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Cooperation of Home and School: Evaluation of Premises of Educational Reform in Poland

Review of book: M. Banasiak, *Współpraca rodziców ze szkołą w kontekście reformy edukacji w Polsce (Cooperation of Parents and Schools in the Context of Educational Reform in Poland)*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, Toruń 2013.

Throughout the years, the relations between teachers and parents have been subject to constant modifications related to challenges and tendencies that have been appearing in the modern world. However, especially intense transformations in the area of cooperation between the family and the school can be observed since 1999, when the premises of educational reform started to be introduced in Polish educational units. These premises impose an obligation of intensifying contacts between at least two social groups, teachers and parents, on every headteacher of an educational unit, for the purpose of specifying the principles of cooperation in such a degree that makes it satisfactory for all entities interested in the child's welfare. A positive aspect of the premises of educational reform is the absence of a determination of a rigid framework of conduct within the scope of cooperation with parents. Such conditions offer a series of possibilities in terms of contact for teachers with the child's guardians that contributes to greater freedom in terms of forms and standards of conduct, which could answer the needs of both parents and teachers. A number of studies conducted around the world indicate that tightening the bond between the family and the school has a positive

impact on learning results and the process of a child's upbringing. These tendencies were also noticed in Poland and a first step has been made to improve the parent – teacher relation by relevant provisions in documents issued by the Ministry of National Education.

Several years have passed since the initiation in 1999 of thorough changes in the Polish educational system. The time has come to verify theoretical assumptions of the reform and to ascertain whether it is implemented in a practical dimension. To what extent are the headmasters and the teachers aware of their rights and obligations within the scope of cooperation with parents? Do parents know their rights and obligations with respect to the school? What is the reality in the Polish school within the scope of the parent – teacher relations? Has the educational reform resulted in any changes in this area, or is it only an empty provision which has no actual impact on the functioning of schools? The reviewed publication provides answers to the questions posed above, along with other questions of a narrower range, but referring to the issue of cooperation between teachers and parents.

Information concerning the teacher – parent relations is presented by the author in a comprehensive manner; their complexity is shown, along with the number of factors that characterise them. The described publication consists of six chapters; however, it is possible to determine two parts – a theoretical and empirical one. The first one shows the concept of the school as a learning organisation according to the premises formulated by Peter Senge. A number of criteria have been presented which a “learning organisation” should meet; at the same time, they were confronted with the Polish school. This confrontation does not allow for considering Polish schools to be learning organisations, something which is emphatically argued by M. Banasiak. The author also specifies a number of guidelines whose implementation contributes to the efficient functioning of the school. In a further part of the publication, the author focuses on a presentation of the premises of the educational reform system in Poland. However, this is done from the perspective of the rights and obligations of headteachers and teachers towards the parents, as well as rights and obligations of parents towards the school.

In the second empirical part of the book, the author presents the results of her own studies which were conducted in randomly selected public and non-public schools of the commune of Toruń and the city of Toruń. They were implemented with the use of a questionnaire and grade scale (addressed to teachers and parents) and interview questionnaires (addressed to headteachers). The data obtained in the course of the study is very interesting. On the one hand, it is possible to draw a unanimous conclusion that headmasters and teachers are still not prepared for working with the family environment. On the other hand, it is surprising to learn that both groups are aware that the educational reform increased the rights and obligations of parents at schools and also imposes a task of closer contacts between home and school. The existing situation results in the fact that with respect to the issue of cooperation with school, parents also feel at loss. They are not fully aware of their rights and obligations, they evaluate support offered by teachers critically and they also claim to have had quite limited forms of contact with the teachers of their children. Basic forms of communication between a teacher and a parent are limited to school meetings and consultations. This pessimistic vision of cooperation between headmasters and teachers with parents is shown by M. Banasiak in the perspective of the various factors that comprise it. The author makes an effort to show the causes of selected unfavourable phenomena occurring in relations between teachers and parents. In the final part of the publication, she details the postulates which might condition broader knowledge of parents and could also allow for the implementation of the premises of the reform within the scope of cooperation between the family and the school. The author makes an attempt to show that the Polish school may function as a learning organisation, which is going to offer benefits to all entities making up its structure.

The publication is written in simple and understandable language. However, it does not lack a scientific approach, which may become an impulse for commencement of own studies in the area of the discussed issue. It is addressed to a broad group of recipients; mainly teachers and students of early childhood education but also parents whose children attend educational units will find useful information in the book. Knowledge

in the area of rights and obligations that should be fulfilled by headmasters and teachers towards the parents may help noticing not only a bureaucratic institution in a school, but also an entity filled with people who are really interested in understanding the child's situation. Furthermore, after the reform commenced in 1999, parents have greater rights than before with respect to co-deciding about, e.g., modifications in the teaching programme. It is expected that they are going to be active partners in discussion; persons involved in the life of the school community and that they will provide information in order to solve children's problems together with teachers. The vision of the parent who passively listens to opinions voiced by the teacher is slowly disappearing and parents should be particularly aware of it.

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