open society.

Key words: democracy, open society, cultural pluralism, tolerance, teacher's and students' freedom, diversity.

Democracy has never been and still is not a perfect structure of social life. On the contrary, it is an unfinished and open idea, a unique myth whose forms of realization are always faulty. The models of modern western democracy alongside market economy, cultural pluralism, specific legal framework and tolerance generate new threats, never experienced before.

Critics draw attention to a progressing fragmentation of social life, to becoming shut within small family and professional circles, to weak social activity on the local level, to a void that is building up in the social space of an individual's realization of freedom and autonomy (Z. Kwieciński, 1996, H. Giroux, P. McLaren, 1993, S. Ranson, 1994).

Democracy as equality of every citizen's vote in electing the leaders was invented by the Greeks in 5th century B.C. ("demos" – the people, "kratos" – the power). They understood also what façade democracy was and how it worked. However, the sources of modern classical theory of democracy are found in philosophical discourses and social concepts of J. Locke, Ch. Montesquieu, J.J. Rousseau. In "Letters On Tolerance" Locke gives grounds and strength to the conviction of the religious freedom of citizens. In "Discourse on the Office" he elaborates on the theory of parliamentary constitutionalism, propagates a thesis that the power comes from the will of the people, calls for majority rule and sets the limits of infrangibility of citizens' rights by the office. In "On the Spirit of the Laws" Montesquieu formulates a principle of division of power into legislative, executive and judiciary. Rousseau in "Social Contract" and "Discourse on the Origins and Foundations of Inequality among People" sees the reason for the bad

human condition in social inequality. He recommends social contract and respecting the law, but identifies the law with the Public Will which is always, the author believes, right and aimed at public good. Rousseau links and subjects his social philosophy to pedagogical beliefs and stipulations included mainly in "Emil" ("Emil, i.e. on Education", 1762).

In contemporary times the classical theory of democracy has been enriched with new elements and requirements. An axiom has been adopted that democracy must be limited by constitution, that it can only be effected within the legal framework. The basis for democracy is a system of institutional tools which make it possible to elect the governing elite with the participation of the whole society, political freedom and constitutional control of power (J. Schumpeter, 1942). Particular significance is ascribed to the quality of the law and the mechanisms of control of power, but even those appear to be insufficient and fallible. Many contemporary authors (J. Baszkiewicz, 1999, W. Osiatyński, 2004, M. Ostrowski, 2005) formulate and justify a thesis that the citizens themselves are the very foundation of democracy. Democracy needs democrats and social attitudes aimed at common good. Free elections of the leaders are important, but the ability to think with a perspective broader than just individual benefit, a conscious involvement in public matters are a constituent quality of democracy.

Historically determined forms of democratic societies are not homogenous in shape (antique democracy, liberal, parliamentary, participative, direct, indirect, façade, permissive, etc.). In general understanding the term identifies democracy with a specific structure of power and a specific method of its social verification.

The author of "Democracy and Education" defined a democratic community through the categories of social communication, free flow of information and experience.

"The degree in which the interests of a group are shared by all its members and the depth and freedom with which this group cooperates with other groups are decisive as far as the values of social life are concerned (...) Society is as much democratic as it provides equal access to its common good for all members and as it secures flexibility of its institutions thanks to the co-operation of different forms of communal life" (John Dewey, 1963).

A weak open society cannot heal the country, this is why the criterion which refers to a degree of citizens' participation in the life of the country is of such importance. A specific form of democratic order depends on what is contributed "from the bottom up", what content an individual, a social groups and the whole society can bring. Whether democracy, the rights and social freedoms are possible depends on the "quality" of citizens, their motivation, readiness, well-formed competence and ability to learn. In democracy there is a constant need to learn how to establish "laws for oneself" in the presence of (in the context of) "laws for

others”, how to create a common area of constructive cooperation out of contrary interests.

Understanding democracy as a process of *l e a r n i n g* implies a question about the trends in educational changes which a community, aware of its needs, aspirations, possibilities and situation vis-à-vis other countries and nations, aims to undertake.

It seems that the perspective of democracy and open society requires attention to be paid to a few basic areas of educational problems which inspire and assist in creating democratic and social attitudes.

The first is the issue of one’s own participation in building an efficient open society of the law. Fulfilling this aspiration depends on a specific type of social mentality, able to develop “a model for social and educational participation”.

In the light of empirical research (J. Koralewicz, M. Ziółkowski, 1990) the mentality in demand is “subjective and entrepreneurial” in character, active.

Its determinant is the need and ability of subjective functioning on all levels and in all fields of life – from subjective attitude towards authority to a vision of relations within families, neighborhoods, education system and schools based on partnership and democracy. The “subjective and entrepreneurial” mentality is in opposition to a mentality which is “passive, unproductive and anti-individualistic”, inclined to subordination, showing no initiative, and to a mentality which is “defensive, conservative and demanding”, avoiding risk and responsibility, believing the world to be an unfriendly and hostile reality.

Overcoming a passive and demanding mentality is the most serious obstacle in the process of democratizing social structures. “Passive and demanding” citizens want their needs, interests and opinions taken into account by those in power, but they do not express any wish to participate in the process of governance. They accept the paternal model of power which ensures security and frees them of the burden of understanding the complexity of social life.

The educational context of the problem of participation calls attention to the requirements for the development of an individual whose perception of the world reaches beyond his or her own person and who shows willingness to participate in responsibility for both personal and common good. At present what seems to be mostly required is a change of educational standard which implies dominance and deprives individuals of responsibility for themselves and their education, and stands in the way of learning a genuine dialogue with what is different and foreign.

Changing the standard means changing the language of educational communication, giving up of the concept of “having the subject of education at disposal” in favor of “being at disposal”, limiting delivering ready-made material in favor of a broader participation of an individual in developing the educational program and his or her own educational career.

Another problematic area is connected with freedom. In general understanding freedom is seen as an attribute of subjectivity and ontological quality of man. It is contrary to all forms of external pressure. However, as an idea of ultimate demands it cannot be uncompromisingly and directly translated into specific and objective categories. In social life the right to freedom takes the form of obligatory standards, and aspirations to freedom are transformed into guarantees of civil liberties requiring limitations and sanctions which restrict freedom and impose the necessity of respecting those. Freedom exists where there are limits and where an individual gives permission for those to exist. It is the space between fulfillment and limitation, between the present and the possibility.

Each person, in their thoughts and actions, desires to be free. A teacher's freedom is fulfilled in relation to the pupil's (student's) freedom if the teacher can respect the individual's right to be whatever the person wants to be and himself or herself wants to stand on his own and be himself.

A teacher's freedom is difficult, it requires the ability to compromise contradictory intentions: openness to influences and signals from the outside world on one hand and distance in relation to pressure and excess interference which destroys the sense of being free and responsible on the other. It is difficult also because it requires limiting one's own (for oneself) freedom in favor of the pupil in the educational dialogue and cooperation.

One can suppose that the direction of educational change in view of democratic respect for an individual's freedom will lead from an intention of "educating and shaping" to a progressive ability of "self-education and self-development", from univocal to diverse pedagogical thinking, from education for freedom to education in freedom, from traditional "lecturing" to educational communication, dialogue, cooperation. The basis of this new communicative space as a principle in pedagogy is the flow of thoughts which leads to knowledge, a continually repeated attempt to communicate with the world. It is an intellectual and emotional experience for both the student and the teacher.

The third anticipated trend in educational change refers to pluralism and tolerance in societies which are becoming more and more diverse culturally, ethnically, religiously, etc. (emigration).

Pluralism, like democracy, is not an aim in itself. Its function is to guarantee the equality of civil liberties and tolerance.

The criticism of pluralistic democracy shows that it is in fact a pluralism of competing elites, and in its populist version (the version of majority) reveals an inclination to awarding oneself with the right to be right at all times. The "openness" of pluralistic democracy paralyses sometimes the ability to make decisions, leads to inaction and the evolution of central, anarchic tendencies. Moreover, competition and the conflict of pluralistic interest groups simply do not lead to common good. Long-term interests often lose to immediate needs, and

common interests often lose to individual ones. A search for superior and obligatory rules which would be free of axiological disputes does not seem to be possible. Therefore, a problem of negation, or, rather, self-negation of the idea of pluralism, arises.

The antinomy of pluralism came to focus in Leszek Kołakowski's essay "Self-poisoning of Open Society". The inner contradiction of pluralistic order and tolerance can be summed up in the question: How can pluralism and democracy defend themselves against their opponents without resorting to means which destroy their very nature ?

"The dilemma is urgent, the philosopher claims, and not, by any means, invented for purely theoretical purposes. Constitution, which guarantees civil liberties and political freedom, acts also against itself when it excludes from the law totalitarian movements and ideas; it also acts against itself when it provides those with legal protection; both tolerance and intolerance towards the enemies of tolerance are in contradiction to the principle of pluralism and it is impossible to know in advance to what degree tolerance can, in given circumstances, extend without causing a breakdown of democracy" (L. Kołakowski, 1990).

In education the dilemma of tolerance and pluralism is not merely a theoretical and conceptual category. It is a living process involved in educational everyday reality (e.g. the problem of headwear worn by Muslim students), in stereotypes in thinking, in emotions, in living memory and ability to forgive, in the overflow of violence and cruelty towards people.

The direction of educational plans and purposes relating to the intention of creating a pluralistic society and tolerant attitudes of its citizens will be, it seems, possible and will lead from intolerance of "different" to willingness to understand and meet the "other". From conviction about one's own truth as the only one to willingness to understand the "truth" of others.

Democracy protects and limits infringement of individual and civil freedom, it limits lawlessness, but cannot, as the past social experience has shown, eliminate injustice and guarantee dignified life for everybody. There are always the weaker, the excluded, the deprived of rational orientation in the world and of a chance to develop. What can they do with their lives? What are they able to do? Can modern democratic education face up to the challenge ?

-
1. *Baszkiewicz J.* Power. Wrocław, 1999.
 2. *Dewey J.* Democracy and Education. Introduction to the Philosophy of Education. Warsaw, 1963.
 3. *Giroux H., McLaren P.* Education, Politics and Ideology // The Missing Discourses. Toruń, 1993. Vol. 3.

4. *Kolakowski L.* Civilization in the Defendant's Stand. Warszawa, 1990.
5. *Kolakowski L.* Can the Devil Be Saved and 27 Other Sermons. London, 1984.
6. *Koralewicz J., Ziolkowski M.* Mentality of the Poles. Models of Thought on Politics, Economy and Social Life in the End of the 80s. Poznań, 1990.
7. *Kotusiewicz A.* Teacher Education in View of the Requirements of Democratic Society // Studies in Pedagogy. Warszawa. 1994. Vol. LX.
8. *Kwieciński Zb.* Democracy in Education or Education for Democracy? / Education and the Young in View of Open Society. Poznań; Toruń, 1996.
9. *Ranson S.* Towards the Learning Society. London, 1994.
10. *Osiatyński W.* The Republic of Citizens. Warsaw, 2004.
11. *Ostrowski M.* Mr Rousseau's Garden // Polityka. 2005. № 25

ОСВІТНІ ПРОБЛЕМИ З ПОГЛЯДУ ДЕМОКРАТІЇ ТА РОЗВИТКУ ВІДКРИТОГО СУСПІЛЬСТВА

Алісія Анна Котусевич

*Факультет загальної педагогіки інституту
Асоціація вчителів Польщі у Варшаві
вул. Смуліковського, 6/8, 00-389 Варшава, Польща*

Обґрунтовано діалектичний взаємозв'язок між суспільством і освітою. Зосереджено увагу на ролі освіти в суспільному житті як джерела, основи потреб людства, засобу сприйняття, інтерпретації та пізнання реальності. Зроблено спробу проаналізувати головні освітні проблеми в контексті демократичних перспектив і розвитку відкритого суспільства.

Ключові слова: демократія, відкрите суспільство, культурний плюралізм, толерантність, свобода педагога й студентів, диверситивність.

Стаття надійшла до редколегії 20.09.2005
Прийнята до друку 25.04.2006