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A Report of the International Scientific Conference "Educational Paths of Poles Abroad", Ciechocinek, April 27-28, 2017

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On 27–28 April 2017 in Ciechocinek, an International Scientific Conference was held, entitled “Educational Paths of Poles Abroad”. It was organised by the Department of Educational Sociology and Social Education of the Faculty of Education of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, and co-organised by: the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow, the University in Białystok, the Department of Ethnology and Education Studies in Cieszyn of the University of Silesia in Katowice, the Marie Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin; the Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University (Ukraine), and the Association for Support of Intercultural Education.

The meeting was under the patronage of: the Marshal of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship, the Mayor of the City of Toruń, His Magnificence, the Rector of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, the Education Sciences Committee, and the Polish Educational Research Association. The Scientific Committee was chaired by Prof. dr hab. Jerzy Nikitorowicz, the Program Committee by Dr hab. Maria Marta Urlińska, Professor at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, and the Organisational Committee by Dr hab. Jarosław Horowski. Secretaries of the conference were: Dr Tomasz Różański, Dr Jarosław Przeperski, Dr Monika Błędowska, Dr Jolanta Suchodolska.

The conference was devoted to the problems of Poles living abroad—both those who were born in another country, and those

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who left Poland as children or adults. The impulse to undertake discussion on the issues related to the lives of Poles abroad, as well as to summarise actions supporting our compatriots by organising the process of teaching of Polish language and culture, was the lapse of 25 years since the Polish minority began to restore Polish education in the East and since it involved the scientific environment of Toruń in this process. However, the abovementioned events are already discussed in the new socio-economic and cultural context, in the perspective of migration of Poles, also those from the East, to the countries of Western Europe, and building of their own identity by them and their children in these conditions. The primary purpose of the conference was to answer the question: how are the paths of life and education of Poles shaped abroad? The diversity of the socio-cultural contexts of the Eastern and Western countries provided an opportunity to compare and share observations and experience which were significant from the point of view of educational practice. The conference participants included not only researchers who were interested in describing the processes currently occurring in Europe, but also representatives of Polonia and Poles living outside Poland.

The issues were met with extremely great interest, as evidenced by the number of papers. More than 140 people took part in the sessions, from twenty-two scientific centres from Poland and abroad, representing the University of Silesia in Katowice, the University of Białystok, the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, the University of Opole, the Jagiellonian University, the University of Rzeszów, the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, the University of Gdańsk, the University of Szczecin, the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, the Nicolaus Copernicus University, the University of Lower Silesia in Wrocław, the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow, the Maria Grzegorzewska University in Warsaw, the Pomeranian University in Słupsk, the Koszalin University of Technology, the Warsaw University of Life Sciences (SGGW), the Warsaw Management University, the WSB University in Gdańsk, the Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, and the Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences in Vilnius.

During the debate, we also heard opinions of the organisers of the school system, principals of Polish schools, teachers, parents, and local members of organisations representing Poles abroad, involved in

assisting and supporting our compatriots in the East and in the West. They included representatives of associations representing the Polish community abroad (the Association for Teachers in Polish schools in Lithuania “Macierz Szkolna”, the Polish Educational Society “Polska Macierz Szkolna” in Belarus, the Association of Poles in Latvia, the Polish National Local Government in Hungary, the Polish Congress in the Czech Republic, the Polish Dramatic Studio in Vilnius). Principals of Polish schools from the following countries also took part in the discussion: from Lithuania (the Adam Mickiewicz Lower Secondary School in Vilnius, the Primary School in Mościszki), from the Czech Republic (the Henryk Sienkiewicz Primary School with Education in Polish in Jabłonkovo, the Polish Juliusz Słowacki Lower Secondary School in Český Těšín), from Scotland (No Boundaries School CIC), and from Latvia (the National Polish Lower Secondary School in Rezekne). The following sent their representatives: the Pedagogical Centre for Polish Minority Schools in Český Těšín and the Centre for Polish Language and Culture in Vilnius.

Within two days, under the plenary session and six sections, sixty papers were presented. During two discussion panels, we could listen to more than ten Poles and Polonia representatives, as well as representatives of the environments supporting their actions in Poland. The speeches took account of the comparative perspective of the world of Poles abroad, covering the past, the current situation, and indications for the future.

On behalf of the organisers, the conference participants were welcomed by the Dean of the Faculty of Education, Dr hab. Piotr Petrykowski, Professor at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, who emphasised the long-term relations of the employees of the Faculty of Education with Polish environments abroad, as well as the relevance of the problems tackled in the debate, which was reflected in the high number of participating researchers and practitioners coming to the conference from Poland and abroad. He thanked the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodship authorities, since the hosting of such a large number of Poles from beyond the eastern and southern borders of Poland was possible thanks to the subsidy received from the Marshal Office and the organisational support of Jan Krzysztof Ardanowski, the member of the Polish parliament. The formal opening of the conference was attended by the Deputy Voivode Józef

Ramlau and the Voivodeship Board Member Sławomir Kopyś, who welcomed the conference participants on behalf of the hosts of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodship.

In the plenary session, the discussion was moderated by professors: Władysław Szulakiewicz and Zenon Jasiński, who—after the introductory speeches of professors: Tadeusz Lewowicki, Jerzy Nikitorowicz, Ludmyła Khoruzha, Dorota Misiejuk, and Maria Marta Urlińska—led a discussion concerning the issues of identity, the world of values, dilemmas related to intercultural education, education in Polish.

Justification for the idea of organising the conference in Ciechoćinek was given by Dr hab. Maria Marta Urlińska, Professor at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, who has been conducting research at Polish schools in Latvia since 1989. In her speech, she referred to the scientific conference she organised in February 1994, devoted to educational identity problems of people living in minorities and diasporas. She particularly referred to the words said in *Rabka-Zdrój* by the man supporting her activities in Latvia, Full Professor dr hab. Zbigniew Kwieciński, who—when opening that conference—emphasised that “The Poles living on the outskirts of Poland and the Poles in the country deserve restoration of proper relations towards foreigners. This concerns three possibilities, and, at the same time, directions of educational support. The first one involves helping those, who by choice or necessity ended up among strangers, live in diasporas and are in a minority dominated by the majority. It is equally important to help us (namely the Poles in Poland) establish proper relations with foreigners living next to us. We should eliminate the feeling of aversion to them that we may have, reduce the distance to someone else’s world. In addition, one extremely up-to-date issue and task involves preparing the Polish society for showing understanding and support for those, who return from the East (often referred to as “Russkies”).” The words of Professor Kwieciński have not lost any relevance and became a compass for the organisers, guiding them to—after 23 years—once again pick up these threads and invite a group of people interested in these issues to Toruń.

In the first discussion panel, “The Voice of Macierz: Entities supporting Poles abroad in their mission and role”, representatives of institutions and organisations supporting Poles abroad presented the

most important theses concerning this subject matter during seven speeches. The discussion was led by professors: Piotr Petrykowski and Ewa Ogrodzka-Mazur. It was opened by MP Jan Krzysztof Ardanowski, indicating the responsibility of the Sejm, the Senate, and the government of the Republic of Poland for actions supporting Polonia and Poles abroad. Initiatives of local governments were presented by: Magdalena Burdziej, Vice Director of the International Cooperation Department of the Marshal Office of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship, and Paweł Garbuzik from the Marshal Office of the Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship.

Support for our compatriots by numerous national institutions, associations and social organisations was presented by Dr Medard Maślowski (former Consul of the Republic of Poland in Latvia and Kazakhstan, currently President of the Foundation “Polskie Kresy Wschodnie—Dziedzictwo i Pamięć”). Dr hab. Mirosław Sobeczki, Professor at the University of Białystok, explained the university’s mission in educating Poles in Belarus. Doctoral candidates from the Faculty of Education also expressed their opinions: Sylwia Szulc (chairman of the Scientific Group for Research on the Borderland of Cultures, under which students of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń conduct voluntary activity in Polish environments abroad) and Dr Paweł Juszkiewicz (scholarship holder and a Pole from Belarus, actively working for the benefit of Poles from the East studying at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń). The speeches of the participants in this debate focused on the role of state, local administration and non-governmental institutions supporting activities of Poles, on presentation of the mission of academic centres in educating Poles in the East, on presenting a number of initiatives of students and pupils.

The second discussion panel, entitled: “The Voice of Poles and Polonia”, was dominated by guests from abroad and was devoted to issues related to assistance and support expected by the Poles and Polonia and offered thereto. Due to the numerous representatives of Poles living abroad, this panel was divided into two parts, with moderators of the first part being: Prof. dr hab. Dorota Praszalowicz and Dr Łukasz Kwadrans, and moderators of the second part: Dr hab. Piotr Krakowiak, Professor at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, and Dr hab. Alina Szczurek-Boruta, Professor at the University of Silesia in Katowice.

The conference participants had a chance to present their papers and messages on their research in the course of six thematic sections. Section I: “Dilemmas of the borderland identity: Integration or isolation?” (Moderators: Dr hab. Krystyna Bleszyńska, Professor at SGGW in Warsaw, Dr hab. Tomasz Biernat, Professor at WSB University in Gdańsk); Section II: “Educational experiences of Polish emigrants” (Moderators: Dr hab. Anna Szafrńska-Gajdzica, Prof. Dr hab. Józef Kargul); Section III: “Formal, non-formal and informal areas of educational activities” (Moderators: Dr hab. Mirosław Sobecki, Professor at the University of Białystok, Dr hab. Piotr Krakowiak, Professor at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń); Section IV: “What does it mean to be a Pole and a Citizen of the country of residence at the same time?” (Moderators: Dr hab. Dorota Misiejuk, Professor at the University of Białystok, Dr hab. Mariusz Korczyński, Professor at UMCS); Section V: “Conditions and specificity of functioning of Polish schools abroad” (Moderators: Dr hab. Edward Nycz, Professor at the University of Opole, Dr hab. Ireneusz Kawecki, Professor at the University of Rzeszów); Section VI: “The potential and strength of Polish environments abroad” (Moderators: Prof. dr hab. Ludmyla Khoruzha, Dr hab. s. Anna Walulik, Professor at the Ignatianum).

The subject matter presented in the speeches was mainly focused on such issues as: education of the Polonia abroad and its legal regulations; the issues of national identity of Polish emigrants and their children; educational migrations of Polish students; the problem of cultivating Polishness in exile; the issue of success in the context of the careers of the migrating Poles; the role of Polish universities in the process of education of Poles abroad; activities of Polish organisations for the benefit of minority schools; the role of teachers in Polish schools abroad; the religious community as educational space of Poles abroad; creation of socio-cultural identity under conditions of multiculturalism; the issue of intercultural competences.

The diversity of socio-educational initiatives and actions of scientific and research centres and organisations acting for the benefit of Polonia and Poles abroad convinced us to also to organise a poster session as part of the conference, as an alternative form of expression and a way to participate in the discussion. The submitted graphic presentations (25 posters) covered, among others, the issues of broadly

understood education, the space of activity of educational institutions and school experiences, coexistence of the Polish community in a multicultural world, forms of support of the Compatriots abroad, as well as mobility of Poles abroad. The posters were prepared, among others, by doctoral candidates, as well as by members of the Student Scientific Group for Research on the Borderland of Cultures, functioning at the Faculty of Education at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. The coordinators of the poster session were Magdalena Urlińska and Dr Mirosław Zientarski. The recital of Jacek Beszczyński, the bard of Toruń (with a second guitarist Krzysztof Kwiatkowski), fitted the atmosphere of the concert perfectly, as it took participants on a musical journey to the various countries where Polish people live.

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