

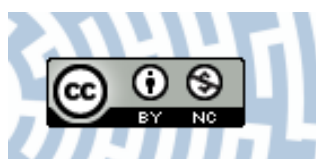


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Title: Three Educational Worlds - USA, China, Poland : report from Survey Research

Author: Marcin Gierczyk, Adam Roter

Citation style: Gierczyk Marcin, Roter Adam. (2012). Three Educational Worlds - USA, China, Poland : report from Survey Research. "The New Educational Review" (2012, no. 4, s. 225-235).



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Three Educational Worlds – the USA, China, Poland (Report from Survey Research)

Educational processes in the 21st century undergo the same transformations as other civilisation processes do. In scientific discourse this is described in terms of the H. Jenkins *catch-up effect* (2006), which does not only concern the media, but the entire culture. It consists in finding similarities in the fields of technology development and access to information and education, of which the Internet is a significant example. The Internet culture, which generates a society of *netocracy*, culture-makers and culture-consumers, and at the same time creates social bonds beyond institutional limits of any countries, which are both opinion-forming and causative (e.g. indignant movement). Another description is to consider changes in the world in terms of the globalisation processes (Bauman Z. 2000, Robertson R. 1992), which may be unequally divided, dividing society into the poor and the rich, but yet it is inevitable, because it is spontaneous. Finally, the third discourse to mention here is Giddens' theory which describes the world in terms of late modernity (Giddens 1991), where the market-, power- and work-oriented processes are not able to be regulators of social life as they are in modernism, therefore an individual carries out transformations as if they were next to or even beyond social organisms and institutions or creates new communities. The presented modest survey research results aim to show how the education world is seen by teachers and students in three countries with different history and culture. Which elements of these systems are common in opinions and which are not? Are we able to distinguish a representation of an education ideology understood according to R. Meighan as: *coexistent, often competing systems of beliefs, ideas and views on education* (Meighan 1993, pp. 193-200) in respondents' answers? Despite the *history end* metaphor and its critical analysis contained in the so-called *civilizations impact* functioning in the social world descriptions at the end of the 20th century, we notice

that the world of ideas still has a pluralistic nature and if it is about educational ideologies, such as: conservative, liberal, social and postmodern. Obviously the authors are aware of the fact that it is their authorial, high-handedly made division. It was built for the use of the presented text and often has a theoretical nature which might not occur in a straight form in practice, since ideas and ideologies often overlap or are mixed with one another for instrumental, sociotechnical purposes in order to create politics which brings plaudits to main actors of political life guided by populism or also because of softening and relativism of the meanings of key words for professed ideologies.

The first type of ideologies is called conservative ideologies. According to these ideologies, educational processes are understood as a culture transmission method. In this vision, high positions in the hierarchy of values are taken by: tradition, religion, a specific ethical attitude, obedience and a sense of belonging (patriotism). They are characteristic of church schools but also of the main stream of public education. In these ideologies one performs the objectification of thinking of the upbringing system by appealing to cultural heritage, universal values or religion. In Poland, a symptom of this ideology domination was an introduction of religion to schools. In the Chinese system, conservatism is expressed by the mono-centric pro-country upbringing system which is based on these preached by China Conservative, in which there is no place for pluralism, individualism and the freedom of speech and thought. In the USA, the right wing environments politically appeal to this strand. A unit, despite the fact that it is a subject in a process, needs an authority (a teacher), who will show the individual what is good and what is wrong, according to the acknowledged standards, because alone it would stray. This interpretation, based on dogmas (e.g. religious ones), is supported in many areas of science, and shows itself as an educational vision which is possibly the most natural, because it appeals to what happened and what turned out to be successful. The school is unearthed as an institution of fundamental thinking, in which teachers are applicators of top-down assumptions. That is why absolutization of values dominates in this conception, which seems to us as obvious and true.

Contrary to conservative ideologies, liberal ideologies are often shown even though freedom is a classical value and because of that it can be seen as conservative depending on its definition. However, these visions are based on a lower number of axioms, but they do assume some postulates. They emphasize the role of education in the development of the individual, who will be making independent choices within a given culture (Szkudlarek T. 1994, p. 401). The individual's subjectivism in making, among other things, free moral choices dominates in this

option. In this idea we have to do with partial anti-fundamentalism and openness to distinctiveness.

Freedom in this ideology is only limited by the agreement on not disturbing one another's freedom area. Most often, the liberal ideology predominates in the so-called non-public (social) education, which is a result of the activity of groups that see public education as total institutions. In this option teachers are communicators of culture knowledge that is subjectively experienced, and they are open to negotiations with other interpretations and experiences. In the American education system, liberalism has been well-grounded not only in non-public education but also in pedagogical theories since the 1960s of the past century. In Poland, such a form of thinking in terms of emancipatory pedagogy is present after the change of the social system. In the Chinese reality, educational institutions of private or association nature, beyond the state, do not exist. During research one did not even reach any regulations which would define how, e.g., disabled children should be educated.

The third kind of ideologies are postmodernist visions which exist as a postulate or an intellectual project in the form of theories derived from philosophy, anthropology and cultural studies. Some elements of this option are incorporated by liberalism. No fundamental assumptions are found in this strand apart from the fact that they do not exist. Postmodernism is the rejection of heritage principles enlightenment. Everything in it is fragmentary, evanescent and momentary. Therefore, the time of masters, teachers and authorities has ended. And so has the time of large narrations explaining how the world functioned without capital letters (Melosik Z. 1995, p. 44). Anti-pedagogy, in which the teacher is an observer, who does not interfere with the student's self-development- why should he interfere with it if he does not know (because he cannot know) what is good or bad? – is the main exemplification of this ideology. In this idea one cannot notice that education is not a method of cultural transmission, but a carrier of a radical change and an attempt of a new interpretation of the existing thinking in education. In the Chinese culture, such a form of thinking in education is not present, and in the USA, it is a bit outdated, and in Poland, it is largely present particularly in pedagogical and sociological narrations. The presented ideologies influence educational processes with different intensity in the surveyed countries, and therefore we decided to observe how teachers and their students estimate the process, in which they are the main subjects.

There are many reasons why comparative research should be conducted. First of all, they incline us to deny what is thought to be obvious in the existing systems. Secondly, the analysis of information from other countries allows for testing the

hypothesis on changes shaping process. It can be discovered whether there are any similarities in characteristic qualities like, e.g., sex or social classification. Apart from that, it is worth checking whether there are any differences in the model of the observed standard. Thirdly, comparing the systems of different nations can be used as a rate of accomplishments of a national system in comparison with accomplishments of other countries' systems, e.g., in public discussions (Grelet Y., Smyth E. 2011). Therefore, it is worth observing how this aspect is implemented in particular countries and answering the question of how the education systems of particular countries are constructed in order to better understand one's own education system.

Research description

The research objects used were: declarations and teachers' and students' opinions about institutional education implemented in the selected countries of Europe (Poland), Asia (China) and America (the USA).

The aim was of a diagnostic nature, it was an attempt to find similarities and differences of the evaluated education systems in the countries which seem to be, despite globalisation processes, culturally different, and sometimes even antipodal (the USA vs. China). The main research problem was formulated in the following questions: how is the educational system evaluated by its participants (teachers and students) in the analysed countries? The main research problem formulated in such a way was elaborated in the following questions: how do the respondents evaluate the system to which they belong? What do the respondents think of educational reforms in their countries? What are their opinions on the dominating methods, teaching methods and the evaluation system of students' and teacher's work? What problems do teachers and students have to face? What are the similarities and differences between the systems, values being conveyed to children and youth and paths of professional promotion?

The research was carried out by a diagnostic survey method with the use of open, individual and Internet interviews, which served mainly as the means of getting to know opinions, assessments and views of Polish, American and Chinese teachers and students. Because the respondents participating in the survey live in different geographical areas, there was a need to use e-interviews.

The research was carried out among teachers and students from three different and previously selected countries in the world. The choice of the sample was connected with the linear type of technique (Eng. linear snowball sampling), the

so-called *snowball* (Eng. snowball sampling) (Castillo J. 2009). It constitutes the non-probability of respondent selection for the research sample. After the first interview the researcher asks a respondent to recommend a person (fulfilling conditions of research assumptions) who will also be able to give information on the questions. Such a method of selecting respondents operates as an efficient chain and is very helpful in the case of carrying out research in environments unapproachable for the researcher. The research population was chosen deliberately. 75 respondents participated in the research: 30 active teachers with differentiated seniority (between 2 and 35 years), and 45 students aged between 13 and 18. The research was carried out in the years 2011-2012. All the teachers were employed in state schools, which undoubtedly influenced the research results. In the case of 20 teachers and 30 students, electronic interviews were applied. Their original version was created in the Polish language and then translated into English and Chinese. The survey questionnaire for teachers consisted of 23 questions. All the questions were open. The open interviews with students consisted of 9 open questions. They concerned only these parts of the education system functioning in which students had had any experience and, as a result, abilities to express their opinions. It consisted of questions about school evaluation, fairness in evaluation, a system of punishments and rewards applied by the teacher and motivation to learn. It seems that the research results were also influenced by the social time in which the research was carried out.

The USA, as well as Europe, contends with economic crisis results, China, as Middle Kingdom, victoriously astonishes the world with its economy's effectiveness. Also in the educational branch a series of changes have occurred. On the one hand, we have to do with unification in the access to education, which was supposed to cause an increase in meritocracy and, at the same time, to be an antidote to social inequalities. Increasingly wider circles face unemployment, particularly among European university graduates. The labour market is deregulated. We live in social chaos, to which we have to adjust by representing ourselves as flexible. It might be the reason why we resort to reinterpreting the world in accordance to Marx's theory (Žižek S., 2012), (Eagleton T., 2012).

Conclusions– qualitative analysis

On the basis of 30 surveys with the teachers, the first conclusion, which was predictable and obvious, was that the education reform is a process which continues for decades and is always unfinished. These reform results often do not fulfil

the intentions and expectations of their authors. Different education mottoes and functions undergo change, because the world is changing. Unfortunately, education processes not only do not flash forward a drift of events but also cannot follow them. The old conservative adage of the four *R* of the English educational system, which reflects its philosophy: reading, writing, arithmetic and respect, has worn off in the times of discovering the meaning of emotional intelligence, empowerment of students in the educational process and individualist culture domination and has been replaced by a principle of three *H*, *head, heart, hand*, defining the equivalence of mind, sensitivity and practical skills. If we add particular statements of teachers from different countries, then Polish teachers appreciate the geometrical increase in students taking up studies and obtaining university diplomas.

However, an overloaded teaching programme, where school insufficiently cultivates key competences, is a drawback. Educational units still focus on the mnemonic mastering of material and not on creative thinking. Reforms are being introduced chaotically, whereby Polish teachers have to, in a way, experiment on students. According to some people, the advantages of reforms are: new core curricula, orientation on the student within the development of his individual talents, a chance of educating disabled children and youth along with healthy children, increasing school autonomy, and high quality teaching materials. The Chinese respondents evaluate the education system as effective in theory but not so effective in practice, especially in meeting social education demand.

Its advantage is that it encourages students and teachers to changes in the way of thinking- resignation from absolute theory in favour of cultivating practical skills. According to the teachers' opinions, in China students are educated for development and the public weal of the socialist society and not for individual self-development, which can be a surprise for social researchers. American teachers think that the American education system is reasonably efficient and does well. The Americans criticise the test method of checking students' skills and knowledge, consider it ineffective, and think that education in the USA is too expensive. They say that many reforms in the USA are carried out for show. Teachers spend more and more time checking tests which, according to them, is wrong. Grade standardisation has been the only good reform in recent years. If we were to compare the statements of the respondents, it could be noticed that the Chinese system fulfils a reproduction function meaning ideological (symbolic) habits reproduction in the young generation of the Chinese population. The education system in Poland tries to fulfil a function adaptive to reality, which is not post-socialist any more, but a young democracy, where the young have already graduated from BA studies

(23 years old). The American system seems to be the most innovative one, but in the teachers' opinions, it is still far from perfect.

During interviews with Chinese students, it was noticed that they had a strong sense of national belonging, which is impossible to be compared with the identity and patriotism of American or Polish students. This is happening because Chinese schooling is based on the assumptions of Confucian philosophy, where there is a strong sense of belonging to the nation and pursuing wisdom and ideals through the daily application of moral and ethical principles.

In all the students' opinions, no matter what nationality they are, school is liked for its modernity, attractive study aids, sense of security, good relations with teachers, possibility of taking part in extracurricular classes, which develop their interests. The Chinese students (like Polish and American ones) complain about too much material covered, but they are the only ones to spend time at school until late in the evening.

All the surveyed teachers apply almost identical criteria while evaluating students. For all of them, evaluation fulfils informational, motivational and checking progress in the evaluation process. Grades in every education system are evident and always justified. The Chinese teachers evaluate a student while also considering his/her psychological qualities and interpersonal skills. Almost all the teachers think that grades help to identify students with problems and support the motivation process. In all the countries, the surveyed students know valid school evaluation systems, and they think that teachers meet the requirements of these documents, so they are aware of what they are graded for.

The teachers from Poland and the USA mentioned numerous methods of work applied in class, which indicates their very good theoretical and practical preparation within this area. They mostly mentioned a project method and a communicative method. Discovering, activating team work, description, lectures, etc. The surveyed teachers have worked out methods of working with talented students and didactically weaker ones, and they choose the appropriate one depending on their abilities. In Chinese schools, contrary to American and Polish schools, lectures are valid and most often applied methods of knowledge dissemination. The applicable relation is the one of master-student, and it has an authoritarian nature. The teacher authority is formal in nature, one has to follow it, it is not supposed, as in many countries, to inspire to follow one's way or prompt to think, but instead it requires imitation which favours incorporating ideologies in next generations. The surveyed students, Polish and American, appreciate different methods of activating their work during lessons. Some of them, particularly those conducted by good teachers,

were considered as awesome. The students appreciate the interactive method the most, which, according to them, is much better than lectures.

In the three surveyed countries, teachers instil almost identical values in their pupils, such as: patriotism, family values and widely understood moral values, respect for oneself and for others, respect for work, responsibility, humaneness, friendship, love, and fighting aggression. Commitment to society welfare is the most important value that is inculcated in Chinese schools. Chinese students put first: the state and its needs, obedience, respect towards authorities and hard work, a positive attitude to good and beauty, positive thinking and bravery in taking responsibility. It is worth noticing that the Chinese students' opinions and observation correspond with their teachers' in the strongest way.

Another issue touched upon in the research was the evaluation of teacher promotion prospects in particular countries. Teacher professional promotion is a very important issue which deserves university attention because the nature of work in the post-industrial society undergoes numerous transformations and these changes do not omit the teaching profession (Ping-Man W., 2012). According to the Polish respondents, professional promotion has only got two advantages – a rational financial advantage and work practice attendant support. The disadvantages are mainly: a possibility of achieving the last level of promotion too fast, the so-called *rat race* at schools, concentration on activities documentation during internship and not on pupils who are, or at least should be, a priority for the teacher. However, according to the results from the American research, active professional development is more effective when it is phased in longer time, because it allows the teacher to master a bigger amount of theoretical material and acquire practical skills (Anderson P.J., 1997). The Chinese respondents think that the professional promotion has nothing to do with qualifications and causes misunderstandings and conflicts in interpersonal relations in their schools. It is independent of the teacher- according to the respondents it constitutes the only formal activity of education authorities of the higher rank and in order to obtain the higher level of professional promotion one should have good relations with supervisors. The need for hard work and self-development is the only advantage of promotion

When it comes to problems at work, which were emphasised by the teachers, all of them indicated a decrease in the teacher status in society prestige. It seems it can be firstly explained by a phenomenon of so-called *social displacement* and in the case of Poland and the USA it can be additionally explained in terms of education institution democratization. Social displacement means that traditional socialisation agendas, like family and school, lose their influence and meaning when facing the domination of Internet culture, which is becoming not an alterna-

tive way of acquiring knowledge, but also the main source of knowledge. However, democratisation processes empowered the teacher-student, teacher-parent relations. It is often seen in terms of power and prestige loss by teachers. Sometimes also parents and their children do not understand or take advantage of egalitarian relations presenting fault-finding, demanding attitudes described as incompetence in education process management and their own children upbringing. One of many problems is students' low motivation to learn. According to the American respondents, American students have too many rights, which does not result in appropriate student-teacher relations. In recent years it is students' parents who have criticized teachers' work most.

In their statements, the Polish respondents emphasised the excessive bureaucratisation of teachers' work. An everlasting concern about the job position is one of the most important problems of Polish teachers. It is connected with two factors – a decreasing child birth rate in Poland in recent years and a relative sense of job security restricted to appointed teachers. According to all the surveyed teachers, a very low income is a problem. In the case of good teachers, their job security devastates their motivation for constant development and increase in qualifications.

In the research, thirty teachers from three countries evaluated their education systems and quality of the introduced reforms. None of them questioned the necessity to reform the existing education systems. They understand that these systems have to be reformed constantly, since requirements of modern societies are changing and it is their main common quality. The problem for almost all the teachers is the disorderliness with which changes are introduced to schools, a lack of consultations with them- practitioners, who bear the main burden connected with society education- and too high requirements, which are connected with the documentation of carried out activities. The teachers do not question the need for or even obligation to constant development. Teachers who are well educated and who are constantly increasing their qualifications are the most important factor in stimulating students' accomplishments (Porter A.C., Garet M.S., Desimone L.D., Yoon K.S., Birman B.F., 2000). Professional development was acknowledged in Great Britain and the USA as a key area of improvement of the teaching quality at schools (Carey K., 2004). The surveyed teachers, no matter what their nationality, have a positive attitude toward their students. According to their statements, they always try to be prepared for classes, apply different activating methods and assess every student, taking into consideration his/her intellectual and psychophysical abilities. They appreciate modern teaching aids, although in Chinese schools a book, more widely a library, still dominates as a source of information. Recent reforms gave Chinese teachers (and students, too) a possibility to think for themselves and

express their individual opinions. It is a great change as the education of young citizens had for a long time been strictly connected with the ideology being in force in this country. Schools in Poland and the USA are apolitical by design.

All the students taking part in the survey are very attached to their schools. They appreciate the acquired knowledge despite mutterings about overloaded material and high requirements assumed by curricula and teachers. They are perfect observers and have created a skill of individual and critical thinking, which is visible in their statements on: teachers' knowledge, school infrastructure evaluation and quality of school as an institution. The students are aware of what they are awarded and punished for. It seems that the Chinese students have more motivation to learn than the Polish and American ones. And they are also the only ones to mention corporal punishments at school. Contrary to their Polish and American counterparts, they consider well-equipped libraries as the most important advantage of their schools. At the same time, their American and Polish peers appreciate modern teaching aids more.

In all the three countries students are evaluated practically for the same- for oral statements, tests and quizzes. The situation in China is an exception; there- as a girl respondent said- students are also evaluated for their life. This statement is a considerable difference – in American or Polish schools it would be unacceptable to assess a student for his/her attitude to life presented at school and at home.

Summary

Despite the different mentality, system and ideology in which they grew up, the teachers from Poland, the USA and China have surprisingly very similar problems- all of them face lack of motivation in many students, an insufficient subsidy of education, over-loaded curricula, bureaucratisation of the teaching profession, overload and lack of respect for what they do with passion and great involvement. All of them also face low earnings and exorbitant requirements from education authorities. They love their job, but they do not recommend young pedagogy students to join their ranks (the unquestioned convergence of views). In China, the teacher additionally lives under huge social pressure. The reason for this is not only the concern about students' future, but also the concern about the older generation's future. In China, children take care of their parents until the end of their lives and as adults they have to be educated and financially stabilized in order to fulfil this obligation. In Europe and the USA the care of seniors has been, to a large extent, taken by social help institutions and non-government organizations.

To sum up, the conducted modest survey research allows us to state that the education systems in the studied countries, despite the differences which are difficult to disregard, to a large extent undergo a phenomenon called the convergence culture.

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