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Romantic and pragmatic - is it European identity?

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In the European history of educational ideas and practices one finds four main interpretations of the value and meaning of modern education in human life.

1. The idea of cultural transmission can be traced back to the thinkers of French Enlightenment and summarised as giving access for future generations to all the crucial and valuable achievements in knowledge, skill and cultural values of previous generations.
2. The idea of naturalism found its original formulation in Rousseau's treatise *Emil* and together with later versions stresses the expression of innate (good) human potential as the aim of education.
3. The British notion of the education of *gentlemen*, together with the Humboldtian education of *humanis*, are two versions of the romantic idea of education for the appreciation of core human values.
4. Education as the provider of efficient action in pursuing the satisfactions of life, and happiness, is the twentieth century addition of pragmatism to the philosophy of education.

These four interpretations of the aims of education do not exclude each other, though they seem to play more or less prominent parts in educational practice within different historical, national, and social contexts.

The aim of this paper is to test the hypothesis that in Polish contemporary society a process of change has occurred over the last two decades: that the romantic and cultural transmission concepts, which were the two dominant concepts of the goals of education, have been replaced by pragmatism and the romantic idea. In other words, that a dramatic increase of appreciation of pragmatic ideas and a clear decrease of the cultural transmission idea can be observed.

Method

458 teachers, pupils and parents participated in the study, carried out from January to April 2003. Together they represented four levels of education: 55 pupils, 39 teachers, and 37 parents of pupils at primary school level; 40 pupils, 40 teachers, and 40 parents of pupils and middle school level; 50 pupils, 48 teachers, and 40 parents from secondary school level, and 20 students, 20 professors and 20 parents of students at university level.

The participants were asked to rank in order the following four statements, which were designed to represent the four ideas of education, accordingly to how closely the statements accord with their own perception of what meaning and value in education consists in. The choices were

1. The aim of education consists of the cultural transmission of human achievements (knowledge, skills, values) from generation to generation in order to maintain and develop them.

2. The aim of education consists of helping individuals with the expression and development of their innate human potential for good while keeping their potential for evil under control.
3. The aim of education consists of shaping sensitivities to appreciate a core set of values (freedom, self-determination, dignity, tolerance, self-expression, etc.) in human life, for both individuals and groups.
4. the aim of education consists of developing knowledge of how to undertake the tasks which we all face in different areas of action in our lives with success and prosperity.

Two hypotheses were made. Firstly, it was expected that pragmatic and romantic ideas of education would be much more frequently ranked by participants as first and second in comparison to cultural transmission and naturalism, which were expected to predominantly fill third and fourth ranking positions. Secondly, it was predicted that the above pattern would be seen within each of the three groups and at each educational level.

Findings

Table 1 shows the frequencies of particular rankings obtained by each of the four ideas of education as a result of rank ordering by the whole group of participants.

Table 1 Ideas of education by ranks - all study participants (N=458)

Rank ↓	Idea→	Cultural Transmission	Naturalism	Romanticism	Pragmatism	Total
1 - 2	n	188	153	283	307	931
	row %	20	16	30	33	100
	column %	41	33	62	67	51
3 - 4	n	270	305	175	151	901
	row %	30	33	19	17	100
	column %	59	67	38	33	49
	Total	458	458	458	458	1832
	column %	25	25	25	25	100

Chi-square (3 df) = 143.28 p < .0000

It is noticeable from Table 1 that pragmatism and romanticism more frequently gain the first two ranks than cultural transmission and naturalism. This is exactly what was predicted. Thus, this finding can be taken as strongly suggestive that the hypothesis about how education is conceived in Polish society is accurate.

Table 2 presents chi-square statistics for distributions of rankings of the educational ideas within four subgroups of subjects according to educational stage, i.e., primary school, middle school, secondary school, and university.

Table 2. Pragmatism and romanticism ranking higher than cultural transmission and naturalism by stages of education. (N=458)

	X ²	df	p<	N
Primary 10-12 year-olds	9.00	3	.03	131
Middle 13-15 year-olds	85.61	3	.00	120
Secondary 16-18 year-olds	39.13	3	.00	147
University 19-23 year-olds	55.02	3	.00	60

The same pattern of findings showing a clear and unequivocal preference for pragmatism and romanticism over cultural transmission and naturalism can be recognised at the consecutive levels of the educational process. This provides strong support for the hypothesis.

Let us look more closely at the rank ordering by each of the three groups of participants at the four levels of educational process. Table 3 shows the choices of pupils and students.

Table 3 Pupils' ranking of four ideas by stage of education. (N=165)

	1	2	3	4	N
Primary 10-12 year olds	Pragmatism	Naturalism	Cultural Transmission	Romanticism	55
Middle 13-15 year olds	Pragmatism	Romanticism	Cultural Transmission	Naturalism	40
Secondary 16-18 year olds	Pragmatism	Cultural Transmission	Romanticism	Naturalism	50
University 19-23 year olds	Pragmatism	Romanticism	Naturalism	Cultural Transmission	20

Naturalism for primary school pupils and cultural transmission for secondary school students seem to be two exceptions out of the eight possible positions of rank ordering, which should all be pragmatism and romanticism if the hypothesis holds. These two exceptions are interesting and meaningful and should not be ignored. However, the prevailing pattern is clear and may be taken as unequivocal support for pragmatism as students' first choice - this is consistent across the four educational stages. Romanticism comes second in two out of four cases, which may be taken as a support of the hypothesis. At the same time, it suggests that further research is needed to clarify the processes by which romanticism changes its position with advancing educational stages.

Table 4 presents the rank ordering of educational ideas by teachers at the four levels of educational processes.

Table 4 Teachers' ranking of four ideas by stage of education (N=147)

	1	2	3	4	N
Teachers of Primary 10-12 year olds	Romanticism	Pragmatism	Cultural Transmission	Naturalism	39
Teachers of Middle 13-15 year olds	Pragmatism	Romanticism	Cultural Transmission	Naturalism	40
Teachers of Secondary 16-18 year olds	Pragmatism/Romanticism	Pragmatism/Romanticism	Cultural Transmission	Naturalism	48
Teachers of University 19-23 year olds	Romanticism	Pragmatism	Naturalism	Cultural Transmission	20

Romanticism and pragmatism are first two choices of teachers in each of the four stages of their students' education. It is noteworthy that the teachers seem to be much more romantic and less pragmatic than their pupils, and this adds another reason for a future study of difference between the stages of the educational process, and a study of the differences between the three groups, i.e., pupils, teachers, and parents of pupils, within the same prevailing pattern of the interpretation of educational ideals. The data presented in Table 4 strongly support the hypothesis within the context of teachers' rank ordering of the four educational ideas.

Finally, Table 5 shows how the parents order the four educational ideas.

Table 5 Parents' ranking of four ideas by stage of education (N=146)

	1	2	3	4	N
Parents of Primary 10-12 year olds	Romanticism	Cultural Transmission	Pragmatism	Naturalism	37
Parents of Middle 13-15 year olds	Pragmatism	Romanticism	Cultural Transmission	Naturalism	40
Parents of Secondary 16-18 year olds	Pragmatism	Cultural Transmission	Romanticism	Naturalism	49
Parents of University 19-23 year olds	Romanticism	Pragmatism	Naturalism	Cultural Transmission	20

In two out of eighth possible cases it is the idea of cultural transmission which achieves second rank in the ordering by the parents of pupils - these are the choices made by parents of both primary and secondary school pupils. The other six choices for the first two ranks are equally distributed between romanticism and pragmatism. The overall pattern can be taken as support for the hypothesis of this study, but the question of how

parental perception may evolve with their children's educational careers remains to be explored in a further and more detailed study.

Taking together all the above ways of testing the hypothesis, it is fair to say that the data strongly support the claim that the combination of pragmatic and romantic interpretations of the educational ideal clearly dominate over the cultural transmission and naturalism as the educational ideologies in contemporary Poland.

Conclusion

The study gave substantial support to the claim that a historical-cultural change took place in the prevailing pattern of thinking about the meaning and value of education in contemporary Poland. The study also revealed that the three groups directly involved in educational process, i.e., pupils, teachers, and parents, differ one from the other within the prevailing pattern, and the significance of these differences is worthy of further study.

If it is a reasonable postulate that all four goals of education should be realised in a balanced way at all stages of the educational process, then the clear domination of pragmatism and romanticism over cultural transmission and naturalism raises fears of an unbalanced and unidirectional education and human development of contemporary generations in Poland. It would be interesting to see whether the parts played by the four educational ideas in thinking about the meaning and value of education in human life how are balanced or unbalanced in other European countries. One can argue that it may be an important part of educational efforts to develop an European identity and citizenship to try to introduce a balanced model of the four ingredients into the practice of education within the particular national contexts in Europe.