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A scholarly society in difficult times. An essay for the 35th anniversary of the establishment of the Polish Educational Research Association

Trying to socialise education,
we have failed to socialise ourselves.

I devote this text to a reflection on selected actions and directions of changes taking place in the period in question within the Polish Educational Research Association (PERA; Polskie Towarzystwo Pedagogiczne) as well as a sketch of proposals that might guide the Association's activity in future. It is not an objective narration, but a peer statement given from the point of view of a participant of events, feeling co-responsible for their content and course. It is to initiate a discussion on prospects for the Association's further development.

The Polish Educational Research Association was founded in the spring of 1981. However, while mentioning the date, we must also remember about earlier actions such as Ewaryst Estkowski's establishment of the Polish Educational Research Association in Poznan in 1848, i.e. during the difficult times of the partitions.

The recalled signal concerns the fitting of the contemporary PERA into the concrete tradition of Europe, where scholarly societies have been founded since the 15th century: initially in Italy, and subsequently in other countries. Poland was not delayed in this scope – in 1489, Sodalitas Litteraria Vistulana was founded here; but it was the organization of the Warsaw Association of Friends of Learning (Towarzystwo Warszawskie Przyjaciół Nauk) in 1800, which rooted institutions of this kind in the Polish intellectual culture, and that was the breakthrough moment for the promotion of the scholarly movement. From then on, general, specialist and field societies were developed, pursuing their activities either in favourable conditions (marked by an atmosphere conducive for research, free-thinking and responsibility for research promotion), or in the situation of limitations, when they had to persistently fight for their very survival (Bartosik 2013).

Today, according to estimates dating to 2002, Poland has about 280 general, regional, specialist, professional scientific, and scientific and technological societies, with a total of about 340,000 members. This means that the Polish Educational Research Association is embedded in a family of like-minded organisations, which

strengthens the energy resources of the entire environment and facilitates the mutual sharing of experience, which is especially important in difficult times.

Statutes of the present day Polish scholarly societies (and I studied the documents ranging from the statute of the Polish Philosophical Association, and ending with the statute of the Polish Scientific Association of Combustion Engines), present their goals, and apply to two avenues of action:

- practice and promotion of research through their members' participation in the development of the relevant scholarly disciplines;
- promotion of research results, intellectual reflection, dissemination of knowledge in the spirit of responsibility, and popularisation of cognitive achievements among both their members and the broader public.

The recently modified statute of PERA, which provides that: "The aim of the Association is to participate in the development and promotion of pedagogical sciences both in Poland and internationally" (Chapter II §10 It. 1 of the Statute of the Polish Educational Research Association of 11 May 2016 with amendments of 6 June 2017) has the same structure.

I intend to base my reflections concerning the 35-year long activity of PERA on the implementation of both these statutory aims of the Association, highlighting the complications involved.

Going back to the title of this work, we may say that 1981, i.e. the year in which the Association was established, was both a difficult and an easy time for its then-activists. What made their work easier resulted from the experience of the "Solidarity" felt as a community endeavour fostering empowerment attitudes, the experience of a realistic sense of agency, and – in the organisational aspect – the extension and maturation of a mass-scale social organization, effectively demanding an improvement of the quality of human life, including the level of education. The above made people feel very strongly motivated to become involved in public issues, and in the daily life resulted in enthusiasm, cooperation, trust, friendship, optimism, energy, and hope both in the individual and social dimensions, while in the case of pedagogues – also in a vision of the improvement of the condition of education and strengthening its pro-developmental potentials.

Difficulties of the times included the necessity to overcome the political system and act in the conditions of the absence of clear perspectives and funds, the unstable situation, the appearance of unexpected hazards including the hardest one – that of martial law, having to cope with the harsh daily reality, and the awareness of the huge scope and novelty of the work ahead.

I have to confess that it was not during the most turbulent days, but only later that I appreciated how people who were at the time trying to establish PERA, including Professors Bogdan Suchodolski, Wincenty Okoń, Mikołaj Kozakiewicz, and Zbigniew Kwieciński, managed to overcome the difficulties, and use the glimpse and the narrow in let of freedom between the signing of the August Agreements in 1980 and the introduction of martial law in December 1981 to actually carry out this extremely important undertaking.

The preliminary programme of PERA was announced to the public in the form of a publication in the *Głos Nauczycielski* magazine ([Teachers' Voice]; 1981, No. 46) under the title *Uchwały w sprawach dla narodu najważniejszych* [Resolutions in Matters Most Important to the People]. It stressed the significance of education for the entire scope of social life that required reconstruction and repair, specified tasks resulting from developmental negligence committed in relation to youth, and appealed to everyone with a feeling for the future and goodness of Poland to participate in educational work. It was a message of a huge social importance.

The foundation of the Association in March 1981 was indeed no mean feat! It was followed by intensive basic works, i.e. the establishment of regional branches, which organised scientific meetings, seminars, and conferences, and planned and carried out research and publication projects in a pro-democratic atmosphere, in cooperation with the local teacher environments. In a nutshell, the 1980s were a busy period of the start-up of the Association's activity, pursued in spite of many difficulties. It was possible to overcome them owing to the serious voluntary involvement of PERA members.

Continuing to discuss difficult times, I am now moving to 1989, which witnessed the political breakthrough. We entered the new reality in the conditions of a rapid social change – both desiring it, and unprepared for it, as we did not have a clear or a relatively uniform vision of the future, or the appropriate power of execution, and were burdened with the past both in the material and mental sphere, which applied to both pedagogues and the ones who were to become their “charges” (Kwieciński 1990).

Research by Jadwiga Koralewicz and Marek Ziółkowski covering the end of the 1980s and the subsequent period showed that the mentality of Poles at the time, which was described in terms of individualism/collectivism, empowerment/subordination, and productivity/receptiveness, included deeply engrained consequences of the previous political system (Koralewicz, Ziółkowski 2003). For pedagogues, the above signalled the huge scale of the tasks ahead of the new education, but also – indirectly – the source of the question to what extent we ourselves were ready to undertake the necessary work.

The awareness of the situation of the time was reflected in the formula and motto of PERA's First Convention (1993), during which the identity of pedagogy was discussed. Rather than obtaining a uniform point of view on the issue, it was about turning towards reflective working through the issue of the senses, problems, and methodology of the scholarly discipline we pursued, as well as our self-knowledge as people of the discipline.

As far as the political system was concerned, we entered the macrostructure of parliamentary democracy, and declared activity for the benefit of the democratization of education, which required an internalisation of the appropriate principles. At a certain point of time, these were insightfully sketched and collected to make a description of a model democrat by Maria Ossowska (Ossowska 1992), and were later complemented by Barbara Skarga in her lecture on citizenship given at the University of Białystok (Kraków 2007).

However, what was the relationship between these models and us – were we democrats, and what was our attitude to citizenship? These issues that had to be faced also constituted some of the difficulties the Association had to deal with at the time.

In a paper given by the Head of PERA during its first convention, entitled *Mimikra czy sternik? Dramat pedagogiki w sytuacji przesilenia formacyjnego* [Mimicry or Helmsman? The Drama of Pedagogy in the Situation of a Formative Turning Point], the problem was defined clearly – the question was whether education is an element of adjustment to the current qualities, or whether it is an emancipatory factor (Kwieciński 1993). It was all, in fact, about a debate on education as a debate on social change, as Lech Witkowski insightfully pointed out (Witkowski 2010).

During the first convention, a serious reflection and discussion were initiated on the issues that were continued to be researched, albeit with changeable intensity, in the 1990s. The discussions both reflected and stimulated thematic publications of the time – let us mention for example selected texts published under self-speaking titles such as *Pytanie o pedagogikę* [The Question of Pedagogy] by Andrea Folkierska (Folkierska 1990) or *Ukryte założenia trzech krytyk. Przyczynek do samowiedzy pedagogii przejścia i pogranicza* [Concealed Assumptions of Three Critiques. A Contribution to Self-Knowledge of the Pedagogy of Passage and Borderline] by Robert Kwaśnica (Kwaśnica 1990).

In subsequent years, reflection on pedagogical self-knowledge markedly diminished – perhaps because the stimulating circumstances were less sharp. We worked in the times that were no longer that difficult – they facilitated both the practicing of research and reflection on educational issues: access to tools such as lectures and international contacts was improving, conditions allowed for familiarisation with and interpretative identification of the formerly “absent” discourses as well as publishing activity, we used freedom of association, and we organized scientific conferences and triannual national-scale pedagogical conventions.

The entire movement resulted in research and many great publications, but also questions concerning the social circulation of pedagogical thought and the quality of people as implementers of change. However, it did not include a large share of topics concerning the level of academic pedagogues as “interpreters” of the socio-educational change, which would be necessary and important in the light of Bauman differentiating them from “legislators” (Bauman 1987).

We returned to a self-analytical direction towards the end of the 1990s. The 5th Convention of Delegates of PERA, which was held in 1996, almost marked a decade of political transformations and was devoted to the topic of “The Achievements of Polish Pedagogy after 1989”, becoming an opportunity to exchange thoughts in this scope. It was considered that the achievements were considerable – even impressive (as described by Tadeusz Lewowicki), which was supported with convincing data. They were marked by passing from “[...] partial images of knowledge to the picture filled with various educational theories, concepts and practices – with diverse assumptions, ideological and social concepts, and models of execution” (Lewowicki 1997: 11–13). It was then that the outlines of the multiplicity of topics, methods, and

languages of pedagogy, which over time transformed into trends of various pedagogies, could be seen (Jaworska-Witkowska, Kwieciński 2011).

The good quality of the research carried out at the time and later, as well as of numerous publications, is a measure of the degree to which PERA carries out its statutory tasks in the area of the Association's participation in the development of scientific pedagogical knowledge. I put it in this way, although it is impossible to identify and separate the Association's activities in this scope from the activities of other institutions such as academic structures, the Committee of Pedagogical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences, and the administration of higher education institutions, which are likewise directed towards the stimulation of scientific dynamics. Despite this limitation, I am adopting an assumption of a positive role of the activity of the Association for the scientific activity of the pedagogical environment.

The positive, although at times also critical assessment of pedagogues' scholarly achievements during the more than thirty years long period, is accompanied by regularly returning questions as to the functioning of the achievements in the real social circulation.

Expressing his concern about the quality of the pedagogical academic environment as a carrier and promoter of the achievements, Kwieciński formed the following significant questions as early as in 1996: "All Polish pathologies are reflected in our environment, which, after all, is academic, as in a mirror. Who, then, is to educate our society? Who is to educate its educators?" and he put forward a postulate of reliable research penetrating the ethos of academic pedagogical institutions all over Poland, taking it as an opportunity to additionally irrigate the professional self-awareness of pedagogues and their awareness of mutual relations (Kwieciński 1997: 8–9).

Differentiation of the condition of pedagogical thought, measured by the scholarly achievements from the quality of its social circulation, directed attention to the appearance, between the theoretically exposed identification of "nationalisation" and "socialisation" of pedagogy (Kwieciński 1996) that was of key importance in the breakthrough time, of a new phenomenon of its "privatization".

In its original use, this word was not tantamount to a multi-staff employment of pedagogues in the rapidly developing non-state schools, but to the mental direction of the people of education, who were building their positions, elevating their own good (their private, "home" good, which was also executed in public institutions) above the educational common good. At some point, the social sense of the thus-understood privacy was discussed by Hannah Arendt, who wrote that "The privation of privacy lies in the absence of others; as far as they are concerned, private man does not appear, and therefore it is as though he did not exist. Whatever he does remains without significance and consequence to others, and what matters to him is without interest to other people" (Arendt 1998: 58). What was of particular importance in our case, was the low concentration, as if even it was absent, of people's interest in the communal dimension of the educational problems they talked about.

What was stressed in answer to the question of whether the nationalisation of pedagogy originating from the gone-by system had changed to its "socialisation" was

the significance of the development of the multiplicity of varieties and languages of thinking of education considered to be a symptom of denationalisation – along with it, the new phenomenon of “privatization” as a current style and manner of practicing pedagogy was signalled. It manifested itself in the treatment of research as fragmentary explications of individual positions; voices on the pedagogical scene were atomised, displaying the speakers’ attachment to their own standpoints regardless of the entirety of the educational issue in its macroscale, and their minimized effort to listen to others, and to relate to them through insight guided by the intention to cooperate in the socio-educational reality and its comprehensive emancipatory transformation (Rutkowiak 1997: 20–21).

It was during conferences at that time that a specific manner of communication was developed consisting in talking about issues somehow “next to each other”, when each speaker presented their own fragmented theses, sometimes not even fully related to the topic of a given conference, and there was no time – and perhaps also internal motivation – for discussion. This was tantamount to a “research individualism” (Cierzniwska 2011: 353) that was inconsistent with the principle of the balance between talking and listening marking democratic relations, and did not foster the concentration of efforts and directing pedagogy towards the building of education understood as a “movement and social undertaking”, as Kwieciński described democratic and humanistic education in pioneering terms (Kwieciński 1982).

It was then that during a meeting of the Association, I heard the phrase “between us – private entrepreneurs” treated as a joke, but one verbalising the ego-centring behaviours and developing relations with the fellow participants of events as separatist relations, which facilitates the reduction of reflection on the educational whole as a common good.

The behaviours of the participants of the scientific meetings organised by the Association at the time can be commented on through the lenses of the practice of negative freedom understood as an absence of limitations. Possibly, the disappearance of the former system-induced barriers to the discussion of certain topics and the manners of practicing research grounding it in the positivist paradigm considered to be the model to be followed caused an eruption of the mood of liberty and provided grounds for the formation of a polyphony, which however failed to organize itself into a paradigmatic reflective whole to the degree that would promote the development of socialized education built for the common good. Regardless of the reason behind that situation, the lack of such awareness was a weak side of our endeavours of the time.

The situation can also be theoretically grounded in a higher generality field with a reference to the conceptual map of paradigms (orthodoxy, heterodoxy, and heterogeneity) drawn by Rolland G. Paulston and presented by Kwieciński during PERA’s First Convention, and subsequently cognitively explored in analyses of the condition of Polish pedagogy (Hejnicka-Bezwińska 1997, 2011).

However we interpret the moods that at the time we probably identified poorly, it should be stressed that the delight in the individual significance of every educator’s discoveries or para-discoveries, made as if out of one’s own cognitive need, was

not accompanied by a clear combination of efforts of socialized pedagogues guided by their care for the building of education as a significant undertaking with a public/communal value.

In this place, I shall refer to the idea of the responsibility of researchers, which has been elaborated theoretically, and grounded institutionally, as manifested in its inclusion in the statutes of some Polish scholarly societies. It seems that at some point the question of PERA's responsibility for education weakened or utterly disappeared from our attention, although its more decisive public coverage would be particularly important when fundamental educational transformations were carried out, including the preparation and implementation of the educational system reform (1999), creation of new curricula, introduction of methods of external, standardized assessment as an actual tool of school selections, changing principles of teacher education and professional development, reform of the higher education, rooting younger children in educational institutions, and quality of learning outcomes, which today are described as an educational calamity when viewed as indicators of the mental condition of society.

Recent issues concern the accelerated "school revolutions" to be introduced as of 2017, as announced on the internet, that are to include changes to the school system structure, history curriculum, concepts of vocational education (with the transformation of "vocational schools" into "industry schools"), principles of school head selection and work of class tutors, and the weakening of the role of local governments in the management of education (<https://men.gov.pl>).

After the first spontaneous and somehow "innocent" wave of privatization of pedagogy marking the beginnings of the 1990s, which focused on endeavours to secure individual positions, and which probably reflected the psychosocial properties of behaviours of people practicing isolationism faced with a rapid democratization of life, a much more advanced second wave came.

I personally perceive it as an already supra-individual (because instrumentalised by the system) reduction of the activity of educators' to self-serving behaviours directed at the development of their own careers with the help of methods modelled on the market system that are harmonized with the mechanisms of that system. I am talking about the institutionally grounded privatisation on a larger scale, made legitimate by the appropriate arrangement of procedures, with pressure on success understood as a sort of profit, and substantially grounded in the neoliberal cultural change.

Descriptions of mechanisms aimed at the shaping of the appropriate human attitudes and behaviours can be found in strategic documents (sometimes projects) concerning the directions of development and reform of higher education in the scientific area and the management of higher education, as well as in the tactical project of bureaucratizing didactics (encased in numerous documents) with a dehumanization of our work and depriving it of individual responsibility, which was to be "controlled" via the introduction of detailed control as a tool of supervision. For example, the main document determining the quality of education describes it as consistence with standards and usefulness for the clients (Hornowska 2003).

What is more important, the bureaucratization of school education, probably most intense at the higher education level, is accompanied by the naturalisation and interiorisation of the market order by a considerable share of researchers themselves, who become passionate about becoming fluent in the operation of procedures, which is often accompanied by their weakening involvement in the gist of their practiced research area. They seem to accept the change of their position of scholars into the position of the “community of the audited”, deprived of trust (Kruszelnicki 2011: 179), although – at the same time – the bitter tone of the daily statements of the people of science indicates that the replacement of the academic with the business style of university management causes deep dissatisfaction. The whole situation reflects the academicians’ internal conflict of identity.

More broadly speaking, let us say that the direction of the current changes facilitates the changing of the movement and circulation of lively research and didactic reflection, traditionally rooted in schools of higher education and permeated with creative efforts and high valuing of autotelic knowledge as well as the interactive/humanistic activities of educational subjects – university people representing various disciplines and levels and their students, shaped as people-citizens, into increasingly formalized, algorithmized and standardised activities that are quantified in a way facilitating a statistical comparative processing enabling positioning (which is a marketing term) by setting together people’s actions and clerical formulas, and promoting the competitive attitudes of educational staff. This is also related to changes within academic institutions and their orientation towards a “scientific and educational product” (Cierzniwska 2011: 353) of traditionally factory provenance (Czerepaniak-Walczak 2013). This is tantamount to directing academicians’ efforts to learning regulatory principles, and, in the scholarly sphere, to practicing promotion-related research aimed at the building of their own successes, which I shall still call privatisation. Let me just once again stress that this is, however, a privatisation that is different than the one from the first wave, as it concerns not so much research interests and results considered by the particular researchers significant enough to be presented and exposed before others, as promoting one’s own interests as a tool of winning a place in the competitive system of efficient researchers as people of the market game of the dominating system.

Here, the system of higher education itself, being a framework institution for their actions, is treated as a service provider directed at the “production of knowledge” (Kwiek 2015a: 35), being – in fact – fuel for the competitive global economic development and factory production of diplomas of university graduates constituting a human capital of the efficient, broadly understood production work.

Going further this way, directed by what is referred to as “reform endeavours”, it was proposed that universities be divided into scientific ones – “flagships” – and didactic ones – preparing students for the standard work of office workers and politically managing the social time of young people. It is a concept which is contradictory to the Humboldtian idea of the university, which combines the practicing of science and didactics, fastening together various branches of knowledge, and building cognitive relations between professors and students, since it is about a unilateral

elevation of the pragmatic functions of education with separation from the function of social enlightenment and improvement of the general public's life not limited to efficiency and financial/productive effectiveness. The appropriate classification of academicians is to be based on research results acquired as a part of formalised, strongly competitive, international systems of grants, points, and ranks, with the immanently inscribed competition based on the privatized orientation of subjects trying to win a better position in the race.

In this situation, the question of *academicians' self-knowledge* becomes intriguing, which applies to both the "didactised" and the "true" researchers guided towards the production of knowledge at the top international level. This is about the conscious awareness of the former of the fact of the degrading of their academic-didactic activity resulting from the real, organizational and financial separation of it from the practicing of science, which will decrease the current level of university education, and, consequently, diminish the mental condition of the society, as well as about the orientation of the latter universities, who provide their energy and competitive talents to the contemporary corporative global economy, with the terror of economic development, acting in the name of controversial "progress", which – indirectly – is tantamount to the co-participation of academicians in the generation of drastic social disparities, currently considered to be the greatest problem of contemporaneity (Piketty 2015). The problem has been rapidly worsening, taking the form of overlapping civilizational, political, economic, and institutional crises as manifested by the recent dramatic migration movement. They call for the application of sustainable global solutions, but – as of today – such solutions cannot be created even by the best "producers of knowledge". Are we, therefore, on the right track? Or are we making self-destructive movements?

Reflection on the meta-level of the scholarly race coloured with the privatisation and market tones uncovers the current quality of the certainly not new questions of social responsibility and ethical conduct of the people of science. Are they the topic of a self-reflection of scholars in the difficult current times – albeit they are difficult in a different way than precious? Do scholarly societies initiate and keep up discussion on the contemporary standing of science and the self-knowledge of scholars? Is their voice heard in the public sphere and is it food for thought? And how does the activity of the Polish Educational Research Association present itself in this scope?

Having presented the question of changes taking place in the system of higher education, I am now returning to the issue of the grounding of the phenomenon of the second wave of privatization of pedagogy in a specific sociocultural context.

This context is the contemporary state of the neoliberalisation of all disciplines of life developing on the global scale, also affecting the practice and application of science. Described from a variety of sides in literature, referred to as financial capitalism, the condition is above all tantamount to a radical marketization of institutions, actions, thoughts and human values, directed at the maximization of real and possible profits and involving consequences such as drastic inequalities of distribution resulting in social disparities, with an unbalanced surplus/shortage of all goods, also in the area of education.

Pedagogues reacted to these inequalities, and, to be more precise, to one of their aspects, i.e. an insufficient access to and low schooling of the Polish society in the past decades, with mass-employment in the rapidly developing non-state run schools of higher education. The above resulted in the weakening of research activity, in particular in “soft” disciplines, including pedagogy, which was examined, documented, and interpreted by way of an application of the theory of institutionalisation, deinstitutionalization, and re-institutionalisation of the research mission of Polish universities (Kwiek 2015b).

Pedagogues often rationalize their directing of activity towards the organisational/didactic side, with the weakening of the scholarly work (to be more precise, its concentration in the hands of a part of the environment), with the putting of the noble idea of making education available, which is traditionally inscribed in their ethos, at the forefront. The past romantic appeals, strengthened with current research results documenting educational inequalities and their negative consequences for the development of individuals and societies (Potulicka 2012a, 2012b), were considered the justification behind the intensified didactization of the activity of pedagogues. Pondering, more broadly, on the pedagogues’ helplessness or negligence, the justification or blame in the times of need (I am talking about both social and individual, private needs), Tadeusz Pilch put forward a convincing hypothesis that the presence of the attitude of withdrawal and opportunism developed on the part of science and scholars the sense of helplessness in relation to the social reality, which marked the intellectual environment of pedagogy for many years and which “[...] causes allergic reactions to appeals for its presence in public life” (Pilch 2004: 67).

Discussing further the phenomenon of the privatisation of pedagogy, let us stress that it involves *subcutaneous, ambiguous pressures* that cannot be interpreted easily, and that result in pulsating tensions and hesitations as to whether education and pedagogues as its people are really entangled in a neoliberal pitfall, and whether the pitfall applies to the Polish educational situation or is just a harmless manifestation of global progress and a developmental norm of contemporaneity.

This is the context of the state of affairs in the situation when the reality moved from the external plan, which was related to a clash of intentions and research desires of active pedagogues in a difficult system and life conditions, to an internal plan concerning the mental attitude to the current cultural reality in which education is entangled and which causes its paradoxes (Potulicka, Rutkowiak 2012; Boryczko 2015).

Pondering on the possibility of an intellectual grasping of the situation, we may boil the issue down to *the collision of ethos and interest*, which puts us at the crossroads between the focusing of scholarly work on questions related to the pro-developmental education which continues to be understood and practiced, in spite of the conditions of the reality, as a “movement and social undertaking”, or the use of imitative, apparent behaviours (Dudzikowa, Knasiecka-Falbierska 2013) directed at one’s own interests, with cynicism at the background. Oskar Szwabowski described the issue radically, pointing out that it facilitates the use of ambiguous games: “In neoliberal management, the academic body becomes either a subjected, tamed, trained body which must no longer be idle and which must become entirely

flexible, mobile, and competitive, or a tactical body undertaking acts of resistance, sabotage, deceptions, and breaking the rules of the game” (Szwabowski 2014: 216).

Bringing the issue of the collision of ethos and interest into the discussion contains a certain number of simplifications related to the identification of the possible tones of the meaning of the relation between these phenomena – such as the idea of “ethical interest”; but nevertheless it can be useful as a treatment facilitating the practicing of environmental self-reflection, involving the change from the acceptance of and subordination to external instrumental pressures and impacts, when we decide that it is no longer possible to avoid the demands of the situation, to the intellectual elaboration of the problematics, directed at the activation of the possible resistance and opposition activity practiced despite the conditions and times that are difficult, considering their current quality.

However, sole discussion of the question is not sufficient, because what counts is real human behaviours, and these are related to the state of the people’s self-knowledge and understanding of the cultural quality of the times in which they act; today, we are dealing with the times that are duplicitous and thus hard to be deciphered. On the one hand, they are good for us as they expose, offer, or actually impose a profusion of offers, including educational ones, and on the other hand, they camouflage the negative sides to this availability.

Problems with the conscious being in the neoliberal system result from the failure to identify, also by some academicians, the quality of the system (a political doctrine, worldview, macroeconomic theory, ideology) from the ideas and practices of liberalism. Misunderstandings in the terminological area, which are not limited solely to these two concepts, have distinct consequences, and, as Andrzej Walicki put it, have as much as “ [...] a deforming effect on public awareness, and even on the shape of the political system we create” (Walicki 2013: IX).

Difficulties with the deciphering of the contemporary domination of neoliberalism and conditions for the conscious understanding of its unique liveliness were recently insightfully discussed by Colin Crouch. He believes that what stands in the heart of the riddle is the discrepancy between the actually existing neoliberalism and its sterile ideological version. This actuality consists in the domination of mighty corporations in public life, while the ideological version of neoliberalism is built by the political conflict between the state and the market (Crouch 2011: 83). This issue seems to be controversial when pedagogues exchange their thoughts, as some of them see the state as the power enabling a potential improvement of the condition of education carried out through the limitation of privatisation, while others evaluate the state as a system destructive to education. The issue is expressively presented in Bogusław Śliwerski’s works (2015).

I take the possibility of yet another interpretation of the issue from my inspiration with Andrzej Leder’s book on dreamt revolutions. The two revolutions, which the author subjected to historical-psychoanalytical Lacanian analysis, concern the consequences of the annihilation of Jews as Polish towns people during the Second World War and the annihilation of the Polish landed gentry after 1945. These events that have been significant for the development of the identity of Poles, were enforced

on us from the outside, and carried out by alien forces with an unconscious, passive, as if deep in sleep, unintentional participation of the “objects of revolution” they concerned. We should remember that the society of the time was poorly educated and its mentality still displayed the remains of the feudal economy based on the work of slaves that was practiced in Poland until the mid-nineteenth century in the form resembling a prolonged Middle Ages (Sowa 2011; *Raport “Polska 2050”* [Report ‘Poland 2050’] 2011). Leder carried out historical logic exercises in this scope, and I suggest that an analogy be used and that the introduction of a neoliberal cultural change to Poland be treated as one more dreamt revolution that we have experienced.

The third revolution, just like the two previous ones: the one related to townspeople and the one involving the landed gentry and peasants, came from outside in the circumstances of the shock of the political and economic transformation of the end of the 1980s. Since we have not yet worked it through intellectually, it has not led to the acquisition of a clear-cut, specific identity (here, we are interested in the identity of pedagogues and the question to what extent they have cognitively consumed the educational/neoliberal changes), due to which, as Leder explains, the contemporary members of society, lacking the adequate identity, “[...] passively experience emancipation, since it is absent in their thoughts [...], [and] avoid entering the public life as self-aware political subjects” (Leder 2014: 8). I am of the opinion that the moderate participation of pedagogues in today’s public life can be explained in much the same way.

Going back to the experience of our functioning in the Polish Educational Research Association, let us say that we performed a leap towards the awakening (using Leder’s language) in the form of a movement that was organised, externalised, communal, and clear from the point of view of its identity, probably only once during the last 35 year – during the 6th Convention of PERA in Lublin in 2007. First, during a discussion of the Programme Committee, the topic of the event was chosen as “Education – morality – the public sphere”. And although we failed to introduce the word “ethicality” instead of “morality” to the title of the Convention, which would be consistent with the initial intention, we did manage to discuss the problem of the rooting and quality of the actual functioning of education in the public sphere as a state departing both from declarations and the needs of the public.

However, the formulation of the mobilisation slogan itself was not sufficient, since it was necessary to design working solutions. PERA members from the Gdansk Branch of the Association provided a particularly significant contribution to this work. I remember a meeting during which we decided that it was necessary to call burning issues related to education and ethics by their name in an organised way during the Convention. We worked in no time, and it was still during the meeting that we reported the “hot” problems we identified, and small working groups formed around them spontaneously. During just a couple of days, they elaborated the issues, and the entire document was drawn up by Astrid Męczkowska-Christiansen and Piotr Zamojski.

It was entitled *Stanowisko uczestników VI Ogólnopolskiego Zjazdu Pedagogicznego Polskiego Towarzystwa Pedagogicznego w sprawie stanu i perspektyw rozwoju edukacji w Polsce* [The Position of the 6th National Convention of the Polish Edu-

cational Research Association Concerning the State and Prospects for the Development of Education in Poland] and concerned:

- appropriation of education by short-term political interests;
- threats to the acquisition of intellectual and civic competences posed by the contents and form of school education;
- consequences of educational reforms (1999) that are contrasting with their initial assumptions;
- reproduction of social inequalities by school;
- increase in educational selective mechanisms generating the myth of the universality of Poles' education;
- breaking down of ethical responsibility of teachers as a result of the bureaucratisation of management;
- disappearance of public debate on education.

I have quoted the headings of the document to turn attention to the language that was developed at the time – the language of a comprehensive approach and factual justification of the subject, exposing its current communal significance and full of care for the improvement of the quality of education. It was marked by a substantial clarity of reporting issues, without the camouflage of slogans or ultra-specialist vocabulary, which made the contents clear and accessible to everyone working in the area of education – from teachers and academic lecturers to educational decision-makers, since they were aimed at a public presentation of the document with the hope for a response from the public. In an unmasking way, it pointed out the gist of the relation between the state of education and the quality of social life as well as the absence of coherence of the relations towards systemic assumptions of democracy. Therefore, it was a document identifying issues of basic importance for education as an indispensable public undertaking – one that is actually not implemented.

The swiftness of the work that was carried out and the excellent cooperation of people reflected the tension accompanying the topics in question, and the people's strong internal motivation as well as readiness to discuss them in the public arena.

The document was adopted by the majority of participants as the position of the Convention, since 68% of them voted in favour in a secret ballot. However, this meant that nearly one third of the participants did not approve of the basic theses about the poor condition of education and the need for improvement despite the fact that they were reported in a matter-of-fact way and with moderate criticism. The result, which is still puzzling, was a specific indicator of the state of the “pedagogical spirit” of the academic environment of educators. Later, Ewa Rodziewicz asked some questions important for the issue, reporting that “[...] 32% of the participants of the 6th Convention rejected? refrained from voting?, neglected the fact of taking a position?, did not support the position of the Convention. This situation provides food for thought and breeds further questions as to what pedagogical orientations, concealed and open thinking programmes, and positions of pedagogues re' the condition of present day pedagogy, the state of education, and the direction of discourse activated as a part of PERA in Poland/Gdansk really are?” (Rodziewicz 2008: 56). These questions remain open.

Attempts at the publication of the convention document in the mass media, undertaken by Dariusz Kubinowski – Head of the Organisational Committee – proved to be futile; no publication or feedback followed, although the text is available in the volume of convention materials (Rutkowiak, Kubinowski, Nowak 2007: 19–24).

On the one hand, the entire issue can be interpreted negatively as an expression of marginalisation on the public arena of the voice on the condition of education expressed by members of a scholarly society, as well as a limitation of the social importance of education itself. But PERA's failure can also be considered a result of its non-politicisation (let us differentiate here between politicisation from a political character) tantamount to the absence of ideological addiction that might be supported by the publication of the convention document. Was the non-effectiveness of the attempt to introduce educational questions to the public sphere testimony to the pathology of the space itself or did it result from the Association's independence or insufficient involvement of its members?

The recalled convention events dating to 2007 evoke the topic of the critical practice of pedagogy. Pedagogues publish many important critical texts, and there are thematic conferences – and PERA members participate in these undertakings, too. This activity may undermine the thesis on the neoliberal (culture and identification-related) sleep of pedagogues, but it may also be tantamount to the expression of the movement of thoughts, but one applying to fragmentary issues or issues formulated in a hermetic language of professionals, which results in the fact that educational topics do not permeate to the broader public. This causes the “absence of pedagogy”, “[...] its marginal place at universities and its weak, dumb position in the public space” (Kopciewicz 2012: 36). This condition was well described in an opinion I heard behind the scenes of the conference: “Critical pedagogy is well and kicking, but it is dead”.

The opinion referred to the gap between the contents of substantial analyses, indicating educational shortcomings, and the low quality of educational practice, which means that the warnings are not translated into actions, or, perhaps, they are improperly formulated, which in turn results from the shortage of our caring and clear interest in the educational whole or is tantamount to such a bureaucratic-systemic entrenchment of the practice that it is difficult to find a discursive access to it. This is related to the para-technical guiding of teachers and pushing away of professional pedagogues from participation in the conceptual work of educational bodies, and is manifested in the severing of the formerly vivid working contacts between teachers, pupils' parents, and academicians.

Due to the current instrumental treatment of teachers as untrusted technicians of education, who are not always aware of their own position and situation in which they work, they search for instructions rather than educational reflection, thus favouring contacts with pragmatic interpreters of the current regulations and distributors of methodological cribs rather than contacts with general thinkers operating the language of “useless abstraction” – a negative label referring to academic pedagogues.

At the same time, however, teachers are deeply dissatisfied with their current professional status, and their condition can be described as dramatic, as the solu-

tions they are forced to adopt clash with principles of their professional ethos, which is still alive among them (Klus-Stańska 2006; Rutkowiak 2012). If this is really so, we can hope that there still is a spark of the potential of our mutual contacts that used to be so fruitful.

I am closing this topic with a conclusion that the low vitality of critical pedagogy results from its closure; it is partially a linguistic closure, but also closure related to the merits, when we focus on fragmentary issues without perceiving relations with the social whole in which we live, or ones in which critics are simultaneously an unnamed object of criticism, which is not convincing to the recipients. I shall illustrate the above with an example concerning the lowering of the level of education in mass universities, where the same people perform didactic work that should be performed by several individuals, not always providing top quality education, while being authors of critical texts concerning negative aspects of the Polish educational boom. Such practices weaken the force of practicing criticism.

A convincing argument concerning the above issue was put forward by Witkowski, who not only supported the practice of critical pedagogy, but also formulated a meaningful thesis: "If pedagogy is serious (i.e. if it is pedagogy *tout court*) – then it is critical" (Witkowski 2012: 19) and treated the criticism as a meta-theoretical postulate, which means that pedagogy must not only unmask, but should also alarm – tantamount to a diagnosis that it is no longer possible to take a mask off, as we are dealing with a fundamental threat (Witkowski 2012: 26).

Is the Polish Educational Research Association a forum for the naming of the basic, alarmist educational threats, or does it focus solely on an occasional and fragmentary presentation of issues of medium importance? It is worth asking ourselves these questions in the jubilee year.

The presented review of selected works and events gives grounds to believe that as members of the Polish Educational Research Association we have no arguments to summarise 35 years of our activity in a solely positive way. Along with many achievements concerning mostly participation in the development of the pedagogical sciences, which is consistent with some statutory tasks of the Association, the time also brought certain shortages, which can be related to the second part of the tasks concerning the promotion of knowledge on education and presenting its problems and interests to authorities and the public with a view to the development of education reflecting our times and human needs.

This is not about the elementary promotion of knowledge on education, but, more broadly, about the life of the knowledge in people's minds, i.e. about its social circulation supported with the Association's active care for the social and civic educational awareness of teachers, parents, pupils, educational decision-makers, politicians, and people of the media, who in their majority function at the moment at the level of opinions which are commonplace, intuitive, narrowly empirical, sensational, amateur, accidental, imitative, guided by their own interests, politicised, and display no orientation in the genesis, senses, importance, and seriousness of the planned and the used educational solutions (Dobrołowicz 2013).

Actions designed and executed on the basis of such resources bring about social damage resulting from a non-recognition of the complexity of phenomena, their context, the absence of analyses of the state of education, and avoidance of the activation of the prospective social imagination as a route to the creation of social educational imaginaria. In contrast to the above, we should hope that the publicization of knowledge on education may contribute to the intensification of reflection, a rationalisation of intentions and the performed actions, deepening of thought, and the limitation of damages by opening up opportunities for balanced ideas with a marked expression of criticism towards “showy” projects, which, despite providing firework-like effects, fail to change anything for the better.

What role can academic pedagogues with PERA people play as propagators – educational translators? Avoiding “enlightening” simplifications, let us say that this can be the role of the initiators of constant reflection, discussions and public thematic debates that – in spite of difficulties – can be carried out, as was demonstrated for example by Zamojski’s work at the University of Gdańsk in 2009 and 2010 (Zamojski 2010, 2011).

The current state of things calls for our permanent reflection on the quality and grounding of the educational whole as well as its prospects for the future, but also reflection on the activity of the Association itself. However, the Association, as one of its members put it “[...] seems to have come to a standstill”. This is because the already well-worn solutions are repeated and old ideas are reproduced – mainly the ones dating to the pioneering times, when what was most important was the posing of the new problems of the democratization of education, and we could maintain a consistency between the form and contents of our actions. Today, the content of issues that need to be undertaken changes, which stems from the aggravation of crises, threats to democracy and the resulting educational complications, while the forms of our work remain almost virtually unchanged. If novelties are introduced, they are to do with organisational and technical solutions rather than merits, thus not reaching the gist of the matters Witkowski called “fundamental threats”. The sources of hot problems of today’s education are not innocent, as they are tense, conflict-based social, political, economic, and cultural states of our rapidly thickening reality. Failure to see them as the foundation for the grounding of education, only moderate the combination of the educational question with the great issues of our times, and an atomization of the undertaken topics is at the root of the question of the quality of education being underestimated as significant for the social whole. This results in the self-marginalisation of pedagogues, understood as their own placement of both themselves and the pedagogical issues they examine on the sidelines, rather than in the main streams of life that are to do with education, whether or not we pay any attention to them.

I shall illustrate the hypothesis of self-marginalisation with an example. A part of it is the topic of PERA’s forthcoming subsequent National Pedagogical Convention in Białystok, contained in the slogan “Towards valuable life. Ideas – concepts – practices”, and developed in the titles of ten convention sections that were made available

online (9zjazd.ptp.uwb.edu.pl). They were expressed in language that was bombastic, postulational, noble, lofty, referring to the great being – language that was far from the realities of today’s difficult, even sizzling reality. This brings about an association with the following fragment of Stanisław Wyspiański’s *Wesele* [The Wedding]:

tak by się nam serce śmiało do
ogromnych, wielkich rzeczy, a
tu pospolitość skrzeczy...

so would our hearts delight
in those grand, wonderful things,
but here commonplaceness stings...

(During the interwar period, the last line was changed by journalists to read: *Buthere the reality stings* and the phrase became popular in this form).

I recently found images of our reality, to be treated here as examples as well, in a volume of Marcin Kącki’s reportages, reaching for the deep contexts of the issues he tackled. In several thematic cross-sections, the author penetrated the contemporary Białystok (where the forthcoming pedagogical convention is to take place). He presented the city after a rapid cultural and ethical change, on the debris of which its new identity has been developed after the Second World War (Kącki 2015); to me, the description was symbolic and I asked myself a question: to what extent does he step beyond locality and describe the state of the country? Leaving out the detailed content of the reportages, I shall devote my attention to the differences between the language of two texts – a PERA document prepared for the scientific convention on the one hand, and the journalistic, documented, linguistic characterization of the site of the convention – its past and present, events and moods, names of interviewees, dates, institutions, references to materials, letters, and memorabilia. Kącki’s book shows Białystok as:

- a place which either does not have signs of remembrance, or has a memory which lives, but is fast asleep, i.e. which does not have such history as is lectured in schools and discussed between teachers and pupils;
- a melting pot of many cultures with traces of cultural resources (some of them are – literally – buried deeply), but with scant awareness of the entirety of the heritage;
- a place of a still living legacy of the past in relations between various ethnic, national, and religious groups which used to live here in relative harmony, and later – for many years – experienced the tension and dramas described in terrifying reports and “hellish recollections” (Kącki 2015: 36);
- a place of understated fates, looped biographies, with the permanent presence of trauma, with tragic recollections of the holocaust, dating not only to post-war but also contemporary times;
- a place of “bitter conflicts” (Kącki 2015: 36) and sharp disputes concerning monuments, the patrons of the university, theatre, music that won popular-

- ity locally, people, signs, words, symbols, and opportunities for foreigners;
- the birthplace of Ludwik Zamenhof, whose idea of peace between people, contained in the Esperanto language, “[...] was in 1977 engraved in a golden plaque and placed in the Voyager space probe, with greetings to alien civilisations. The probe has already left the Solar System, is twenty billion kilometres from Białystok and continues to go further...” (Kącki 2015: 281), but Zamenhof was not considered worthy enough to become the patron of the local university;
 - the location of the Medical University in which pioneering research on *in vitro* was carried out;
 - the location of the only university unit examining miracles in Poland (Unit for Research and Documentation of Miraculous Phenomena) (Kącki 2015: 269).

The collection of issues constituting the main thematic threads of the volume of reportages in question leads to the following questions: to what extent do these local reports come close to reflecting the quality of today’s Polish reality, in particular its inconsistency, and, if we give a positive answer to this question, how can and should we practice work for the benefit of pro-developmental and pro-social education in the conditions of such a reality?

Participants of Kącki’s journalistic narrations often use the language (or talk about the language) of intolerance, aversion, and ambivalence between hatred and human helpfulness dating back to pre-war times, but also experienced today. At present, this is often the language of prejudice, indignation, aggression, hostility, xenophobia, conflicts, polarisation, and suspicions dividing people from different groups diversified in terms of ideology, ethos, status, and institutional affiliation. Sometimes it takes the form of full, emotional statements, and sometimes bits of narration or a refusal to talk to the journalist, keeping silent about the events in the atmosphere of fears and alertness.

There were two reasons why I became interested in these diverse texts and their different languages. One of them is connected with the already signalled feeling that the tone of Kącki’s text reflects something more than reports on problems related to a concrete place – as a location of the convention, since – at least to some degree – it shows moods to be found in the country as a whole whose painful historical, political, and cultural past becomes current again for many reasons, and continues to bother people in various places of the social scene. This breeds tension, mutual accusations, communication difficulties, and an impossibility to conduct a sustainable discussion and to create constructive communal projects and developmental solutions, also covering education.

If the thesis that was put forward is acceptable, then the given issue reflecting the present state as particularly difficult should be taken into account in the topics to be discussed during the Convention. Nevertheless, the topic of the Convention is acquiescent and its programme project seems to be taken from another world of life.

The second reason why I became interested in the texts in question results from the difference in languages used to talk about the issues discussed. The pre-convention language to be found in relevant documents is correct, stand-

ard, lofty, aesthetic (we do not know yet what the language of the convention will be like), while the language of the daily reality is tense, conspicuous, expressive, radical, and often brutal. The use of language marked by tones very distant from the current very heated and arch-difficult problems of the actual current reality in the PERA's pre-convention documentation creates certain new "absent discourses" in the sense that what is discussed is not the most difficult things for our education at present, while what is omitted and avoided is the "present discourses" discussing the "pedagogy of shame", "pedagogy of pride", "the only truth", educational "historical politics", "new patriotism", and "Poland for Poles", which expresses educational contents and projects that are clearly directed in terms of the merits, but also people's radically different receptions – from deep concern to impudent enthusiasm.

This state calls for reflection and responsible discussions including the developed arguments and counterarguments, or – in a nutshell – the performance of the already mentioned cultural working through. Omitting the most heated topics of the difficult situation, we create the second variant of "absent discourses". In the past, it was created for us by the isolating system, as a part of which we had to acquire the unavailable knowledge, while today we create such knowledge ourselves, without posing to ourselves and to the public sphere the pressing, particularly topical educational issues, which are replaced by a thematic silence covered by a linguistic form – one sounding correctly, but is it at all significant?

How can we, people of the Polish Educational Research Association, find ourselves in this situation?

I believe that we should look for an answer in turning towards the neglected statutory commitments concerning the promotion, and, to be more precise, the publicization of pedagogical knowledge by introducing to public fora education-related topics as socio-ethical issues with the verification of the commonplace simplifications, indicating the context, significance for the future, broadly understood developmental importance and the seriousness of education, as well as its executional complications.

How should it be done? This requires a sound reflection on the further direction of the work and development of the Polish Educational Research Association, or perhaps even – broader – reflection on the prospects for the activity of scholarly societies in today's difficult times.

In order to relationally connect programme thinking with the current realities (and therefore not to create the new "absent discourse"), we need to have a closer look at the crisis we have been experiencing. Let us assume that the crisis consisting in the "[...] disturbance of the relation between the horizon of expectation and the space of experience" (Ricoeur 1990: 53) is not at the same time a collapse or a difficulty thoroughly ruining the reality, but a breakthrough leading to a new quality in the emergence of which language plays a special role (Mendel, Szkularek 2013).

Guided by the above assumption, I propose the intensified complementation of the current scientific direction of the

work pursued by the Association with the second line of its statutory commitments concerning the promotion – understood as publicization – of knowledge on education with a view to the execution of the cultural and opinion-creating function of the Association through the development of educational literacy.

I understand the development of educational literacy as linguistic work carried out in the form of watching the language of education, fostering the semantic sensitivity of educational subjects, searching for and creating language suitable for the contents of the presented pedagogical problems, having insight into the senses of what is discussed, raising the alarm in situations of linguistic abuses, sensitizing both ourselves and those around us to the consequences of the change of meanings, and – most broadly speaking – the sociolinguistic creation of reality, including the educational one.

The importance of the changing of senses in the area of education can be seen on the basis of a current example from research performed by Łukasz Stankiewicz, who demonstrated how various interpretations of the student figure in documents concerning the reform of the school system are the basis for the construction and justification of entirely different models of education on the higher level (Stankiewicz 2012: 246–247). This issue fits the area of the no longer new, but recently sharpened question of the political manipulation of language (Bihr 2008).

To show the postulate of undertaking linguistic-educational work aimed at the promotion of literacy, I shall use three examples related to the dynamics of the current use of language and its consequences. The word “multiculturalism”, which for a long time gave hope for the understanding of the appropriate aspect of the complexity of reality, has recently become insufficient to embrace the problems in their whole range of complexity – therefore, the linguistic efforts must be taken as if anew.

The phrase “to work through the past” is used by authors of sociohistorical and sometimes also pedagogical texts, but is it clear what it actually means and what does the “working through” that might really facilitate the awakening of awareness of event participants involve?

The third example, this time constructive, concerns the phrase “the ignorant schoolmaster” introduced by Jacques Rancière. It is not tantamount to the teacher’s lack of knowledge, but their adoption of untrue assumptions on the equal levels of intelligence (understood as cognitive capabilities) of their pupils. This hypothesis is subject to verification – one that is not rooted in the classical procedure of positivist methodology, but treats it as a basis of pedagogical work aimed at making the assumptions true (Rancière 1991).

For me, Rancière’s book and the phrase “ignorant schoolmaster” was a refreshing reading, facilitating attempts at the giving of another sense to my cooperation with the mass students with whom I work. I noticed that the adoption of the appropriate, counter-actual thesis gave me a chance to weaken the indignation at their poor preparation to study and to strengthen my motivation to work with young people marked by very diverse levels, which facilitates the achievement of progress in pedagogical work, although sometimes different than the one I used to imagine.

I propose that the suggested linguistic works perceived as our contribution to the intensification of PERA's cultural and opinion-forming effects be located in three areas:

- the lexical one;
- reflection on “empty signifiers” (according to Laclau);
- the valuation of phrases with an empty meaning that are significant for the creation of a vision of the desirable world (according to Szkudlarek).

Works in the lexical area would concern our contribution to the extension of civic educational lexical resources aimed at the improvement of thinking and public speaking about education and the prevention of semantic disorientation in this area; what it boils down to is increasing the level of pedagogical culture of the society. What can be used for the purpose is the reconstruction of substantial resources of substantial meanings in the area of education, the identification of diverse educational standpoints with the deepening of their justification, and the reflective civilizing of projects and statements by stressing the significance of conscious reflection on what we speak about and what responsibility for speech is. Therefore, this is not about lessons of “legitimate meanings”, but about providing access to linguistic tools enabling better communication leading to a substantially constructive consideration and responsible design of educational solutions and making it accessible, as well as the practice of a factual critique concerning the generated results.

A similar idea from another field, authored by Radosław Markowski, was recently signalled in the press. Publishing his texts under an attention-catching title *Sprostowania* [Corrigenda], the author intends to present a series of materials constituting political assistance for responsible citizens who “[...] are interested in public affairs, check what things actually are in reality, and read so as not to succumb to arrogance and despise of reason”. The series will present to the readers the basic socio-civic vocabulary, including such notions as: 1) democracy, 2) rule of law and constitutionalism, 3) capitalism of the 21st century and models from the welfare state, 4) the question of the EU/Poland. The presentation aims at helping people better understand contents concerning social life, to comment on them, discuss them, think efficiently, and to communicate in order to plan and execute common actions (Markowski 2016: 19).

The pedagogical linguistic work in the area of reflection on “empty signifiers” proposed further as a possible direction for PERA, would concern imaginings: naming them, and filling them with meanings. Owing to the senses filling these areas, we could build the educational imaginarium in such a way as to see the educational question in new linguistic lights and consequently deepen our reflection on the area we have been practicing, which becomes complicated in the conditions in which many pedagogies function.

On the sidelines, I shall signal that the latest 16th Convention of the Polish Sociological Association (*Polskie Towarzystwo Socjologiczne*; September 2017) was held under the title “Solidarity in the times of mistrust”. Solidarity, here being an “empty signifier” broadly commented upon in literature, is an example of how an element of this type can be useful for socio-scientific reflection.

The third area of works proposed to be undertaken by the Association concerns contents as a valuation of terms that have no agreed upon mean-

ings. For fear of the ideologisation of various issues, we are mistrustful towards valuation, but a subtle inspiration for the issue was recently provided by Szkudlarek in his report on research into the discursive construction of the subject (Szkudlarek *et al.* 2012). Referring to the pedagogy of culture and exposing individuals as “shapable” subjects, the author discussed the issue of the valuation of what is not, but potentially can be, filled with values. Perceiving the issue as paradoxical (Szkudlarek *et al.* 2012: 13–16), as it involves empty/not empty, the author simultaneously discussed it and protected it with the classical justification on the validity of values, which “[...] reflect the vision of the world that does not, but should, exist”. Such a “figure” creates the deontic system of duties – which continues to be close to pedagogues – which in a sense is close to “empty signifiers” as phenomena located “[...] beyond the sphere of identity and beyond the sphere of experience” (Szkudlarek *et al.* 2012: 17). It is a system which seems not to be significant at the moment, but which is simultaneously significant, being possible and even, from the point of view of duties, “desirable”; thinking about such a world has always been a domain of pedagogues.

Summing up my presentation on the activity of the Polish Educational Research Association on the 35th anniversary of its activity, I shall once again stress the important contribution of the Association’s members to the entire reflective movement concerning the problematics of education and its transformations related to the transformation of the political system and contemporary changes of culture. In his recent presentation of “pedagogy with the past” focusing on the positive sides, Kwieciński presented our scientific achievements, taking into account the contribution of the PERA environment. At the same time, the author pointed out that despite the Association’s attempts at the construction of desirable relations between pedagogy and the public sphere, “[...] No environment or institutions have been developed in Poland that would shape a strategic, systemic, paradigmatic vision of the development of education [...]” (Kwieciński 2011: 24).

In answer to the questions posed in this text, i.e. “What shall we do next? What direction should we take?”, I opt for the linguistic direction creating opportunities for the development of educational literacy as the basic work for the building of the communal foundation of a strategic vision of pro-developmental education as good for both people and the times – which are always difficult.

This is because I do not associate the phrase “difficult times”, as featured in the title of this paper, with periods that are in particular unfavourable for the undertaken endeavours, but with a phenomenon that is always in place, and results from the complexity of the world and education, but also being a mobilizing factor for people. During the 35 years of the activity of our Association, the stimulating atmosphere could not always be found. Recently, aware of the large amount of work we carried out for the benefit of education, but also conscious of the quality of Polish education, which is deeply unsatisfying socially, we also feel disenchanting and in low spirits. To lift our mood, despite the difficult times, I shall quote a fragment of Cyprian Kamil Norwid’s work *Cywilizacja* [Civilisation]:

Co dzień woda w okręt ciecze,
 Nogą z łoża ani stąp;
 Co wieczora – o! Człowiecze,
 W górę rękaw! – i do pomp

Day by day water leaks into the ship,
 No way to put your leg down;
 Every evening – oh! Let it not drip,
 Put up your sleeve! – and pump.

The point is we have to reflectively construct the “pump” ourselves.

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Summary

A scholarly society in difficult times. An essay for the 35th anniversary of the establishment of the Polish Educational Research Association

The structure of the essay is created by the question about the execution of PERA's statutory goals in the context of other scholarly societies. The goals concern the performance and popularisation of scientific research as well as the promotion of scientific achievements. The review of 35 years of the Association's activity provided a conclusion that it recorded successes in the field of scientific research and publication of research results. At the same time, there has been no significant progress in the promotion of educational ideas and creation of the grounds for educational change understood as a movement and social undertaking. The author of the text sees PERA's perspectives in the development of educational literacy.

Keywords

research support, dissemination of knowledge, socialization

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