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Are Polish Primary School Pupils in Favour of Wearing Uniforms? Snapshot Comment

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to discuss whether Polish primary school pupils want to wear uniforms, and it is motivated by the Polish government's recently proposed policy: Zero Tolerance for Violence at School. Seventy one pupils, who attend Podstawowka Nr30 school in Cracow, were surveyed, and the authors found that most pupils are not in favour of wearing uniforms. The theoretical framework for this article is supplied by the general notion of the school as an organization and social institution.

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Introduction

Poles are committed to the notion of compulsory education and public (state) schooling. Poles start school at age 7 and can leave at 18.

There are guarantees in Poland for private schools and special education.

Polish Ministry of National Education Introduces Significant Changes in Primary and Secondary School System

In September 1999 the Polish Ministry of National Education introduced significant changes into the primary and the secondary school system of education ((Kucińska, 23 February, 2000; Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej, 1999, 3-72; Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej, 1999, 3-80; Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej, 1999, 3-48). The number of years of primary schooling was reduced from 8 to 6 years, 3 year junior secondary schools (gymnasiums) were created. Starting in September 2001 students (depending on their academic ability) began their studies in either 3 year academic senior secondary schools (specialized lyceums) with the possibility of earning a school leaving certificate (the matura) or 2 year vocational senior secondary institutions (Bogaj et al., 1999, 70).

The Ministry hopes that junior secondary schooling will lead to an increase in the number of pupils entering secondary school due to the fact that these institutions will be better staffed and equipped than many primary schools (Kucińska, 23 February, 2000, Ministry of National Education, 2000, 12-13). Poland's rural dwellers will most likely significantly profit from this particular change. A UNESCO report entitled "Republic of Poland Education For All: The year 2000 assessment" indicates that 35% of the urban adult population have finished secondary school whereas somewhat less than 15% in rural areas have done so. . The establishment of junior secondary schools is in itself a

benefit because it segregates pupils between the ages of 13 to 15 from much younger ones¹. That is, of course, if these schools are located apart from primary institutions.

The new system involves: 1) integrated skills teaching for the first three years, 2) block instruction for the next three and 3) teaching by subject throughout junior secondary school. In the old system, instruction by subject began in the second grade. Since it is thought that children have difficulty differentiating between subjects at an early age these changes in teaching practices are an attempt “to make the school fit the child” (Kucińska, 23, February, 2000).

Research Question

Do Polish primary school pupils want to wear uniforms? The predicted answer was “no” because people dislike restrictions that influence the way they dress.

Pupils’ Attitudes towards Wearing Uniforms

On 6 March 2007 seventy one male and female primary school pupils between the age of 10 and 14, who attend Podstawowka Nr 13 school in Cracow, were asked to indicate on small sheets of paper whether or not they would like to wear uniforms. The results are as follows: 25 % (for), 68 % (against) and 7 % (undecided). That means that most pupils do not want to wear uniforms.

Interestingly, the School’s headmistress is also against the wearing of uniforms because they stifle pupil creativity with regard to dress.

Concluding Remarks

Our findings suggest that the Polish government will have difficulty implementing their recently proposed policy: Zero Tolerance for Violence at School. Nevertheless, it is recommended that more research be carried out, in the future, involving additional institutions.

Interview

Kucińska, Teresa, (MA), Deputy Director of the Department of Post-Primary Training and Permanent Education, Ministry of National Education in the Republic of Poland. Interviewed: 23 February 2000 in Cracow.

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