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***At the Meeting of Cultures: An Afterword instead of a Review***

I would like to ask the Editors of this volume to let me “escape” from the role of a typical reviewer. I would like to ask them and the readers to treat this text rather as a handful of miscellaneous thoughts or reflections on their publication. I hope that they will be willing to accept my suggestion. It seems to me that a form of a modest *afterword* will be more appropriate for such a short text than their original proposal of a very prominent position of a *foreword* or an *introduction*.

Let us start from posing a question: What makes us constantly try “to have a look” at what others are doing and then describe what we have seen with all the notional apparatus available to us and analyse it? Curiosity – an inborn quality of human nature? Need – coming from the necessity of “reaching the essence”, justified in one way or another? Or maybe something else as well? It seems that there will be a lot of answers – and they will depend on individual motifs that forced the person answering the question to “have a look”.

First thought. It is enough to go through the texts included in “Education at the Meeting of Cultures”, to find out that each of the authors will provide at least slightly different justification of why he or she has chosen this and not that topic of his or her considerations. The approaches to the selected research subject will also differ. And it is natural as the postulates of developing a uniform methodology of comparisons made in the area of education, voiced by Marc-Antoine Jullien de Paris (1775-1848) – the father of comparative pedagogy, included in his work *Esquisse et vues préliminaires d'un ouvrage sur l'éducation comparée* /Eng: *Outline and Preliminary Views of a Work on Comparative Education*, Paris 1817/ two centuries ago have never been put into practice [Průcha, 2004, p. 26]. Actually, today nobody even tries to put forward any proposals on the necessity of universalistic concept of comparative research, which, just a few decades, based on positivistic assumption of the possibility of finding general laws of development of education, was postulated by Pedro Rosselló (1897-1970) or Jean Piaget (1896-1980) – connected for years with the famous International Bureau of Education in Geneva [IBE, 2007]. Even a superficial review of contemporary research approaches to “peeping at the education of others” makes us conclude that there is a great variety of theoretical and methodological positions in this area. [comp.: Barczyk 1998, pp. 11-25, Pachociński 2007, pp. 11-67]. So the lack of methodological similarity of individual papers of the volume does not surely constitute a base for formulating any critical remarks about the volume, but perfectly illustrates the currently existing differences in the area of educational research works both on comparison of various systems and any educational phenomena happening “at the meeting of cultures”. It also seems that (almost) all the papers included in the publication also show well yet another current regularity that in this type of research there is now a clear shift of research emphasis from (self) limitation of the authors coming down to just description and attempts of understanding education, towards taking up challenges connected with explaining educational phenomena. That is why most of the works have acquired a mature, interdisciplinary character.

Second thought. Already in 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. Polybios from Megalopolis (ca 200-118 B.C.), in the opinion of the contemporaries the most distinguished historian of the Hellenic epoch and the author of a forty volume *Historiae* – the oldest known general history noted down a thought that “hardly ever there was any connection between events that were happening in the world, while now they are all viewed as one whole” [Piszczek (ed.), 1990, p.602]. It was thus a clear signal that in that world, due to Rome, some globalization processes were taking place, the processes that caused flourishing of interdependence between various societies and communities of the ancient world and a gradual integration of different cultures and social, which, in effect, led to the situation which Federico Mayor, UNESCO general director for many years called “the feeling of belonging to the world” [Mayor 2001, p.19]. Since that moment on the societies of our civilisation will always “be forced” to function, in a sense “at the meeting of cultures” – if you let me refer to the name of the Student’s Research Club “At the Meeting [of Cultures]”, operating at the Institute of Education of the University of Gdańsk, from which the editors of the volume come, and often “at the meeting of cultures” – if you let me recall yet another part of a title from this collection. It makes it necessary to constantly resolve the dilemmas of the proportion between locality and globality through the subsequent generations that have inhabited the Earth since Polybios’ times till today. And the methods of settling down the dilemmas themselves will be changing both in vertical direction – historical one, and horizontal – geographical one, each time showing the openness or self-confinement of the society in question, the society living in a given time of history and in a given place of the globe.

Third thought. Let us slightly change the perspective of our considerations. The role of education today, obviously enough, consists mainly in preparing citizens responsible towards the future, that is the necessity of stimulating reflection and teaching the skills of not being influenced by others but of independent decision taking. As the above mentioned Mayor noted, being a responsible citizen “means an acquired ability to think, that is to remember, to compare”. And “remembrance and comparison constitute two essential elements of ethics” And “ethics itself is directed towards the future” and cannot satisfy itself with “carrying out the duty towards the present, does not limit itself to a contract”, as it is an ethics that “tells both the decision makers and the citizens to take up activities in due time, that is to anticipate” [Idem, pp. 491-492]. Therefore, it seems pretty obvious that today the main premises for building civic society and the educational practice leading to it are based on the postulates of wisdom and experience, which can be put into practice through referring to native wisdom and experience of the past generations, or to the wisdom and experience of others. It would, of course, be best to make use of those two opportunities at the same time. Many recipes for the future of education are provided by various sorts of experts: “Anchor localism in globalism, and what is individual – in what is collective and civic: emphasise interpersonal relations on the plane of information exchange, create conditions for development of any local and regional specific character inside the global network, so as to prevent formation of a uniform culture” [Idem, 2001, p. 398]. In other words, cognition, understanding, cooperation – yes, but not ahistorical approach and cultural peneplena. The desire to grasp the processes intellectually thus leads to taking up attempts at cognition, description, understanding and – often – explaining of what is going on in the community at the other side of “the borderline”, or in the community that is in an interaction of the type of “at the meeting of cultures” with us. Education of others is sometimes one of desired areas we want to learn about. Attempts at analysing ways of education and bringing up by other communities (enemies, friends, potential allies, etc.) were taken up already in Polybios times. And it was not infrequent that based on that conclusions were drawn on their condition, e.g. moral, intellectual or physical, or the communities tried to introduce elements of educational solutions of others – sometimes transferred uncritically, sometimes – as creative adaptations. Let us also emphasise that yet another motif of “peeping at” should be mentioned here since, as Michael E. Sadler (1861-1943) noted as early as in 1900, better understanding of native educational solutions becomes one of the practical benefits of international comparative studies on education [Pachociński,

2007, p.15]. This volume, with papers of authors from as many as five countries, indirectly but clearly confirms the viability of the arguments of the English educator voiced over a hundred years ago.

Fourth thought. I must admit that the fact the Editors of “Education at the Junction...” point out to my class on “Ideologies of Reforms of Educational Systems” that I had the pleasure of delivering at the Institute of Education of the University of Gdańsk two years ago was one of significant inspirations of making the effort of preparing the publication is of great satisfaction to me. And I hope that they will continue developing their research interests in world’s education. Let us take this opportunity to remind the readers that this publication is not the first study on international problems of education prepared by the students of the Institute of Education. Two books were published in the 1990s: the first one – a presentation of ten different educational systems prepared by student teams [Hovenberg *et al.* (ed.), 1994], the second one – showing, *inter alia*, students’ texts on teacher education in eleven countries [Burzyńska *et al.* (ed.), 1998]. Both books were written and published under Polish-Swedish Education Democratization Project “S/z/koldem”, coordinated jointly by the University of Gdańsk (Institute of Education) and University in Linköping (Centre for Adult Educators) – its partner university from Sweden, and have been used as ancillary material for the class “Comparative Education”. Recalling students’ publication we must at least mention the book by Raul Emilio Soto Sanchez – University of Gdańsk education student from the far Bolivia, whose master thesis on Latin American folk education was published by the efforts of Kashubian regional activists [Soto Sanchez, 1996]. We want to stress the fact that the Institute of Education of the University of Gdańsk has a certain established tradition in publishing students’ papers.

In the above context “Education at the Meeting of Cultures” is a continuation of a certain good tradition of the research community of Gdańsk educators. And what is the difference between the previous books and this one? It is the fact that it is the first in the history of the Institute publication whose concept was developed entirely by the students themselves – members of Student Research Club “At the Meeting [of Cultures]”. It was also them that edited and prepared some of the texts included in the book. There is one more thing that came as a nice surprise - it is really hard to say which texts were written by our students - researchers that have just started their research career, and which by other authors, of much longer research experience.

The publication shows how creative ideas and putting them consistently into practice contributes to a final success. The Editors’ contributions in both areas turned out to be a success, which, I am sure, each of the readers will notice, and will find interesting materials for his/her own studies and reflections on education at the meeting of cultures.

### Literature

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