

Report from the 9th National Pedagogical Congress
Toward a meaningful life. Ideas – concepts – practice
Białystok 21–23 September 2016

The 9th National Pedagogical Congress: *Toward a Meaningful Life. Ideas – Concepts – Practice* took place in Białystok, on 21–23 September 2016. It was organised by the Chief Directorate of the Polish Pedagogical Society in collaboration with the Praesidium of the Committee on Pedagogical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Science and the Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology of the University of Białystok. It was the perfect occasion to present the marvels of the capital of Podlasie to its participants. The opening of the Congress and the first plenary session was held at the Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic Hall – European Centre of Art in Białystok. It was attended by the members of the Faculty of the University in Białystok, including rector prof. Robert Ciborowski, local authorities (the Vice-Marshall of the Podlaskie Voivodship – Maciej Żwyno, vice-head of the Presidential Department of the City of Białystok – Waldemar Pawłowski), invited guests and Congress participants. The Congress was opened by the deans of the Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology prof. Mirosław Sobecki and prof. At the end of the first day of the Congress participants were invited to watch the musical „Korczak” written by Chris Williams and Nick Stimson, based on Andrzej Wajda’s (director) and Agnieszka Holland’s (screenplay) biographical film about the outstanding educator Janusz Korczak, his students, and their tragic final journey during the Holocaust. The musical encourages spectators to reflect on timeless values and behaviour patterns.

The Second day of the Congress opened in the Main Performance Hall of the Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology (opened in 2013). After an inspiring plenary session the participants opened discussions in 10 parallel sections, which took place

at the Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology and the University in Białystok Campus (opened in 2014). The discussion in each section was moderated by a panel composed of scholars from various academic institutions in Poland, supported by a coordinator and science secretary from the Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology. Each section developed its own style of work with the common denominator being the achievement of expected scholarly goals.

Section 1 focused on the subject: *A Meaningful Life in the Context of Condition Humana in 21st century*, which points to the grounding of pedagogical thought in philosophy. Participants in the discussion stressed the need for education with an axiological core and a wise teacher – a master, who can lead students towards a valuable life. Fulfilling this task requires moral competence. A number of social areas were discussed, which could play a significant role in creating a world of value: family, media, work, etc. The section had 37 active participants.

The discussion in section 2 was conducted under the slogan: *Meaningful life – meta-theoretical and methodological aspects of axiopedagogical research*. The common theme in all the introductory presentations was discussion of meta-theoretical and methodological aspects of *axiopedagogical research*. The debate was continued in themed sessions focused around issues such as: *Researching the intangible: analysis of the values of an individual subject (example: children)*. *Researching the invisible: analysis of the values of a communal subject (example: institution)*. *Axiological aspects of the analysis of pedagogical activity*; *Axiological researcher's dilemmas*. The discussion in this section had 14 participants.

Meaningful Life and the Dynamics of Socio-Cultural, Economic and Political Change – was the theme of the discussion in Section 3, attended by 94 participants, 86 of whom participated actively, presenting papers and taking part in the discussion. Attendees in this section voiced opinions about the participation of pedagogues in the public debate and the role of pedagogy in view of current changes. If they are to participate in the public debate it is important to decide what their voice should be. There is little an individual can do. Neither can members of the Pedagogical Sciences Committee, the Polish Pedagogical Society, or other bodies achieve much, if they differ significantly in their views. A common voice has to be found.

In section 4 – *Culture and Art as Axiological and Educational Space* presentations were delivered on the representation and (re)construction of identity in modern culture and education. Works by the 16 participants of this section were printed in a special edition of the periodical „Transdyscyplinarne Studia o Kulturze (i) Edukacji” (nr 11/2016). Texts included in that publication were based on the presentations prepared for the Congress. “By reaching for the source of awakening, paideia, the debaters invoked the primary function of education, which is the transformation, spiritual change, growing into a culture understood as a base for experience and a place in social space for the realisation of tasks for the current” (pol. „Sięgając do źródeł przebudzenia, paidei odwoływano się do prymarnej funkcji kształcenia,

jaką jest przekształcenie, przemiana duchowa, wrastanie w kulturę rozumianą jako podłoże przeżyć i miejsc w przestrzeni społecznej do realizacji zadań na miarę epoki” (B. Śliwerski, 2016)).

The discussion in section 5 followed the theme: *Human Identity – Pedagogy and Diversity*. The 33 papers presented in the section, as well as the discussion revolved around the question of the teacher’s and students’ identity and its creation through the processes of social learning. Participants agreed that the modern world is subject to continual reconstruction and teachers have the responsibility of transforming it into something more human, conducive to finding and constructing identity. The section had 54 participants.

The subject of Section 6 was *the Temporal Dimension of a Meaningful Life*. The section had 49 active and 2 passive participants. The discussion revolved around a reflection on the individual dimension of history (a meaningful life shown through the biographies of individuals), as well as institutional history, or the history of education. The history of guidance studies was presented, among others in relation to the current change in the centre of gravity from the question “how to live” to “how to be” and “how to be noticed”. The subject of analysis was also the strategy of searching for educational emancipation in education and through education in situations of crisis of legitimacy of institutions and aspiration. Issues of guidance were also discussed in the context of choosing a future professional career and mechanisms of attributing value to it.

Section 7 – *Education – towards Key Values* was attended by 70 participants. The speakers stressed the need to care for values such as patriotism or respect for the dignity of others in the broadly understood educational system. Analysis of their statements leads to the conclusion that the aspirations of modern teachers for responsible education of young people face many institutional, personal, legal and social limitations on the effectiveness of their actions. A need was observed for supporting teachers and students in school and outside of it. Cooperation is advisable between various sectors (e.g. schools and local governments), which would turn the educational system into a reality closer (more friendly) both to those responsible for it and those who create it.

The number of participants present and active in Section 8 – *Creating an Academic Environment from the Perspective of a Meaningful Life*, was 65. The discussion focused around three main issues: *A Meaningful Life from the Cognitive Perspective of Various Individuals and Social Groups; The Role of Educational Institutions, Workplaces, Social Organisations, Local Communities in Creating the Educational Environment; Reflection on the Creation of an Educational Environment*. The participants of the section stressed a crucial role of values in creating a good and worthy academic environment

The theme of Section 9, attended by 50 people, was: *School and Education towards a Meaningful Life*. The discussions in this section focused around thesis: *The student*

introduced to the world of values should experience valuable life at school; There is a question: does school teach a student how to be an aware human, member of the national community or culture; It is necessary to concern on sustainable human development, according to the rule: at the same time to know – understand – interact – create, so «to be». The discussions in this section also led to the suggestion that an open letter should be written to the Minister of Education, expressing fears about the proposed changes in the school system, regarding both the contents of the reform and the manner of its introduction. It was decided that the letter should address issues such as: (1) No grounding of the reform in educational science; (2) Politicisation of education; (3) No clear vision for the reform; (4) No clear idea of goals or their operationalization; (5) The “educational law” proposed by the Ministry leads to lawlessness; (6) No rational strategy for introducing the changes will lead to wasting social and economic capital” (ibid).

The final, 10th section of the Congress was a poster session, which was an interesting visualisation of research results. Twelve participants decided to present their results in this form, 11 of whom actually presented posters, which were discussed by 10 speakers. Subjects of presented posters were differential, some of them express the issue of values in education, other refers to a teacher’s work or to culture. Some of them based on empirical research, other on theoretical analysis. The session was accompanied by a lively discussion, questions and reflections directed at the presenters.

The rich program of the three-day-long meeting in Białystok was proof that a meaningful life depends on a number of factors, but a multi-aspect analysis of the issue was conducted during the Congress, thanks to the involvement and hard work of all the participants.

By the decision of the Chief Directorate of the Polish Pedagogical Society the next, 10th National Pedagogical Congress will take place in Warsaw. It will be organised by prof. Stefan Kwiatkowski, rector of the Maria Grzegorzewska University in Warsaw and prof. Anna Wiłkomirska, dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Warsaw.

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References

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