

# Gifted Students in the Light of the Statutes of the Commission for National Education

## Uzdolniony uczeń w świetle ustaw Komisji Edukacji Narodowej

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**Abstract:** The idea to undertake the research presented in this article was sparked by the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of establishing, on October 14, 1773, the Commission for National Education, which was the first in Poland state office for education. The establishment of the Commission gave rise to great hopes for education of new generations of Poles, whose future activities were meant to help the country rise from the fall after the first partition of Poland carried out by Russia, Prussia and Austria in 1772. The research aimed to analyse the conditions created by the Commission for National Education for gifted children and youth in the educational system of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The article discusses the research findings which provide an answer to the question about educational solutions introduced in the provisions of the Statutes of the Commission of National Education to support the development of students' abilities. The research used the documentary research method. The content of the Statutes of 1783 published by Stanisław Sobieski in 1872 in Lviv was qualitatively analyzed. The original version of the document is currently kept in the digital resources of the Greater Poland Digital Library. The research showed that although the Statutes of the Commission contained no separate chapter devoted to specific provisions regulating education of gifted students, the Legislator still allowed for some organizational, financial, personal and methodical solutions which offered opportunities for the development of students' abilities. The article provides an overview of the regulations concerning the system of school awards, institution of tutors and instruction of teachers with the resulting benefits for gifted students.

**Keywords:** Commission for National Education, school reform, gifted student, teacher, school awards, tutor



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**Abstrakt:** Impulsem do podjęcia badań prezentowanych w niniejszym artykule stała się 250. rocznica powstania Komisji Edukacji Narodowej powołanej 14 października 1773 roku, jako pierwszego w Polsce państwowego urzędu do spraw oświaty. Z działalnością Komisji wiązano ogromne nadzieje na wychowanie i nauczanie nowego pokolenia Polaków, których działalność na rzecz ojczyzny podniosłaby kraj z upadku po pierwszym rozbiórze dokonany przez Rosję, Prusy i Austrię w 1772 roku. Celem badań było poznanie warunków rozwoju zdolnych dzieci i młodzieży stworzonych przez Komisję Edukacji Narodowej w szkolnictwie Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów. Niniejszy artykuł prezentuje wyniki badawcze stanowiące odpowiedź na następujące

pytanie badawcze: Czy i jakie rozwiązania edukacyjne sprzyjające rozwojowi zdolności uczniów zawarto w zapisach Ustaw Komisji Edukacji Narodowej? W badaniach wykorzystano metodę badania dokumentów. Analizie jakościowej poddano treść Ustaw Komisji z 1783 roku publikowanych przez Stanisława Sobieskiego w 1872 roku we Lwowie. Oryginalna treść dokumentu znajduje się w zasobach cyfrowych Wielkopolskiej Biblioteki Cyfrowej. W wyniku badań stwierdzono, że warunki kształcenia uczniów zdolnych nie zostały wyodrębnione w Ustawach Komisji jako odrębny rozdział. Ustawodawcy wprowadzili jednak rozwiązania organizacyjne, finansowe, personalne i metodyczne, które mogły sprzyjać rozwojowi uczniowskich zdolności. W artykule opisano regulacje dotyczące systemu nagród szkolnych, instytucji tutorów oraz standardów kształcenia nauczycieli i wynikające z nich korzyści dla uczniów zdolnych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Komisja Edukacji Narodowej, reforma edukacji, uczeń zdolny, nauczyciel, nagrody, wychowawca-korepetytor

## INTRODUCTION

The first partition of Poland in 1772 by Russia, Prussia and Austria shocked part of the society of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. A group of magnates headed by the king and wealthy noblemen, for whom the welfare of the country was the highest value, took actions aimed at strengthening the state in terms of its organisation, operation of the power apparatus, law enforcement, and education (Bartnicka 2015; Bartnicka, Dormus and Wałęga 2018; Kot 1996; Mizia 1975). The partition of Poland and the dissolution of the Jesuit Order, which, alongside the Piarist Order, had in its hands the supervision and running of schools, were a direct impulse for the undertaken reform of education. Its sources can also be traced back to the new philosophical trends of the Enlightenment, education reforms carried out in Western Europe, the lively intellectual movement of the Stanisław August Poniatowski era or the activities of Stanisław Konarski and the Cadet Corps (Bartnicka, Dormus and Wałęga 2018; Koźmian 2014). Polish reformers perceived education as the main tool in their fight to build a new, strong Republic of Poland and change social mentality. Their aim was to shape a new generation of Poles, such citizens who would not only understand the significance and necessity of carrying out political reforms but who would also be able to implement them.

The establishment by the Sejm on October 14, 1773, of a state office for education, i.e., the Commission Having Supervision on the Education of the Youth of the National Nobility, commonly referred to as the Commission for National Education, was a unique phenomenon on a European scale (Bartnicka 2015; Bartnicka, Dormus and Wałęga 2018; Bednarski 2009; Kot 1996). So far, it was the Church which played a dominant role in education in Catholic countries. It should be noted, however, that the idea of secularizing education was not a novelty. The necessity to involve the state in the upbringing and education of the young generation of Poles was proclaimed as early as the mid-16th century by Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski (2023). Responsibly pursued educational policy was meant to be the means of lifting the country from its collapse and, in the long run, of facilitating its development. According to the authors of the Statutes, supervision and care for education was the primary duty of the state.

The Commission for National Education also played the role of the state ministry, a centre for pedagogical thought and a decision-making authority as regards educational practice (Bartnicka 2015; Bartnicka, Dormus and Wałęga 2018; Bednarski 2009). Due to its activities over the next 21 years, i.e., until the second partition of Poland, many innovations were introduced in Polish education, both in terms of organization, administration, financing and supervision of schools; goals and methods of teaching and upbringing; curricula; school textbooks and methodological materials for teachers; issues related to the academic estate as well as living problems of students and teachers (*Ustawy* 1872).

The Commission operated in conditions of social, political, economic and cultural backwardness. The changes proposed by the Commission encountered numerous obstacles posed by groups of fierce opponents, consisting of the clergy, magnates and wealthy nobility, who perceived the new direction of educational policy as a threat to their own interests and social position. The introduction of new educational plans, giving a chance to rebuild the Republic of Poland, required many compromises. Not all the planned changes were implemented in their intended form, and the regulations governing school matters had to be completed and amended in subsequent years (Bartnicka 2015; Bartnicka, Dormus and Wałęga 2018; Bednarski 2009). There is no doubt, however, that the reform carried out by the Commission had a great impact on Polish education as it introduced many changes in the areas of organisation, ideology and curriculum, as well as in the teaching content, or in methodological and personal aspects.

## 1. RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The presented research aimed to find out about the conditions for the development of gifted children and youth created by the Commission for National Education in the education system of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This article focuses on presenting research findings that answer the research question about educational solutions introduced in the provisions of the Statutes of the Commission of National Education to support the development of students' abilities.

The research used a non-reactive method of examining documents (Krüger 2007). The source basis for the study were the Statutes of the Commission for National Education for the Academic Estates and for the Schools in the Lands of the Commonwealth of Poland of 1783, published by Stanisław Sobieski in 1872 in Lviv. The document is available in the digital resources of the Greater Poland Digital Library. The decision to refer to the content of the Statutes of 1783 resulted from the fact that they provided the full picture of the changes that took place in Polish education as a result of the Commission's activities. As Kalina Bartnicka (2014, 109) notes, it was the most important document issued by the Commission, constituting the "code of school regulations".

The content of the Statutes (1872) was subjected to qualitative analysis. The frame of reference were the studies from the area of gifted education psychology

and pedagogy, in particular those regarding the conditions for development as well as methods of teaching gifted students. In the work on raw material, hybrid coding was used, in which the leading role was played by etic codes, derived from the source literature, supplemented by emic codes, emerging from the content of the Statutes. In the next step of working with the data, thematic analysis was used (Glinka and Czakon 2021; Maison 2022).

## 2. REGULATIONS CONCERNING GIFTED STUDENTS INCLUDED IN THE STATUTES OF THE COMMISSION FOR NATIONAL EDUCATION

The Statutes of the Commission for National Education of 1783 (*Ustawy* 1872) do not contain a separate chapter devoted to creating special conditions for the education of gifted students. Information on students' abilities and possibilities of their development can be deduced indirectly. It is worth emphasizing, however, that the term "capacity" which can be understood as "gift" recurrently appears in the Statutes (cf. Dutkova 1973, 161).

The conducted analyses showed that the Statutes of the Commission for National Education (1872) contain three key regulations that address the topic of gifted students. They concern the school awards system, the institution of tutors, teacher education and the requirements placed on them.

### 2.1. School award system

The Commission for National Education developed a system of awards for students achieving outstanding academic results. The types of awards and conditions of granting them are described in Chapter 24 of the Statutes of 1783 titled "Courts, penalties, awards" (*Ustawy* 1872, 115-117). The awards were divided into ordinary and extraordinary. Ordinary awards included praise added to reports submitted to the Main School; oral praise passed to the student's family by the school prefect; reading out the student's name during the ceremonial inauguration of the school year; entrusting the functions of the tutor and decurion; the right to wear a blue or crimson ribbon on a student cap; displaying the student's name on the board in the classroom or the school corridor. In turn, the extraordinary awards included: a letter of commendation to parents, publishing information about the student's results in newspapers and sending it to national schools; and exemption from the obligation to pass a defined part of the educational material. In the case of poorer students, an extraordinary award for outstanding study results was admission to the group of funded students.

The highest form of award was granting students the privilege to participate in public performances where they could display their knowledge. This type of award was available only to the best students. The performances were usually organized at the end of the school year, but in some schools also at the end of the first half of the year. They are described in Chapter 17 of the Statutes, specially dedicated to this topic, titled "Examinations and performances" (*Ustawy* 1872, 89-91). This

tradition was taken over from Jesuit and Piarist monastic schools. The students' performances had a very solemn, public character and they were given in front of the gathered audience, consisting of the students' parents and prominent guests. The students' performances took various forms, usually, of public examinations, essay readings or speeches prepared by students on a predefined topic. However, there were also student performances in the form of public assemblies, tribunal meetings or other gatherings of nobility (Wołoszyński 1973). The Commission recommended that in the case of older students, the performances should be organized according to subject groups, and for younger students - according to school classes (*Ustawy* 1872). As Ryszard W. Wołoszyński (1973) notes, students' public performances had two basic functions. Firstly, they were aimed at monitoring the level of education in the schools controlled by the Commission as they allowed presenting to the general public, as well as to the Commission inspectors, the high level of students' knowledge as well as their civic attitude. Secondly, they served a popularizing function - allowing wide social circles to learn about the latest scientific achievements, current problems and ways of solving them. It is worth noting that some schools, especially those from larger research centres, published student papers in the form of brochures ranging from several to several dozen pages in length, which were even used by teachers in parish schools.

## 2.2. Institution of the tutor

The network of secondary public schools was organized in such a way that individual school centres were located in cities, therefore most students were forced to live away from their family home. To ensure proper upbringing of young people deprived of parental care and supervision, the Commission for National Education established the institution of tutors. The duties, requirements and recommendations regarding tutors' work with their charges are included in Chapter 20 of the Statutes of 1783 (*Ustawy* 1872, 96-102). Tutors served on the one hand, as caretakers of the boys entrusted to them, and on the other, as their teachers. One tutor commonly looked after several students, taking over the family's role of upbringing and taking care of his charges, living with them and sharing everyday life matters (Mizia 1975). His basic tasks included caring for the moral and intellectual development of students, as well as their proper nutrition, clothing, hygiene, health, and valuable leisure time (*Ustawy* 1872). What should be noted here is the small age difference between tutors and their charges, as tutors usually took up their positions at the age of 19-21 years old (Mrozowska 1985). The legislator's intention was to foster interpersonal relationships and better communication between tutors and their charges and at the same time shape the civic attitudes in young men. Tutors were usually recruited from among older students, graduates or candidates for teachers who, as they have already had the experience of attending the public schools run by the Commission for several years, were imbued with its ideas (Ratajczak 2020). It should be emphasized that the parents of students were obliged to pay the tutors. Moreover, it was the Commission's recommendation to entrust the position of

tutors to students from poorer families, which opened for them the possibility to commence university studies. Tutors' activities were subject to direct supervision by the school prefect. He was the one who selected the tutors from among the applicants. The prefect was responsible for monitoring the care provided by tutors, as well as for improving their educational skills by providing advice and recommending the study of appropriate literature. Failure on the part of the tutor to fulfil the duties entrusted to him was subject to financial penalties. The way tutors treated the students entrusted to them was also subject to control. Excessive severity or callous treatment of charges was punishable and led to the loss of the position or complete exclusion from holding it in the future (*Ustawy 1872*).

### 2.3. Regulation of questions related to teacher education

Establishment of state schools implied the necessity to acquire well-prepared teaching staff adequately qualified to implement the new direction of educating and upbringing children and youth. Pursuant to the Statutes of 1783, the Commission for National Education established the Academic Estate, which was a secular form of the teaching profession. The Academic Estate encompassed all teachers of secondary and main schools along with candidates for the profession of teachers (Ekiel-Jeżewska 2012; *Ustawy 1872*). The establishment of the Estate brought two consequences. On the one hand, it gave teachers autonomy guaranteed by law (Kot 1996), and on the other hand, it was an expression of deep respect and appreciation for teachers who were responsible for the future of the young generation of Poles (*Ustawy 1872*). The mission of educating secondary school teachers was entrusted to the reformed universities - the Academy of Kraków and the Academy of Vilnius, which were respectively transformed into the Main Crown School and the Main School of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The schools were incorporated in the structure of the school system and took over administrative functions in relation to the lower-level schools subordinated to them (Bartnicka, Dormus and Wałęga 2018; Ekiel-Jeżewska 2012). The Commission, realizing the importance of tasks faced by teachers, defined in detail the procedure for accepting candidates for public teaching positions. The procedure is described in Chapter 5 of the Statutes titled "Candidates for the Academic Estate" (*Ustawy 1872*, 43-48). Candidates for the profession had to be at least 18-year-old, graduates of a 6-year education cycle with proven track record of impeccable moral attitude, high academic achievements, exemplary behaviour and good health. Candidates were subjected to a multi-stage qualification procedure. The process of teacher education covered 4 years with the first year treated as a trial period. In some cases, the costs of candidates' education were covered by the Commission. In turn, students who received such a scholarship were obliged to work for 6 years in state schools. The rest were educated at their own expense (Szybiak 1980; Szybiak 2014; *Ustawy 1872*).

New teachers were expected to be fully aware of the role they were undertaking and to demonstrate a number of positive qualities. These included the attributes of the mind (insight and clarity of thinking, knowledge of human

nature), which were supposed to be helpful in reflexive and critical observation of the surrounding reality, as well as in proper understanding of students; as well as the qualities of the heart (in particular sensitivity, kindness, sincerity, justice, steadfastness, understanding and concern for students' well-being) conducive to effective teaching and upbringing of young people (Mizia 1975; *Ustawy* 1872).

Chapter 14 of the Statutes of 1783 titled "Teachers" (*Ustawy* 1872, 74-78) stipulated rules for teachers' conduct towards students. The Commission for National Education paid much attention to teaching methodology. It was recommended that teachers, rather than follow the method of a one-way transmission of knowledge, should instead strive to stimulate students' cognitive powers and abandon tasks based on memorizing the material. It was postulated that teachers should develop students' critical thinking, reflexivity, logical thinking and independence by encouraging them to ask questions and express their doubts. One of the tasks set for teachers by the Commission was to "test the ground", i.e. learn about individual characteristics of the student, such as "tendencies, passions, receptiveness of mind, specific combination of abilities and skills" (Mizia 1975, 289). Based on this knowledge, the teacher trained in line with the recommendations of the Commission for National Education should adapt the scope and degree of difficulty of the educational material as well as the methods of its implementation to the student's educational needs. It should be emphasized that the Commission placed great emphasis on changing the teacher's attitude towards students and building relationships with them. Teachers were encouraged to establish deeper bonds with students based on honesty, kindness, respect, friendship, and even fatherly love (*Ustawy* 1872). The Statutes of the Commission of 1783 also contain recommendations on how to address students in a polite manner. The teacher was also obliged to constantly improve himself by reading literature, talking to his superiors and colleagues, and, above all, to reflect on his own teaching and educational behaviour (*Ustawy* 1872).

### 3. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

During the period of activity of the Commission for National Education, the question of gifted students was not yet subject to systematic scientific research as it was initiated by Francis Galton 100 years later (Gardner, Kornhaber and Wake 2001; Simonton 2010). It was a period in which perception and interpretation of the phenomenon of giftedness was burdened with a number of speculations and conjecture. It should also be emphasized that it was only in the second half of the 20th century that researchers first pointed out the differences between the abilities of children and adults (Feldman and Goldsmith 1986; Tannenbaum 1983). In the case of young children, abilities take the form of potential, which in subsequent years, under favourable development conditions, transforms into competencies and expertise to achieve the final level of excellence in adult age. A developmental approach to abilities, which emphasized their dynamic and interactive nature,

dominated the way the abilities of children and young people are perceived in the 21st century (see, e.g., Gagné 2005; Gagné 2016; Mönks and Katzko 2005; Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius and Worrell 2011; Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius and Worrell 2015; Ziegler 2005). In connection with the above, it is particularly noteworthy that in the second half of the 18th century the creators of the new state education system introduced by the Statutes of the Commission for National Education for the Academic Estate and for the schools in the lands of the Commonwealth rewritten from the 1783 text (*Ustawy 1872*), did not remain indifferent to the issue of student abilities. And although, as it should be emphasized, the conditions for educating gifted students were not addressed separately in the Statutes of the Commission for National Education, the legislators introduced a number of organizational, financial, personnel and methodological solutions that can be considered as conducive to the development of students' abilities.

It is worth analysing the way that gifted students were perceived at that time which can be deduced from the provisions of the Statutes. The attitude to gifted students was in line with the ex-post-facto approach which assumes that the term "gifted" may be applied to those who manage to achieve the best results in the areas of their activity (Szumski 1995). The prism of high or even outstanding academic results was highlighted in many passages of the Statutes of the Commission for National Education (*Ustawy 1872*). The level of students' school achievements was a decisive factor and, as it seems, the sole indicator of their abilities. Excessive focus on the level of student achievement also confirms the tendency to limit students' abilities to the academic area.

A qualitative analysis of the content of the Statutes of the Commission for National Education of 1783 (*Ustawy 1872*) indicates that the issue of gifted students is reflected in the provisions regulating the school award system (ordinary and extraordinary awards, public displays), the institution of tutors (i.e. caretakers and teachers) as well as the system and teacher education strategy.

When analysing the school award system from the perspective of the conditions created for the development of student abilities, it is necessary to emphasize its motivating nature. Contemporary source literature highlights the importance of motivation for school success achieved by gifted students (see, e.g., Dyrda 2006; Klinkosz 2010; Limont 2010; Łukasiewicz-Wieleba 2018). Initially, awards shape the student's external motivation related to responding to specific stimuli. Over time, however, it may develop into internal motivation, understood as self-direction and self-determination of goals. This is facilitated by strengthening the power of the reward by creating conditions for students' activity and independence. Students can engage in both teaching and learning processes because they want to it, not because they feel the pressure to do it (Brophy 2002; Tokarz 2005). The motivating nature of the school award system should also be considered from the perspective of systemic and developmental theories as well as ability models. Their authors consider motivation to be the key element of the abilities structure, which plays an important role in the processes of their transformation (Gagné 2005, 2016; Mönks



and Katzko 2005; Renzulli 2005; Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius and Worrell 2011, 2015; Ziegler 2005).

The role of the institution of the tutor in creating conditions for the development of students' abilities can be viewed from the perspective of both the student subjected to such care and the tutor providing it. In the case of the first one, it is worth mentioning the potential role of this institution in expanding the knowledge and developing the skills of students under the supervision of an older colleague, who is more advanced in studies. The position of the tutor was assigned only to students who achieved outstanding school results. Therefore, it was a kind of scientific tutoring aimed at preparing the charge for exams or helping him to gain deeper knowledge in a specific area (Czekierda 2015). The purpose of the tutor's work was to convey defined information and to develop in his charges the skills of independent thinking, analysing, interpreting, drawing conclusions, arguing and formulating their thoughts in writing (Stańczak 2015). The activities undertaken by tutors could also include elements of developmental tutoring which involves supporting students in their development processes, planning their educational and professional paths and helping them reach independence and maturity (Czekierda 2015). The Commission obliged tutors to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of their charges in order to adapt appropriate developmental and supportive activities in their teaching (*Ustawy* 1872). In turn, in the case of tutors, the fact of performing this function had a motivational character as it was assigned as a form of award for achieving high academic results, as well as a social one as students' parents paid for their work.

The last area in which conditions for the development of talented students can be sought as regards the Statutes of the Commission of National Education of 1782 (*Ustawy* 1873), are regulations regarding the new system and standards of educating the teaching staff responsible for the intellectual and moral development of young citizens of the Republic of Poland. The legislators not only defined a multi-stage qualification procedure as well as the path and scope of educating future academics, but also defined the threshold requirements as well as the desired personal profile of candidates. Future teachers had to be gifted individuals themselves and this was to be confirmed by the fact of their graduating with high results, enjoying an impeccable reputation and good health, and by demonstrating a number of virtues of the mind and heart (*Ustawy* 1872). The importance of a teacher's individual personal profile is confirmed by contemporary research conducted among talented students and their teachers. It is worth emphasizing that for gifted students, the teacher's character profile was more important than his knowledge and ability to convey it (see, e.g., Cieślukowska 2005; Croft 2003; Giza 2006; Vialle and Tischler 2005).

Another important point are the new rules of conduct regulating teachers' behaviour towards students defined in the Statutes of the Commission for National Education of 1782 (*Ustawy* 1873), which inscribe themselves in the modern catalogue of teaching competencies. Many studies confirm that the level and type

of teacher's competencies are the key condition for effective education of gifted students (see, e.g., Cieślukowska 2005; Croft 2003). The Commission for National Education recommended changing the methods and forms of teaching from one-way instruction to stimulation of students' cognitive abilities, development of their logical, critical and independent thinking skills and readiness to express their own opinions. We are clearly dealing here with didactic competencies related to the knowledge of the methodology of the taught subject and the ability to construct the educational process. They are, apart from substantive competencies, the teacher's basic resource, indispensable for effective work with students in general, and even more so with students who demonstrate academic abilities. Teaching competencies also include the ability to recognize talented students and adapt appropriate methods and forms of education to their abilities and needs (Stańczak 2020). A teacher educated in accordance with the new standards introduced by the Commission for National Education was expected to adapt his education strategy to the individual needs of students. Nowadays, the basic solutions used in working with gifted students include expansion and acceleration of education (Limont 2010; Worrell et al. 2019). Activities consistent with the first of the above-mentioned solutions were included in the Statutes of the Commission for National Education of 1782. Professional competencies required by the Commission from new teachers also include social competencies (related to building a committed interpersonal relationship with the student) as well as communication skills (related not so much to the quantity but to the quality of verbal interactions). The last of the teaching competencies referred to in the provisions of the Statutes of 1782 are development competencies. Teachers educated under the Commission system were obliged to undergo continuous professional development.

It is debatable whether the scope of regulations introduced was sufficient to ensure optimal conditions for the development of gifted students in schools operated by the Commission. When viewed from the perspective of contemporary achievements in the area of psychology and pedagogy of abilities, it has to be admitted that it was not. For once, the solutions introduced by the Commission embraced only the most talented students who revealed strictly academic talents, while they omitted students who had lower-level or other types of abilities. The second drawback was promoting gifted students only from a privileged social group, i.e., sons of magnates and wealthy nobility, who were being prepared in secondary schools and academies to hold the highest positions in the country and decide on its fate. Therefore, a significant group of talented children and youth of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth coming from lower social classes, i.e., peasants, middle-class bourgeoisie, as well as minor nobility, were not embraced by special solutions aimed at supporting students' development. Parish schools provided them with only basic education (Bartnicka, Dormus and Wałęga 2018). One more argument against the implemented solutions was the exclusion of girls from the secondary and higher education system, who were thus deprived of the opportunity to develop their talents, even if only academic ones. In 18th-century

Poland, there was no formal system of state education for girls. Those from higher social classes gained education through home schooling, at convent schools and boarding schools for girls, while girls from peasant and middle-class bourgeoisie, or even those from poorer nobility could only attend parish schools (Jakuboszczak 2017).

However, if we evaluate the solutions applicable to educating gifted students from the perspective of the socio-cultural conditions of 18th-century Poland or from the overall level and quality of education at that time, they are undoubtedly extremely progressive. Firstly, the Commission for National Education appreciated the importance of developing the talents of the young generation of Poles. The best-educated graduates of state secondary and higher schools were expected to carry out political reforms in the country and thus strengthen the state. However, graduates of parish schools were also expected to contribute to the development of the country to the best of their abilities. The educational reform implemented by the Commission for National Education introduced an innovative curriculum that was not only progressive, but also practical. In parish schools, it combined elementary preparation with vocational knowledge (Mrozowska 1973). Moreover, the Commission sought to change the teaching methods also in the lowest-level schools. The new methods and forms of work implemented by parish schoolteachers were intended to activate students and thus support the development of their reflexivity, critical thinking and independence (Bartnicka, Dormus and Wałęga 2018; Dutkova 1973). It is worth emphasizing that the creation of the new school structure meant offering a specific right to education for children from different social classes, thus giving them a chance to develop their skills. In principle, each type of school was addressed to a specific group of recipients, but in practice they were also available for students from other social groups, e.g. students originating from the middle-class bourgeois could study in schools for the nobility. The main obstacle here was the financial situation of the student's family rather, not the social class they came from. The introduced system of awards and penalties was meant to motivate students (not only the talented ones) to fulfilling their school duties conscientiously and to shape their civic attitude. As Kamila Mrozowska (1973, 18) writes: "Each student had to know, feel and remember the obligations he owed to his family, to the social environment, and finally, to the entire nation of which he was a part."

## CONCLUSIONS

The presented research findings expand the state of knowledge about the approach to the abilities of children and youth and the conditions for their development in the times of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the period between the first and second partition of Poland. This topic has not yet been sufficiently covered in literature. The present research has not fully exhausted the possible areas of exploration related to the topic. The results presented in this article

concern the state postulated in the Statutes of the Commission of 1783 (*Ustawy 1872*). A more complete evaluation of the actual conditions conducive to the development of gifted students during the period of activity of the Commission for National Education would require reference to other documents, such as school or inspectors' reports created for the purpose of supervising the reformed school system.

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