

International Scientific Symposium “Education: What for and why?” (University of Gdańsk, June 12–13, 2017)

In the fourteenth IMPACT¹ pamphlet, we can read that the most important question to ask about school education is ‘What is it for?’ (2007, p. 5) and that it seems uncontroversial to answer *a basic aim of education is to prepare young people for adult life* (ibidem, p. VII). Probably more controversial would be if we asked, but what kinds of adult lives do we want schools to prepare children for? Or what sort of society do we want to create for the future? But still the basic question which seems to be timeless should read: What, in short, is education for? And why?

It is worthy to mention that each above-mentioned IMPACT launch included a symposium for policy makers and others at which the issues raised in the pamphlets had been further explored. The symposium organised in June 2017 in Poland also took as its theme what we think is a fundamental set of questions about education. It was organised by Institute of Education at Faculty of Social Sciences (University of Gdańsk) as an accompanying event of a meeting of scholars participating in a shared research project. It gathered not only renowned theorists and philosophers of education who have devoted their work to redefining education amidst the decomposition of its thus far dominant rationalities (J. Masschelein, S. Todd, T. Szudlarek, M. Mendel), but also younger researchers from different countries and universities worldwide. Most were academics and research students from universities in Poland, with University of Gdańsk, University of Warsaw, Kazimierz Wielki University of Bydgoszcz, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University, Pedagogical University of Cracow, University of Lower Silesia in Wrocław and University

1 IMPACT is an initiative of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain. Its purpose has been to bring philosophical perspectives to bear on current UK education Policy. Launched in late 1999, the IMPACT papers have been commissioned from leading general philosophers and philosophers of education interested in exploring the assumptions behind current Policy; see: IMPACT NO. 14, vol. 2007, issue 14, p. IX; version of record online 23 Nov. 2011, available at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.2048-416X.2007.tb00116.x/pdf>, Access: 16 June 2017; see also: <http://www.philosophy-of-education.org/publications/impact.html>.

of Zielona Góra all represented. Some attendees came from much further afield, for example, one of the keynote speaker was F. Tony Carusi from New Zealand.

The symposium focused mostly on the question of instrumentalism in education (but also: How does one link education to economic prosperity in a policy climate of austerity? How can pluralism be a purpose of education in a nation where xenophobia elects its political leaders?)². Proposals were invited from the humanities and social sciences, particularly from the fields of education, philosophy, politics, sociology, and critical theory. Apart from invited key-note presenters, 10 papers were accepted for presentation in consecutive sessions so all participants could share and discuss their ideas presented during six sessions on June 12th and 13th.

The symposium was opened by Tomasz Szkudlarek (University of Gdańsk) on Monday morning. The first day was an all-day event with three sessions of speakers and conference dinner at “Stary Maneż” in the evening. On the second day of the symposium not only next three sessions took place but also final discussion and a SCAPE (Studies in Culture, Conflict and the Political in Education) meeting with presentation of past activities of the network and prospects for the future.

The two keynotes at the first part of symposium were delivered by Sharon Todd (Maynoth University, Ireland) and Jan Masschelein (Catholic University Leuven, Belgium). In her presentation entitled ‘Beyond the Humanist Navel and the Economic Instrument: Reframing Education in Terms of Public and Aesthetic Sensibility’ Sharon Todd reviewed the current discourses of education which are frequently framed in two predominant directions: either education is treated as an instrument for preparing students for the marketplace or it is seen as that which services the individual’s own self-development. Her presentation reframed education in terms of sensibility therefore she explained how sensibility offers a language through which to explore the core work of education as an aesthetic process. In this sense it moved beyond the psychologism and instrumentalism because both subjects and the social continually come into being. Todd has also talked about a new Danish project called “Sisters Academy” which is a school where the sensuous and poetic mode of being is at the centre of actions and interactions. “Sisters Academy” is the school in what it is termed a ‘sensuous society’ – and as it is explained at the web site of the academy refers to – *potential new world arising from the post-economical and ecological crisis*³.

In Jan Masschelein’s contribution called ‘Making School as the Delay and Suspension of Ends. An Attempt to Find a Pedagogical Voice’ the issue of education was approached from a strictly pedagogical point of view. He traced the terms ‘pedagogical’ and ‘pedagogy’ back to the emergence of the Greek paidagogos and explained that ‘*one of the oldest images we have from the paidagogos clearly shows*

2 See more: http://wns.ug.edu.pl/media/aktualnosci/62493/symposium_naukowe_education_what_and_why; access: 26 June 2017.

3 See more at: <http://sistershope.dk/about/>; access: 16 June 2017.

that this figure was not at all to be identified straightforwardly with the teacher. Masschelein suggested that 'school' is in fact the 'unthought of philosophy in general' and that thinking the school opens the possibility to develop a non-instrumental understanding of education. Since we increasingly tend to speak about learning when we speak about school today, learning means a process and approached in terms of having a beginning and having an end (and the end is framed in terms of knowledge, skills, values etc.). This process refers to change which is differently conceptualized from psychological, economic, sociological or biological point of view. As Masschelein suggests nowadays, from these external perspectives, *'schooling is increasingly considered to be an inefficient and non-functional institutional arrangement'* and he proposes an internal perspective on the school because then the school might be seen not as an institution but as a particular kind of time-space-matter arrangement to deal with different challenges (existential, anthropological and societal ones). In the book⁴ written along with Maarten Simons, they try to identify what makes a school 'a school' and pointed out some central features of what they call the invention of the school as a particular 'space-time-matter arrangement' that actually operates in a very particular way as a kind of gathering that makes things public or common. For Masschelein the future of the school is also a public issue (Masschelein, Simons 2013, p. 12).

Session two has started with Maria Mendel's (University of Gdańsk, Poland) contribution who looked at important context which can be provided by research engaging the Foucauldian notion of governmentality where interpretations span from governing oneself to governing others, with a crucial role played by the notion of the conduct of conduct. She has presented her research on parental identity and parental learning as a way of identity formation. Mendel explained that parental identity – in some interviews – was explicitly grounded in the past educational experiences. The conduct of conduct and subjectivation was expressed in the narratives as various ways in which parents were constructed by 'taken' truth as either 'a school is for me' or 'a school is not for me'. The practices of the conduct of conduct were present in the narratives and they often referred to the intersection of the government of other and the government of the self. In biographical narratives analyzed by Maria Mendel instrumentalism was discovered post-factum and narrators controlled it by consciously making it part of their life experiences. She ended her contribution with posing some questions on possibilities of non-instrumental education and some aspects of instrumentalism.

Next symposium participant, Paul McLaughlin (University of Limerick, Ireland) pointed out that there is a significant scope for doubt about whether there is a single educational aim either instrumental or intrinsic one. In his contribution entitled

4 Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons about 'In Defence of the School: a Public Issue' 2013, also available at: <https://lirias.kuleuven.be/bitstream/123456789/400685/1/Jan+Masschelein++Maarten+Simons+-+In+defence+of+the+school.pdf>.

'A Plurality of Educational Aims: The Parental Perspective' he drew his attention to the word 'aim' in historical contexts and then put the question: why *not* aim? McLaughlin interpreted educational aims in terms of education versus schooling, schooling versus childcare and schooling versus valuable learning. In what he called 'baby-sitting' perspective there is an absence of learning dimension whilst in 'child-care' perspective there is an absence of valuable dimension. His interpretation of educational aims might be considered as somewhat as he suggested – "cynically" done – but it was intended to provoke some level of discussion and debate around contemporary educational norms.

Stefano Oliviero (University of Naples Federico II, Italy) gave a fascinating insight into whether the school can be preserved in its 'calamitous' character also in the era of digital technology. The word 'calamity' refers to *calamus* – the cut straw used to write with and one of the conditions of possibility of the school. Oliviero explained that his paper – The End (Game) of Schooling and the 'Calamity' of Education – can be read as a sort of *parergon* to Masschelein's *experimentum scholae*. He used the powerful image of Serres (2012, p. 24) to ask if the school could (or could be not?) now be like one of those constellations of which astronomers tell us that they are dead long since.

The aim of next presentation made by Łukasz Stankiewicz (Kazimierz Wielki University, Bydgoszcz, Poland) and Karolina Starego (University of Gdańsk, Poland) was to describe education, its meaning and conditions of possibility from the perspective of the category 'uselessness'. Stankiewicz and Starego proposed a different account of the meaning of category of 'uselessness' for education. They maintain education can be both useless and individually and socially meaningful and in the first part of the presentation they showed how the categories of 'uselessness' and 'usefulness' were used in the Polish public debate on higher and vocational education. Then they expanded the notion of 'uselessness'.

The first day of symposium ended with the contribution of Joris Vlieghe (Liverpool Hope University, United Kingdom) and Piotr Zamojski (University of Gdańsk and Liverpool Hope University) which was entitled 'Redefining Education and Politics: Unconditional Love for the Present vs. Hate for the World'. What seems essential to every critical approach to education is – as Vlieghe and Zamojski stressed at the beginning – the *recognition* of the inevitable *political* dimension of education. They pointed out that for the first time in history we have the chance to transform education into an instrument for real social emancipation so they wanted to draw attention to an opposition H. Arendt introduces in her essay on *The Crisis in Education*: preparing the new generation for a new world versus preparing them for an old one. Vlieghe and Zamojski took the bifurcation which Arendt introduces a step further and argued that the distinction between the political and the educational can be articulated in terms of hate and love for the world. The approach they defend is post-critical or – as they explained briefly – a fully *affirmative*

and *immanent* approach (it is about ‘saying yes’ to the world and to what is good in the present world and we also should try to understand education from the inside).

On June 13th, the next day of symposium on “Education: What for and Why”, speakers focussed on instrumentalism in education policy (e.g. F. Tony Carusi) or as a critical concepts for the philosophy of education (e.g. P. Sosnowska) as well as ontological issues and examples of hermeneutical challenges to teaching and learning.

In contribution entitled ‘What are Teachers for? The Politics of Instrumentalism in Education Policy’ the first keynote speaker, F. Tony Carusi (Massey University, New Zealand) showed that more recently policy studies research has turned to the notion of ontological politics to critique the instrumentalism of education policy. He looked at the way education policy in the US and New Zealand identifies teachers with being for with the effect of instrumentalizing ontology where being is being for. He argued that the move from causality to instrumentality performed by policy in its creation of the teacher-being-for problematically naturalises the politics of instrumentalism by conflating cause and effect with means and ends. Carusi suggested that when instrumentalism is understood in its political dimensions, the teacher-being-for becomes a new ground for empirically verifiable education that further entrenches notions of measurable learning outcomes and teaching effectiveness.

Second keynote speaker, Tomasz Szkudlarek, used different metaphors to talk about the ontology of instrumentality (‘Heidegger’s Hammer and the Beauty of Our Weapon’). Heidegger’s hammer is an illustration of the category of ‘readiness-to-hand’ which explains how tools ‘withdraw from view’ due to our concentration not on the tool but on ‘hammering’. The question which has been formulated by M. Heidegger was addressed by Szkudlarek by means of two metaphors applied both to common experiences of education and to the design proposed in Rousseau’s *Emile, Or Education*. Szkudlarek referred first to G. Harman’s analysis of Heidegger’s ‘tool-beings’ which led Harman to redefining the ontology of objects through the lens of the ‘totality of equipment’, characterized by *invisibility* and *totality*. The second metaphor used by Szkudlarek comes from Leonard Cohen’s song *First we take Manhattan* in which Cohen’s protagonist is *guided by the beauty of our weapon*. The relation between invisibility and the beauty of instruments gains complexity, Szkudlarek explained, when we ask *who* can enjoy the beauty of our weapon, and for *whom* are the ‘hammers of education’ invisible. He argued some instruments of education remain invisible not only to those who handle them, but also to their students. The conflict between individual freedom and the construction of social order is resolved pedagogically and politically by making certain interventions *invisible*.

During the fifth session the papers of Paulina Sosnowska (University of Warsaw, Poland), Anna Blumsztajn (Liceum Wielokulturowe J. Kuronia & University of Gdańsk) and Tamás Tóth (Research Fellow, University of Lower Silesia, Wrocław, Poland) were discussed. ‘Is *Instrumentalism* a Worthwhile Critical Concept?’ asked

P. Sosnowska in her speech. She compared three critical conceptions (Adorno, Heidegger, Arendt) in modern philosophy that treated instrumentality very seriously as a critical tool for the description of Western civilization and – as Sosnowska pointed out – at the same time used instrumentality sweepingly (instrumental reason, calculative thinking, means-ends logic in politics).

Anna Blumsztajn made some reflections on the concept of ‘equality of educational opportunity’ as an instrumentalizing concept of equality in education. She demonstrated the role and meaning of ‘equality of educational opportunity’ in some historical contexts and changes. Blumsztajn maintain the idea of ‘equality in education opportunity’ has constantly shifted its attention from the reality of the educational process to its structural conditions as well as societal and individual effects (measured by inputs and outputs). She explained that even when fundamentally rooted in a concern about social justice, it has stated educational goals in terms of measurable economic and social achievement, comparative advantage and disadvantage of various social groups – outside of the educational experience and the individual subject’s reaction to it.

The last presentation during the fifth session by Tamás Tóth referred to Michel Foucault quotation: *People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don’t know is what ‘what they do’ does*⁵. Drawing on Foucauldian genealogies of schooling Tóth demonstrated two concepts of power in institutional education. He argued that the antagonism between the disciplinary machine and the democratic imaginary created a disarray of the aims and the operations, which led to – as Tóth says – irresistible paradoxes like ‘democratic schooling’ or ‘inclusive classroom’.

The talk by Olga Ververi (Liverpool Hope University, United Kingdom) was much anticipated, and for different reason. She showed that both ontologies of cram schooling (*frontistiria*) are analysed against the current economic context of recession as well as the meaning of education as shaped within Greek society nowadays. The two different ontologies are important for understanding of the meaning of education. *Frontistiria* have usually been private tuition centres that offer students of secondary education mostly, additional learning support for all subjects of the state school curriculum. However, due to the economic recession, the number of parents who cannot afford to pay private tuition at these schools is rising. In accordance to this situation solidarity-based cram schooling (SBCS) has developed in Greece and offer tuition lessons for free.

The presentation of Rafał Godoń ended the sixth session. It was entitled ‘Conversion and Contemporary Education. Hermeneutical Challenges to Teaching and Learning’ and examined the most problematic aspects of pedagogy with questions such as: What is really worth of reflection and questioning in the field of education or When

5 Quoted in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982, p.187, see: Dreyfus, H.L. and Rabinow, P. (1982). *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*.

educational practice is recognised as an important human activity? Inviting hermeneutical readings, for example Gadamer and Ricoeur works, Godoń strives for educational experience with the emphasis on conversion and its personal aspects.

As we can read in the fourteenth IMPACT pamphlet (2007, p. IX), I have referred to at the beginning, every symposium organised by IMPACT at that time, has been attended by Government ministers, their opposition Shadows, other MP's, and members of a wide range of organisations including the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, the Institute of Directors, the Trades Union Congress, the General Teaching Council, The National Union of Teachers, Politeia and Demos, as well as key educational journalists and academics involved in policy-making. Nowadays each IMPACT pamphlet is also launched with a seminar or panel debate at which the issues it raises are further explored. Launches have been attended by government ministers, shadow ministers and other MPs, by representatives of government departments, non-departmental public bodies, professional associations, trade unions and think tanks, by education journalists and researchers, and by teachers and students⁶.

Very successful two-days at the University of Gdańsk might start a good tradition of similar meetings in the future. The questions shared before the symposium at the University of Gdańsk' web site⁷ remain still open and requires attention from politicians, from teachers and from the public: Does education really need external aims – and if so, what are they nowadays? Is education necessarily an instrument of something else than itself? How does it relate to politics, economy and identity? And in case it does not, why should one care about it?

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6 See: <http://www.philosophy-of-education.org/publications/impact.html>, Access: 16 June 2017.

7 See: http://wns.ug.edu.pl/media/aktualnosci/62493/symposium_naukowe_education_what_and_why, Access: 26 June 2017.