

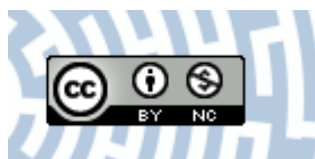


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LAUDATIO

**for Prof. WINCENTY OKOŃ, Ph.D.
Doctor of the University of Silesia, *Honoris Causa***

*Your Magnificence,
Honourable Doctor,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Esteemed Guests, representing the most outstanding academic and research
institutions in the Republic of Poland,*

For any nominator involved in the proceedings for the conferral of the title of Doctor *honoris causa*, the simple fact that such an elevating decision was made by their superiors to entrust them with this special role is in itself a rewarding distinction. Hence I have received the honour of preparing and publicly announcing the resolution of the Senate of the University of Silesia to confer upon Professor Wincenty Okoń the Honorary Doctorate.

In fulfilling this noble responsibility, I shall allow myself at the very introduction, which precedes the actual Laudatio speech, to present both the final resolution of the Senate of my *alma mater*, dated 26 September 2006, as well as the important and simply fundamental events which preceded the heretofore mentioned resolution.

The institutional proceedings regarding the investiture of Professor Wincenty Okoń with this distinction were initiated at the proposal of the Dean and Council of the Department of Pedagogy and Psychology of the University of Silesia on the 16th of May, 2006. It was also proposed, in submitting the candidature of outstanding reviewers - scholars representing contemporary teaching on education - that in keeping with the obligatory procedure of such proceedings, the below-mentioned personages accept the review duties for this endeavour, they being the following Professors:

- prof. zw. dr hab. Wojciech Kojs – Full Professor of the University of Silesia;
- prof. zw. dr hab. Zbigniew Kwieciński, h.c. – Full Professor of the University of Warmia and Mazury, Chairman of the Polish Pedagogic Society;
- prof. zw. dr hab. Tadeusz Lewowicki, h.c. – Full Professor of the University of Warsaw, Chairperson of the Committee on Pedagogical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

The Senate of the University Silesia adopted the submitted proposals with unanimous approval at a session on the 27th of June 2006. Generalising from the individual appraisals of individual opinion givers I can say that all reviewers in unison underline that the comprehensive research accomplishments of Professor Wincenty Okoń externalise the unsurpassed analytical and theoretical abilities of the Scholar. The results of his accomplishments display the immense and unprecedented knowledge of the Candidate, the accuracy of hypotheses and the thoroughness of his considerations. The multiple and meaningful accomplishments that the Scholar has achieved for years are also perceived in academia as unequalled moral authority. In a situation where intellectual values are connected with ethical sensitivity, conscientiousness and generally perceived responsibility, the conferral of the honorary doctoral degree on Professor Wincenty Okoń assumes the form of fully deserved approval, admiration and recognition for the unquestioned and unusual achievements and exceptionally *creative* activity of the Professor. The personage of Professor Okonia has been associated for years with the most outstanding representatives of the world of sciences in our country. Among many professors representing the humanities during the stretch of the prior half century, only several have been permanently written into the insitutional and progressive development of academia in Poland, Europe and the world.

*Honourable Doctor,
Distinguished Guests,*

Amongst the obligatory responsibilities of the nominator must be included the presentation of the profile of the Doctor's person as well as a basic chain of events; particular autobiographic elements and fortunes are identified and attached to specific dates. It is precisely these events which have determined the many-year, successful, creative and fruitful work of the Professor. I honestly admit that I was accompanied by a certain stage fright while preparing the present *laudatio*. Despite my knowledge of the majority of the Professor's works, I cannot pretend to embrace the entirity of this multi-faceted achievement. We are facing a huge project, unconventional in nature and distinguished by an abundance of investigations, next to

which my own competencies as a sociologist of education remain unfortunately limited. The achievements of the Professor encompass more than 330 publications. This number includes more than 20 books, that is, cohesive authored works. It is generally acknowledged that many of these individual works combine very original interests which contemporarily some scholars try to ascribe to various specialties or subdisciplines, isolating them, perhaps erroneously – from themselves.

Thankfully, the *laudatio* is not a self-contained and self-sufficient work. It remains for me therefore to utilise the carefully prepared reviews and *de facto* real *mini-essays* of recognised opinion givers who comment on the same issues as I – the specific experiments, studies and analyses of the Candidate, works which exemplify a rich and difficult to classify scientific creativity. I shall indeed attempt to scrupulously use these incontrovertible appraisals. Of course I am not capable of presenting the whole of the Professor's merits or naming the majority of papers and treatises which he wrote, nor those for which he was editor during his more than half-century-long scientific mission. The majority is very well known by representatives of the social sciences and pedagogical sciences anyway.

It happens that some scientific careers develop quickly. Others, on the other hand, are characterised by an evolution that is preceded – as is the case with the rich biography of this candidate – by historically conditioned experiences. The Professor's life path began at his family home in Chojeniec. He was born in this village on the 22nd of January, 1914. He was raised in a family with many siblings, where he took part from early childhood in organisational and other work typical of every farm. After completing six years of General School in Siedliszcz he took on studies in the Teaching Seminary in Chełm, an institution of exceptionally favourable conditions and many-sided influence on the minds and feelings of future teachers (See Kojs, 2006, p. 2). As one of his students and later a very close co-worker of the candidate reports, the Professor displayed a great passion for learning and inquisitiveness while attending schools of consecutively higher levels of education. From youth he demonstrated his broad interests and talents. He took part in an amateur cultural movement, was interested in literature, and also made music. He chose the teaching profession, which was to be his lifelong profession, relatively early on. He worked as a teacher (from 1937 to the outbreak of the Second World War). As an officer in the reserve, and as many peers from the Professor's generation in the year 1939, he took on the soldier's duty of defending his country. Later he was a soldier in the underground Home Army, where he organised and took part in underground education. In the year 1944 he was again called up for the military (Lewowicki, 2006, p. 2). This time he was conscripted to the independent Marine LWP Battalion led at that time by Commodore Franciszek Dąbrowski. It is worth mentioning at this occasion that the Professor's supervisor during this

period was the second in command for Major Henryk Sucharski, national hero and famous leader of defence of his post on Westerplatte in the first days of September 1939. Being the leader of a company, the Professor himself trained marines, imparting them with the unconventional canon of socialisation – education work during the passage of his military duty. At the same time he successfully completed his higher educational studies at the Free Polish University. After completing his studies having attained the rank of war marine captain he made the decision to leave military service, in order to begin work in September 1946 as a university lecturer in the Department of General Pedagogy of the University of Łódź under the direction of Professor Sergiusz Hessen – an outstanding scholar – in the position of assistant (Okoń, 2005, pp. 216–221; Compare Juszczak, 2006 “a”, pp. 1–5). After his doctoral thesis defense in June 1948 less than two years after receiving the Master’s Degree, he made use of the proposal submitted by Professor Bogdan Suchodolski in 1949 and took on work in his current Department at the University of Warsaw as an adjunct professor. This transfer took place in connection with changes in the University of Łódź (including the removal of Professor Sergiusz Hessen from the Department of General Pedagogy), at a time when – as the Professor has written in his autobiography – “criticism and self-criticism was the rage in the papers and at meetings”, and professors were sent off on retirement at an extraordinary rate.

Within seven years after his completing doctorate in 1955 Professor Okoń attained the title of Associate Professor, and in 1966 he was made Full Professor, permanently directing the Department of General Didactics until 1984, which was the moment when he retired. At this time he also performed the duties of Dean of the Pedagogy Department at the University of Warsaw as well as chaired the Council of the same organisational unit. For many years he directed the famous Didactics Seminar, known for its exceptional reputation (scholars of similar calibre Prof. T. Kotarbiński and B. Nawroczyński also participated in the realisation of the programme) training the academic cadre. Participants in the Seminar were recruited amongst from employees of institutions of higher learning and teachers from the entire country (Okoń, 2005, pp. 225–227; Kojas, 2006, pp. 3–4).

Together with his work at the University of Warsaw, the Professor fulfilled the responsible duties of Director (1961–1972) of the Institute of Pedagogy of the then Minister of Education. This institute was restructured in 1972 into the Institute of Pedagogical Research, which he also directed (until 1974).

Both the Department of Didactics at the University of Warsaw, and the Institute of Pedagogy (later Institute of Pedagogical Research), came to be the strongest education-focussed academic and research centres in Poland, thanks to the efforts and personal involvement of the Professor. Under his direction numerous domes-

tic and international studies were performed - including studies on the teaching-learning process, school achievements, educational system transformations, etc. (Lewowicki, 2006, p. 3).

He created – as he himself put it – “a decent academic institution” from the Institute, conducting basic research of major importance to the development of educational theory, publishing academic monographs (including 31 volumes of *The Teacher’s Library*, the many-volume series *The Library of Vocational Education*, and the journal “Pedagogical Review”). At this time – as Profesor Andrzej Janowski reminisces – [...] He tried to civilise pedagogy maximally, and the institutions he directed slowly but systematically transformed into Western-style academic institutions. [...] He desired to distance the Institute as far as possible from the Stalinist model of pedagogy which was ideologically subordinated” (Janowski, 1994, p. 35; Quoted: Kojas, 2006, p. 4).

As a member of the Polish Academy of Sciences since 1973, Professor Wincenty Okoń also performed the honourable and responsible function of Chairman of the Committee on Pedagogical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences (1974–1984), actively participated in the work of the Expert Committee for the study Report on the State of Education (1971–1973); for many years he was also the editor of “Pedagogical Quarterly (1973–1984) and “Pedagogical Studies” (1978–1987). As Profesor Zbigniew Kwieciński underscores, “Professor Wincenty has achieved much for the development of the integration of academic pedagogical circles in Poland. He was a leader of central educational academic institutions for years; he was also the initiator, founder and creator of the Polish Pedagogical Association as the universal association of academic pedagogy, independent from political authorities who constantly attempted to subordinate pedagogy to serve party and state ideologies. He is currently the honorary chairman of the Association” (Kwieciński, 2006, p. 3).

Numerous contacts with foreign academic centres abroad played an important role in the activity of the Esteemed Doctor, namely participation in international conferences and congresses, travel to Western Europe funded by grants (a three month UNESCO grant in 1957), journeys and *professorial assignments* to the USA, England and France (a six-month Ford Foundation grant and numerous others). By the end of 1988 Professor Wincenty Okoń had made nearly 100 trips abroad to many academic centres, including trips where he travelled in the capacity of UNESCO expert. He delivered lectures and conducted academic seminars in Japan (1968) and Heidelberg, FRG (a six-month stay in 1981–1982), among other locations.

Among his many significant works, his books outlining the development of general education hold a special place in Poland and in many other countries – *The Teaching Process* (6 Polish editions and several Japanese); *An Outline of General*

Didactics (4 editions); *The Basis of the Learning Question*; *Fundamentals of General Education*; *On Progress in Pedagogy*; *Elements of Teaching in Higher Education Institutions*; *An Introduction to General Didactics*; *Play and Reality*; *Ten Alternative Schools*.

Several other works already belong to the classics of the teaching profession and literature serving the creation of a theory of the school. These are, among others, the books: *The Matter of the Education of Teachers*; *Images of Renowned Polish Teachers*; *Ten Alternative Schools*; as well as the joint publication edited by the Candidate entitled: *Experimental Schools across the World*. These works appeared at various times, were reissued, and continue to be a source of knowledge about education, about the school and about the teaching profession.

Among other original and meaningful accomplishments of the Professor must be listed the *Pedagogical Dictionary* (several editions) or *The New Pedagogical Dictionary* (Compare Kojs, 2006, pp. 4–5; Lewowicki, 2006, p. 4). I would also like to quote the credible opinion of Profesor Zbigniew Kwiecieński, who attempts to capture the entirety of results of the Professor's creative engagement.

“General didactics according to Wincenty Okoń is of an integrated nature. It neither divides nor compares various approaches, currents, or directions, but rather presents the academic and practitioner of schools of every level and type with a multi-faceted, yet integrated approach.

It is also a didactics which may be described as translatable, relevant, and adapted for reception by the academic reader of highest competency as well as each reader who wishes to learn the art of teaching, which is at the same time the support and leadership of children, youth and adults in the independent and active process of learning.

Professor Wincenty Okoń created models for empirical studies on the teaching and education process. His «*The Teaching Process*» achieved records in readership and caused a wave of debate and imitative experiments in Poland and throughout the entire world. Professor Wincenty Okoń's experiments and studies in the area of the theory of teaching have always been open to creativity, alternatives and experiments at home and abroad. He attentively followed and critically analysed all important innovations in Poland and across the world, wrote books and numerous articles about them, supported the research and teaching movement intellectually and in institutional activities on behalf of innovation, without forgetting their historical roots.

Activity, creativity, empiricism, measurement of achievement, raising of the criteria of the level of academic work in Polish didactics and pedagogy – these are the continual and intensive achievements of Professor Wincenty Okoń. Professor Wincenty Okoń also did much good to introduce the Polish pedagogical circle to

the foremost achievements of pedagogical thought throughout the world. He initiated a series of translations and made intensive study tours to many countries. He returned with penetrating observations, books and research contacts of a long-lasting nature. He was consistent in exchanging ideas with his international colleagues, thus transferring the achievements of Polish pedagogy beyond the borders of our country as well as bringing innovative foreign achievements to Poland. In terms of his international cooperative efforts, Professor W. Okoń had no equal among other scholars in Polish pedagogy.

The Professor paid the masters of Polish academic history much attention and respect. It is to the achievements of these masters that he devoted several monographs, a book profiling the most outstanding Polish educationalists, and numerous positions in his many-times-reissued and expanded «*Pedagogic Dictionary*». He also brought about the publication of a new edition of the works of Sergiusz Hessen with his own extensive introduction” (Kwieciński, 2006, pp. 1–2; See Wołoszyn, 1993, p. 95).

It seems that indeed Sergiusz Hessen was the Professor’s master in lectures on the logic of research and scientific production. In a consequential penetration of numerous questions located on the axis continuum of problem-oriented teaching on the one end versus comprehensive education on the other, in a similar vein to Sergiusz Hessen the Professor reaches for experiences resulting from strictly cultural observations. The narrative flow led by Professor Okoń awakens in the reader an urgent need to explain and conduct one’s own observations.

For years the doctor has remained the unquestioned creator of several important scientific theories, important in the development of the field of pedagogy. Foremost are the theory of the teaching-learning process and the theory of multi-faceted education. Additionally yet of particular importance is the very significant influence they had on school educational practices.

Numerous school experiments – conducted under the Professor’s initiative and leadership – have led to the modernisation of traditional educational processes at school. The Professor always has been and continues to remain an enthusiastic propagator and promoter of most educational innovations. On the topic of Professor Okoń’s theories his own version of the theory of problem-oriented teaching-learning should be recalled. This theory – in the opinion of Professor Tadeusz Lewowicki – which also draws on the theories of John Dewey, produced a significant and visible impact on changes in education in Polish schools (Lewowicki, 2006, p. 4).

Professor Wojciech Kojas points out other aspects of the Professor’s scientific works. To quote this reviewer’s statements [...] In texts treating the methodology of pedagogical experiments, as in texts dealing with issues of education and

upbringing, the characterisation and use of historical and comparative methods appears. Their presence, and most importantly their use, caused issues in pedagogy presented by the Professor to be seen as multidimensional, situated in a broad space-time context of social processes, making possible the anticipation and design of future educational and pedagogic events. Content as a constitutive component of education and upbringing drew the Professor's attention to methods of analysis of scientific knowledge, and so to methodological problems of scientific knowledge, the philosophy and logic of language, linguistics, as well as – in connection with the presence of assessments and norms in these knowledge fields – ethics and aesthetics. To the above-indicated methods should be added the so-called didactic (pedagogic) speculation based on the crossing from abstract forms, free of facts, to forms imbued with facts, and therefore connected with the domination of deductive thinking, allowing for – together with data achieved with the help of other methods – the diagnosis, explanation, prediction and design of educational activities. The analysis already mentioned, undertaken with great scrupulousness in the compilation of lesson protocol and the analysis of scientific structures in school textbooks, combined with an analysis of their contents (goals, tasks, functions) and search for and discovery of relationships as well as the rationalisation of the content of teacher and student actions, is nothing less than a qualitative hermeneutical analysis of educational and pedagogical events” (Kojas, 2006, p. 8).

In his works the Scholar reaches for the observations and experiences of other thinkers. It is unusual for him to conduct tabular arrangements arising from the classical methodological results of empirical explications.

The Eminent Doctor is of course the founder of a scientific school¹. To quote the words of Professor Zbigniew Kwieciński, it is worth articulating this characteristic statement: [...] He created his own powerful, extensive, flourishing and creative scientific school of pedagogy. From this point of view he has not been equalled by any Polish educationalist, nor many Polish humanities specialists [...] if we were to mention here only a few names, we would immediately see the sphere of teaching

¹ The concept of a “scientific school” may successfully be described as “a group of students connected in a common dependence on models established by the master” (Znaniński, 1929, p. 11; See Szacki, 1975, p. 7), and the same emphasis would be transferred from the person of the “master” to models and standards of behaviour, including scientific approach. I completely agree with the opinion that a “scientific school” is a group of people dealing with a defined common issue, representing a certain theoretical and methodological orientation accepted by the master (or developed cooperatively), remaining in a mutually interactive relationship, acknowledging the same Individuals as authorities, using similar research models, etc. A key issue is as a rule the having of students, the ability to gain junior researchers and create special – in a psychological sense – bonds between members of the group (Compare Szacki, 1975, p. 7).

influence held by Professor Wincenty Okoń. [...] In every academic environment in Poland we can find his direct, or indirect, students” (Kwieciński, 2006, pp. 2–3).

I suppose that there is no way to categorise the Person of the Professor to any school of thought in contemporary pedagogy, although the Master did cross paths with several classics of social science of the 19th and 20th century. His work falls outside of the normative classifications. The Professor, as has been mentioned, has created his own *school* – in pedagogy and related sciences – a school which makes use of the work of other *schools*, while allowing for the possibility of verification of previously discovered paradigms (Compare Szacki, 2006, p. 12).

Professor Tadeusz Lewowicki encapsulates the particular virtues of the Professor with *warmth* and *sensitivity* in the more personal sphere, listing numerous characteristics his students, co-workers and circle of friends learned to anticipate, amongst which dominate kindness and tolerance toward the achievements of other authors. The Professor has always treated the activity of both the younger and older generation of educationalists with a dose of sympathetic openness and engaged interest, although of course, not without due criticism.

“When speaking of the Professor’s successes – maintains Lewowicki – I want to underline here the fact he has repeated many times, that he counts as his greatest success his gathering and promotion of an unusually numerous and for years very significant circle of students and co-workers. The fact that he has graduated *about 70 doctors*, and what is more, *at least 15 of them have received the title of full professor*, and *20 of them are associate professors*, inspires our admiration and recognition” (Lewowicki, 2006, p. 5; Compare Kwieciński, 2006, p. 2).

The conferral of the Honorary Doctorate on the Eminent Scholar Professor Wincenty Okoń by this University adds splendour to the 30-year Jubilee Anniversary of the establishment of the Department of Pedagogy and Psychology of the University of Silesia in the cultural and organisational milieu of Polish academia (Juszczak, 2006, pp. 1–2). In an aptly-noted reflection of Professor Wojciech Kojs, these ceremonies in a natural way force the evocation of Silesia – Zagłębie threads running through the entire fabric of achievements and intentional academic cooperation of the Honourable Doctor.

It is worth remembering that [...] amongst the individuals closely connected with the Professor were most certainly Professors Bogdan Nawroczyński and Bogdan Suchodolski, both born in Zagłębie (Dąbrowa Górnicza, Sosnowiec). Prof. Czesław Kupisiewicz, his student and co-worker of many years, was also born in Sosnowiec. The Professor also cooperated with Prof. Jan Szczepański (Honorary Doctor of the University of Silesia), among other individuals on the Expert Committee for the study Report on the State of Education, as well as Prof. Aleksander Kamiński, active during the interwar period in Silesia (Mikołów, Górki Wielkie).

It is significant that Professor Wincenty Okoń has repeatedly cited in his works the results of studies conducted by, among others, Prof. Józef Pieter, Barbara Żechowska and Jan Poplucza. I also wish to mention yet another, strong connection with the pedagogical community at the University of Silesia – the common use of the Professor's academic achievements by staff and students of pedagogy and teaching studies. Through his academic achievements and the designation of large educational areas worth scientific systematisation, he inspired his employees to take on empirical research. And this continues today. A specific and telling aspect of direct relations between the Professor and our University is the exceedingly fruitful cooperation with his eminent student - Prof. Tadeusz Lewowicki.

“It is also worth emphasizing the fact that – as far as I am aware – more than forty years ago the Professor published his text in the pages of the Silesian «Chowanna», and then in «Studia Śląskie» (1979) and recently in «The New Educational Review», of which he is an honorary editor” (Kojs, 2006, pp. 17–18).

Already more than a quarter of a century ago – during the year of a short-lived historical turning-point (1980) – the Professor was granted an *Honorary Doctorate* by the National Education Commission Teaching University in Kraków. After the passage of several years – in the year 1996 – the achievements of Professor Okoń were acknowledged in the form of a conferral of yet another, his second – Honorary Doctorate – this time at the Technical University of Braunschweig in Germany.

The authority of the Professor – which has and continues to influence not only academia but also the pedagogical knowledge and experience of thousands of teachers – is of an unparalleled, generally-acknowledged renown. It is most visible during groundbreaking periods and difficult times of social change, when – as now – pathology interweaves itself with therapy in academic life.

We perceive in the person of Professor Wincenty Okoń a contemporary thinker, who like no one else was able to break away from the binding model of Soviet pedagogy as soon as the early 1950's. In so doing, he enabled the broad ranks of teaching staff, researchers and teachers in Poland to thoroughly and credibly learn about the processes of education and creation of autonomous and integrated knowledge, which constitutes the identity of modern pedagogy. We perceive a figure who has shaped contemporary teaching, while simultaneously having made efforts toward the specialisation and development (i.e. further institutionalisation) of teaching in institutions of higher learning, so important for all subdisciplines.

Thus, Greatly Distinguished Professor, Our Professor, known commonly as an uncompromising, intellectual and erudite individual, a good and modest person of unblemished honesty; it has come time to strengthen the bond linking You with Upper Silesia and Zagłębie Dąbrowskie, and above all with the successful University of this region and its entire academic community, in the Year of the Jubilee

Anniversary marking the passage of 30 years from the establishment of the Department of Pedagogy and Psychology at our *Alma Mater*.

May I therefore announce to all that in recognition of your particular and exceptional achievements and merits in exemplary service to education, and never-ending assistance to faithful advocates of education and a several-hundred-thousand-strong body of pupils, students and teachers; The Senate of the University of Silesia according to the resolution effective the 26th of September, 2006, has resolved to award and confer upon You, Honorable Doctor, our highest honour, the Doctor of the University of Silesia, *honoris causa*. I assure you, Distinguished and Dear Professor, that our Academic Community regards the acceptance of your esteemed person into the company of our honorary doctors to be an honour and distinction. Honourable Professor, commended Doctor, please accept these expressions of my highest respect and most cordial and best sentiments.

Prepared by
Andrzej Radziewicz-Winnicki

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