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Entrepreneurship in School in the Conditions of the Education System Reform in Poland – a Voice in the Discussion on the Directions of Change

Abstract: Preceded by the debate, the 2016 implementation of the school reform in Poland brought serious organisational and program changes. These changes also concern entrepreneurship education, therefore the subject of the article is the discussion on the proposals of the Ministry of Education regarding changes to the school system, in the context of yet another comprehensive organisational and program reform of the Polish education system. The primary goal of the paper is to present the direction of change, based on the current research and discussions conducted by various forums. The author's claims in this regard are based not only on his reflections but also on the voices presented by the participants of Kraków entrepreneurship conferences and conventions of teachers, as well as by the authors of the papers included in the previous volumes of this annual. Under the limited number of hours dedicated to the teaching of entrepreneurship in post-primary schools in general education, that is, compulsory for all pupils, the most important is the careful selection of objectives and content of entrepreneurship education. The article concludes with the presentation of the essential conditions influencing the success of the implementation of changes, mainly related to the appropriate preparation of entrepreneurship teachers.

Keywords: core curriculum; education system of Poland; entrepreneurship education; reform of education system

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Introduction

Entrepreneurship is one of the pillars of the socio-economic development of spatial systems of various scales, from local to regional, national and global levels. Many authors

(Zioło, Rachwał 2012) drew attention to this issue, later acknowledged by K. Wach (2015) who reviewed the literature on the subject. Numerous authors also point out that the foundation for the development of entrepreneurship in particular socio-economic conditions is good education at all levels: from kindergarten to higher education, as well as through lifelong learning, i.e. continuous education and training (*Entrepreneurship Education...*, 2013; Nowak, 2016; Rachwał, 2005, 2010; Wach, 2013, 2014; Zioło, 2012). However, as Andrzejczyk (2016) points out, there are many research methods used in education and entrepreneurship research, and one of the significant problems of the current study of entrepreneurship vs. education is the inability to compare their results. It is because researchers from different countries apply different measures of entrepreneurship and education. Moreover, it is worth pointing out, following the same author, that studying the impact of education on entrepreneurship is extremely difficult, and some researchers and practitioners even question the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education at all, paying more attention to the process of learning or shaping entrepreneurial attitudes by individuals themselves. The role of the teacher, in this case, is to inspire to develop entrepreneurial competencies (Żur, 2014), rather than conduct classical teaching which involves the transfer of knowledge from teacher to student.

In the light of the above-mentioned, the theme of the article is the discussion on the proposals of the Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Poland concerning changes in the education system in the context of the next major organisational and program reform of the Polish school system. The main aim of the paper is to present directions of changes, based on previous research, discussions conducted by various fora, including the Kraków conferences on entrepreneurship and education issues connected with the teachers' conventions (Rachwał, 2014), as well as contained in the journal "Entrepreneurship – Education". The author's claims in this regard are based not only on his reflections but also on the voices presented by the participants of these conferences and conventions, as well as by the authors of papers in the previous volumes of this periodical.

Issues of changes in entrepreneurship education in the Polish school in the literature of the subject

Although the research on entrepreneurship education is quite broad (Wach, 2016) and many academics are addressing this issue, however, a small number of researchers in Poland are addressing program reform issues at the school level. A number of publications refer to university education. Program changes in the field of entrepreneurship education in primary and secondary schools are of interest to few authors (Górz, Rachwał, 2006). An interesting comparative study of the core curriculum in Poland and other countries was presented by Berger et al. (2012), noting that in Poland entrepreneurship education is dominated by equipping pupils with economic knowledge and competencies directly related to them. Comprehensive analysis of pre-reform program curricula, which will be valid until 2019/2020 in post-secondary schools of the "old" type, was presented by Rachwał, Kurek and Boguś (2016). Some authors study this issue from the perspective of pupils and teachers (Osuch, 2012; Kurek, Rachwał, Szubert, 2012; Tracz, 2015). A team of researchers from the Pedagogical University of Cracow and the Cracow University of Economics also prepared an extended curriculum framework project (Rachwał et al., 2008). It was to enable the introduction of the basis of entrepreneurship

into the canon of the Matura leaving exam subjects, as proposed by teachers for many years and formulated by many educational circles (Bartoń, 2005).

Organisational and curriculum changes in the education system in Poland since 2017

The work and discussions on the reform of the education system in Poland that have been taking place since 2016, lead to significant organisational changes. They are manifested, among others, by the liquidation of junior high school and the extension of the period of primary and secondary education. In the new primary school, the schooling period will be eight years (until now six), while in high school four (three), technical college five (four), vocational school of the first level – three (instead of two in the previous vocational school). The purpose of the reform is also to make profound program changes, by introducing new framework curricula that define how many hours are spent in a given class in a specific type of school for teaching a particular subject and formulating a new core curriculum. The core curriculum is a document that sets out what goals, content, and specific requirements should be met for a given subject in all schools in Poland as a mandatory minimum. These changes also refer to an important part of the education system, such as entrepreneurship education.

Discussions on the position of entrepreneurship in the education system in the reformed school

Focus on entrepreneurship in the education system or possible new curriculum framework during the public consultation held in 2016, preceding the start of the transition process, was relatively weak. There was only one central debate about entrepreneurship held at the Ministry of National Education. As can be seen from the discussion within the virtual expert panels, other school subjects and organisational changes in education were the priority. There was little interest in the changes referring to this issue. After presenting the framework of the changes in the school system in the middle of 2016, the work on the new curricular plans and core curricula of individual subjects has started, which gives us an opportunity to reflect on the extent to which these changes should affect entrepreneurship in Polish schools. This article is an attempt to introduce this in-depth discussion, including a summary of what the postulates in this regard have been communicated by researchers in recent years, including entrepreneurship teachers and methodologists, as well as teachers of related subjects. This discussion has mostly been taking place for thirteen years at the Krakow conference (www.przedsiebiorczosc.up.krakow.pl) organised by the Department of Entrepreneurship and Spatial Management (www.zpigp.up.krakow.pl) at the Pedagogical University in Cracow (Rachwał, 2014). Moreover, it is present in the only Polish journal devoted to this issue “Entrepreneurship – Education” (www.pe.up.krakow.pl). In particular, due to the ongoing work on the reform, the 13th International Scientific Conference on “International and National Conditions for the Development of Entrepreneurship in Spatial Systems” was held at the Pedagogical University of Cracow on 10–11 October 2016, which was linked to the Convention of Entrepreneurship Teachers. During the Teachers’ Meeting, a special discussion was held on “Entrepreneurship education in Poland under conditions of the education system reform”. As a result of the

presented papers and debates, a standard position of the academic community and experienced teachers was developed, which was sent to the Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Poland. It is worth pointing out that this position mostly refers to previously presented opinions and research results. Also, brief discussions are taking place within other bodies, such as the national convention of entrepreneurship departments in the first half of 2016 and other conferences, or in other journals. It should be emphasised that, although somewhat limited, this is a continuous, multi-year discussion, and its effects are available in the form of articles published in journals.

Rationale and foundations for the discussion about the role, objectives, contents and methods of entrepreneurship education

In the first place, attention should be paid to the relevant premises and foundations for discussing the role, objectives, content and methods of entrepreneurship education, including primarily the fact that entrepreneurship is one of the eight key competencies in the European education system, in addition to mother tongue, foreign language, mathematics and computer skills (*Key Competencies*, 2002; Kurek, Rachwał, 2009). It has to be regarded as a critical competency and should not be marginalised in the Polish school.

It is also worth emphasising that entrepreneurship is not just about setting up a company – it is an important manifestation of entrepreneurship but not the only one. Entrepreneurship for education purposes is understood much broader (see the definition of the European Commission – *Key Competencies*, 2002; *Recommendation*, 2006 and many authors, e.g. Rachwał, 2005; Wach, 2014). It is mainly a set of personality traits that allow active participation in the socio-economic life, preparing for adulthood but also further education as part of career development. Many scholars point out that entrepreneurship of individuals and organisations, as well as central and local governments, plays a fundamental role in the socio-economic development of countries as well as regional (voivodeship), supra-local (powiat, functional and metropolitan area) and local systems (Zioło, Rachwał, 2012; Wach, 2015). Entrepreneurship is also of great importance in counteracting unemployment and strengthening the development of family businesses (Rachwał, 2010). It is reflected in many strategic documents of the OECD, the European Union, Poland, as well as various spatial systems (e.g. development strategies of voivodeships, cities, gminas), which was analysed by Płaziak and Rachwał (2014). For this reason, the European Union allocates a significant amount of resources to research entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education – practically every year comprehensive reports from various expert panels appear, which indicate that Poland is at a lower level of development of education in this field than other countries (*Entrepreneurship Education*, 2012).

Furthermore, entrepreneurship of the Polish citizens plays a fundamental role in accelerating the development of a home-based economy, whose profits are mainly spent on consumption in Poland, reinvested principally in the country. It is reflected in the reports of business associations and various types of foundations, such as the report of Foundation "Think about the Future" (Fundacja „Pomyśl o Przyszłość") or the reports prepared for the Plan for Responsible Development of Poland. The development of Polish companies stimulates, in turn, domestic innovation which is vitally important in a knowledge-based economy. That is why entrepreneurship education can be regarded as an element of upbringing for economic patriotism, understood as the responsibility

of consumers and entrepreneurs for the prosperity and development of their own country. Thanks to the entrepreneurship of citizens, it is possible to launch the country's economic development programs, mainly based on the use of domestic resources (see the Plan for Responsible Development, announced by Vice-Prime Minister of Poland, M. Morawiecki, and implemented from 2017 as a Strategy for Responsible Development until 2020 with a perspective until 2030 – *Strategia..., 2017*). Changes in education should, therefore, be in line with strategic economic development plans.

Assessment of the current changes in entrepreneurship education

Regarding education for entrepreneurship, great milestones have been made over the last 15 years. This includes the introduction of content in the field of entrepreneurship to junior high school under the subject Civic Education, the subject of Entrepreneurship as compulsory in general education to secondary schools (2 lessons per week in one class) and Economics in practice as optional for high school (1 lesson per week). Therefore, in the context of the program reform debate in the case of entrepreneurship, one should think more about evolutionary rather than revolutionary actions, correction and not the complete redevelopment of the core curriculum.

There have also been thousands of entrepreneurship teachers prepared, recently enrolled mainly in postgraduate qualification studies in entrepreneurship and dual-qualification teacher education (e.g. geography with entrepreneurship, such as those offered at the Pedagogical University of Cracow). It is also worth emphasising in the light of the research that sometimes common opinions about the poor preparation of these teachers are wrong (see Tracz, Rachwał, 2007). Teachers, however, pay attention to the sometimes disrespectful attitude of school students to this subject, resulting from its low rank, because it is not a Matura leaving exam subject, and the number of teaching hours devoted to this subject at school is minimal.

Suggestions for changes

When discussing the place of entrepreneurship in the new education system (which is mainly materialised through the regulation of the Ministry of National Education on the so-called framework and core curricula), it is proposed the following postulates be taken into account:

1. Extension of the elements of entrepreneurship education to lower levels (according to European recommendations and experts, entrepreneurship should be taught from pre-school and early school levels to the lifelong learning process already existing in many countries, e.g. Norway, Denmark). As international comparisons show, economic education begins at the stages 5–7 (pupils aged 12–14), i.e. At the end of current primary school or the beginning of the current lower secondary education in Poland (see also *Eurydice Report: Entrepreneurship Education..., 2012*).
2. Introduction of the content of education to pre-school and early-school education curricula – in the form of playing and discussion, for example, on money as a result of work (where from do parents have the money for supporting the family and buying things for the child) and the functioning of the company (why do we need companies, why do parents work in businesses or run them), attitudes and personality

traits such as ingenuity, willingness to learn and work, undertaking new challenges, as well as activity, diligence, responsibility as elements of an entrepreneurial attitude (why are they important in every human being's life).

3. Separation of the module on entrepreneurship in the Civic Education (in Polish: Wiedza o Społeczeństwie – WOS) at the second stage of education of a new, 8-grade primary school (formerly known as "Education for active participation in economic life" within WOS) in the form of a separate subject. It is of particular importance because, as the research and the voices of the teachers themselves indicate, very often WOS teachers do not feel competent to run this part of the subject. It is because entrepreneurship is often marginalised during the WOS studies. Moreover, they have insufficient time to implement the content of "citizenship" education (which is the most important content of WOS). Thus the content of entrepreneurship in WOS is shortened or even omitted. It may be possible to keep this content as part of WOS, with proper preparation of teachers of this subject (courses, master studies), but their separation into an individual subject seems to be beneficial.
4. Introduction of the possibility of realising the subject of Entrepreneurship in the extended version, with the option of taking it at the Matura exam (as an optional subject), which will enable recruitment for economic universities or other entrepreneurship-based university courses based on the exam results (see the declaration of rectors of economic universities delivered a few years ago to the Ministry of Education through the Department of Education of the Financial Supervision Commission, who declared that the Matura grades in entrepreneurship would be considered in recruitment for economics studies). For those not enrolled in the extended courses, entrepreneurship education could follow the current teaching pattern. It is worth emphasising that the core curriculum for the extended level was once developed by a team of experts from the Pedagogical University of Cracow and the Cracow University of Economics with the support of the Department of Education of the Financial Supervision Commission, and could now be used or be the springboard for further discussion in this regard (proposal is available in the form of the article from Rachwał et al., 2008). It is also worth stressing that the fears that it would not be possible to verify the skills in entrepreneurship in the form of a written exam (what is important in entrepreneurship education) have been resolved after many years of discussion. Experts agree that it is possible to develop excellent worksheets that test not only economic knowledge but also entrepreneurial skills (as seen in the examples of Geography exam papers in the economic geography section, or testing map reading during the Matura exam in Geography).
5. Keeping the subject "Economics in practice" in the framework of teaching hours at the secondary school level as an optional subject, with possible renaming it "Entrepreneurship in practice" as more relevant to the content (as it is about entrepreneurship and not about economics as a science). It is of particular importance if there is no possibility of realising the subject of Entrepreneurship in the extended form.
6. Correction of the core curriculum for entrepreneurship at the secondary and earlier levels of education, in particular:
 - a. removal of unnecessary repetitions between (present) junior high school and high schools, transfer of banal content from high school to "new" primary school (now junior high school), while too demanding – from junior high to high school;

- b. more emphasis on skill development; explicit decision at the core curriculum level relating to the establishment and running a company (fully only at the extended level if it would be possible to implement the foundations of entrepreneurship at this level);
 - c. elimination of unclear wording in learning outcomes (so-called detailed requirements);
 - d. introduction of content (learning outcomes) to pre-school education, integrated education and other subjects in primary school up to grade 4;
 - e. reduction or elimination of certain content that is being implemented through other disciplines (e.g. globalisation issues in geography), and introduction of certain supplementary material, e.g. on social economy of entrepreneurship, strengthening the content by introducing the issues of customer protection, financial services, marketing and management, as well as the role of family businesses or companies in the sector of small and medium enterprises in the economic development of Poland.
7. It is important to maintain the multidisciplinary nature of Entrepreneurship, which is also the subject of economic and financial education in general education in the absence of the possibility of introducing other economic subjects into the school system. The new core curriculum of Entrepreneurship should focus on knowledge and skills related to the functioning of an enterprise and labour market, which should be based on economic awareness of the operation of the market economy and financial knowledge, complemented by skills related to the behaviour of pupils as future customers of financial services.
8. When creating a new core curriculum, it is worthwhile to draw on the experiences of other countries, but assuming that it is not possible to automatically transfer solutions from other nations to Poland due to different national circumstances.

Terms of change

It is worth noting that the condition for a real difference in entrepreneurship education is the preparation of competent teachers in higher education (and not just via postgraduate qualification) in the field of entrepreneurship, as well as the improvement of active entrepreneurship teachers (e.g. In postgraduate studies). The role of teachers' competencies was emphasised by Tracz and Rachwał (2007). Such studies should be financed by central or local authorities with the support of, for example, EU programs, prepared in cooperation with universities specialising in economic education and teacher preparation.

The key issue in the education process is its continuity at different stages of education and the use of appropriate forms, methods and teaching resources adjusted to the goals, as well as psycho-physical development and perceptual abilities of the pupil. It is of particular importance here to use methods that are conducive to shaping the capacity to observe phenomena and processes taking place in the economy, use new approaches and ICT to acquire, collect, analyse and present information on socioeconomic processes and business operations, as well as conduct regular field work. In particular, it is advisable to visit with the students a company and have a discussion with the owner or one of the managers. To that end, appropriate recommendations could be made to the core curriculum or even included in the curricula framework. It is also important to use more

education strategies that emphasise self-reliance in obtaining information, conducting debates and participating in competitions.

Final remarks

The presented rationale for the discussions, postulates and recommendations, as well as the conditions for introducing core curriculum changes in entrepreneurship education are an attempt to outline areas of discussion that should be undertaken in the course of establishing the curricula in Poland. Experience so far has shown that the willingness of all stakeholders to participate in such discussions is rather small, and the interest of foreign researchers in this topic is negligible. Exceptions are only some of the platforms for the exchange of thoughts, e.g. The Kraków entrepreneurship conferences and teachers' conventions. It remains to be hoped that all those interested in the new shape of entrepreneurial education in Poland will engage in such a discussion to systematically strive to improve its quality. Otherwise, the lack of involvement may lead to the reduction or total marginalisation of Entrepreneurship in the Polish school. Such a situation would not be a good solution for preparing the young generation for active participation in the social and economic life and economic activation of spatial systems of various scales – from local to regional and national, to European and even global.

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