

EDUCATION FORTUNES AND FAILURES: BETWEEN TENDENCIES AND CONTINGENCIES

Dear Readers,

It seems to be a paradox that frequently initiated political decisions in the field of education influence the expected alterations as well as a number of negative factors. Recently, the quality of education has been devoted meticulous attention. There is no doubt it is a pressing matter at all levels of the education system. Every stage is specific and encodes the fortunes and failures of the following stage. The one, who obviously failed to succeed at the very beginning, can experience arising problems in the future. First of all, in this particular case I refer to lack of certain education and therefore, probably no one can be blamed as the education system is often found guilty about the situation. The education of the post soviet countries encountered a variety of fortunes and failures. On the one hand, the reforms of the education system were an inevitable and necessary process. A worse point is that in certain cases, they became sustained, ongoing and not preserving the established order, and thus caused discontent at a varying degree. For example, applying the so called modern ICT in the education system was not always a clever idea as only later it was perceived that the technologies themselves brought no success. Skills at purposefully using them, abilities to effectively apply the required equipment in practice etc. are necessary.

The rejection of the identical programmes of general education in a number of post soviet countries including Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia can be accepted as success. Up to 1990, all Baltic States used the same course books as in the former Soviet Union. After gaining the independence, an underlying update of teaching content at all levels of the education system started. First original (not translated from the Russian language) course books appeared. In a few years time, first course books written by the European authors were published. However, didactically, these were not particularly suitable for Lithuanian students. For example, for more than ten years, the Latvian students of comprehensive school have been provided the possibility of choosing a learning curriculum. Although at previous times, they had a chance of selecting teaching subjects, still the latter principle did not satisfy expectations. A number of disagreements on bringing profiled teaching in practice occurred in the year 2000 (Lamanauskas, 2000b). The prospects and reality of the former education reforms taking place in Lithuania were openly discussed (2000a). It was expected that the then chosen model would ensure the individual possibilities of free choice. However, it can be stated that to a larger extent the implementation of the model in Lithuania did not succeed. After making the major transformations the initial

model was withdrawn. It is clear that not all students are equally good at all subjects taught at school. Although the idea of profiling was brilliant, however, the chosen strategy for implementing things in practice had not been properly checked considering the prevailing conditions in Lithuania. Another important aspect is that this seems to be one of the ways to deny the core of comprehensive schooling. Though rather selective education systems exist in a number of European countries (for example, in Germany), too early specialization contradicts the conception of general education as the one graduating secondary school, must receive thorough education. Certainly, an opponent should state that presently, almost there is no country that should not provide a child with the possibility of choosing at least a part of educational content. Even supposing it is true, who can ensure it is a careful, well-balanced etc. choice. Since 2007, controversially evaluated profiled education in the Lithuanian establishments of comprehensive education has been changed to a less elaborated system that allows the learners to individually decide on 40% of the subjects they want to be taught. Following a new requirement, a basic school graduate first of all, must choose not the profile but at least nine subjects from the basic school curriculum and almost the same number of the optional subjects.

Another failure is that up to now, no equally qualitative education has been guaranteed for students neither in Lithuania, nor in Latvia. Despite the fact, that conditionally the above mentioned countries are quite small, the level of social isolation varies to a large degree in the city site and the rural area. In the majority of cases, financial support for education institutions depends on municipalities as these promote the latter establishments and are responsible for providing the required resources which definitely worsens the quality of education in general. Secondary schools were transformed into the institutions of basic education whereas the former basic schools were either closed or reorganized into the establishments of primary education in the larger part of rural areas in Lithuania. Such situation cannot be explained referring to demographic arguments, for example a decreasing number of learners, which on the contrary, facilitates higher quality education, as having the same financial resources, the number of students remains reduced and therefore more attention can be devoted to teacher training etc. Modern technologies and a smaller amount of students in the classroom create conditions for every learner to work out an individual plan of education that helps with introducing a personal style and pace of studying. In this case, the larger part of countries supports the idea of individualized teaching.

Strong competition, general instructions on enrolling in the Lithuanian institutions of higher education and students experiencing pressure of their parents ignoring natural children's abilities to learn have a negative impact on education. To organize the process of total enrolment, all universities in Lithuania have formed an association. A number of young people break studying due to the wrong choice of a subject. For the last few years, the regulations have specified that up to 20 positions pointing out the chosen curricula of studies can be included in the application form. It is an opened lottery. The results of random enrolment are dramatic. Statistics shows that students' options frequently do not correspond neither to their interests nor individual possibilities. The annual average of people eliminated from higher and vocational schools makes more than 20 000. For example, in the school year 2003/2004, 378 in 10 000 citizens of Lithuania were studying in universities. Under statistics provided by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania, more than 70% the same year secondary school graduates are still studying in the institutions of higher education (44% - in universities and 238% - in colleges)

<http://www.smm.lt/>. Thus, on the one hand, the number of students constantly increases, on the other hand – the required financial support cannot be guaranteed, and therefore the quality of studies remains reduced. The Rector of Vilnius University suggests that if a number of students having no motivation enter the university and study no matter what they get, logically they fail to qualitatively study (Juodka, 2007). Another evident failure of education policy is that the number of managers having a doubtful qualification is increasing while that of qualified workers is decreasing in all three Baltic States.

The problem of teachers' social status can be accepted as a serious failure in some post soviet countries. Though education in Latvia and Lithuania is considered to be a priority field, nevertheless teachers' remunerations remain really poor. Such situation does not attract qualified teachers to work at school. They must work longer hours and sometimes increase work load twice which prevents them from raising qualification, training courses and professional advancement. For the last few years, the trade unions of the above discussed countries have been fighting for their rights so that they would be honestly paid for the work they did. Periodically performed protest actions and strikes do not help with achieving main political decisions.

A positive point is that all three Baltic States are closely collaborating in the fields of policy and education. The latest statistics and research have disclosed that the achievements of Estonian students surpassed those of Lithuanian and Latvian learners. The Latvian students of upper secondary school (forms from 10 to 12) were provided with new equipment necessary for laboratory experiments in sciences which is a very complimentary decision. During the last 15 years, an interest in natural sciences has remarkably decreased, is negatively evaluated by the majority of people and certainly will have a damaging impact in the future. A relevant task that should be undertaken by the Lithuanian Government is to arrange school network and properly supply schools with necessary equipment. However, a matter of concern is frequently and motivelessly closed schools having a small number of learners. The decrease of schoolchildren is not the major argument about the closure of school. In the majority of cases, the schools located in the rural area are the only focal points of education and culture. Therefore, the space of education in the Baltic States can be more or less treated in a similar way. It is likely that a close collaboration in the fields of education and policy will be central issues in the future. The Ministers of Education and Science of the Baltic States regularly discuss achievements in education in each of the countries.

The problems of education fortunes and failures have been briefly discussed. Even such a subtle point of view should encourage researchers to more critically analyze the phenomena of fortune and failure in education. Quite a few failures were obviously programmed in the past and retrospectively can be accepted as a tendency. A number of things are being programmed nowadays as this is the way to programme the future of our society. Is it a tendency, contingency or both? Sinergetically, contingency can be accepted as creative constructive antecedent. With reference to education, it has a positive shade because of the power pushing forward the tendencies stimulating the growth of education planning and efficiency.

The present and future education policy is definitely related to globalization and rapid changes taking place in society which is a real information revolution connected with the use of information communication technologies. It is clear that the countries that intended to change the education system and thus society itself had approved purposes. Some goals were achieved whereas a part of those were not attained. There is no excuse for a strong wish to intercept ex-

perience of the Western countries as the latter situation prevented from solving local problems. Therefore, a pertinent question *whether we have our own science and education policy and a future project or only blindly follow things occurring in the West and enthusiastically take them over* arises. An objective to change things and be changed is welcomed. It can be emphatically affirmed that education is able to change society. However, are the politicians competent enough to change education itself and create the required conditions for changes in education? The increase of reforms at different level is determined by gaining certain freedoms. Nevertheless, the main problem remains the same – how to combine the previously launched various projects on the reforms of education into the wholeness in order to achieve better implementation of the projects through coordinating them and how to succeed in getting the best results. Losses and failures have never been ageless as they can be treated as general systemic regularities. It is the time to take control over, predict and learn from the failures of education. In the end, a controversial question asked by A. Bloom *Will future learning be in tablet form?* can be repeated.

References

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