CHANGES IN YOUTH EDUCATION – A WAY TO PROMOTE ATTITUDES TOWARDS ENTREPRENEURSHIP.

FINDINGS AND EIGHTEEN YEARS PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE.

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Changes in the world economy, in particular in the most developed countries, the development of the knowledge-based economy, an increasing pace of changes, examples of the development of firms such as Microsoft, Google and Intel all indicate clearly that the biggest added value is achieved when new inventions and ideas are implemented in the economy. **Success comes from innovation, creativity and entrepreneurial spirit**. If there is one thing that is certain nowadays it is the fact that entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity will be the leading motto for the next several dozen years.

Intellectual entrepreneurship – an ability to create something (e.g., a company, a new product or a new service), out of nothing will be becoming more and more important.

Knowledge - the basic **'raw material'** in the new economy is becoming widely available due to new inventions.

An ability to use, utilise and process knowledge is becoming essential.

Wyższa Szkoła Biznesu- National-Louis University (WSB-NLU) in Nowy Sącz is a classic example of creating an institution based on intellectual entrepreneurship.

Created out of nothing, with the total initial capital amounting to USD 2000, established by people from outside of the academic circles, WSB-NLU is an example of an innovative transfer of American university know-how to a small town during the initial stage of the Polish economic transformation (year 1992).

One of the factors contributing to WSB-NLU success, which was also a characteristic that made it stand out from among other higher education institutions, was that fact that the college administrators and faculty aimed at shaping personalities of full-time students in such way as to enable them to discover their inner talents and to enhance their entrepreneurial and innovation skills.

As a result, WSB-NLU alumni were very soon recognised in the labour market. As early as in 1996, WSB-NLU started winning Polish rankings for the best business school.

After the years of experience we were convinced that, thanks to a unique combination of the curriculum, the school's student-oriented approach and encouragement for extra-curricular activities, we were able to create a system of education in which students gained substantial added value, they simply 'outdid themselves'.

However, we also realised that we were correcting mistakes made at earlier stages of their education, which has led us to formulating the thesis that if the methods of education were changed at the early stages then the effects of our efforts in the higher education institution would be even more pronounced.

It is commonly believed that American primary and secondary education is of poor quality. An average Polish or Czech pupil stands out with his/her knowledge at an American school. Why, then, are there so many inventors and entrepreneurs in the USA? Why do American companies dominate in the new economy?
It cannot all be explained by the 'import' of the most talented people from all over the world to the USA.

The future of the Małopolska region depends, among others, on its ability to transform into the 'Knowledge Region'. Starting from a relatively low level of development, typical for the post-communist countries, Małopolska must find essential mechanisms for development in order to compete in the future with the strongest European regions for investment and EU funds earmarked for R&D.

While making strategic future decisions, the best investment will be the creation of an effective education system, starting from the youngest group.

‘DiAMEnT’ Project – ‘**D**ostrzec i **A**ktywizować **M**ożliwości, **En**ergię, **T**alenty [The Diamond Project – to Notice and Stimulate Abilities, Energy,Talents] -

constitutes a deliberate investment of the authorities of the region of the Province of Małopolska in establishing the fundaments for the **knowledge region**.

American schools are geared towards shaping their students' attitudes to enable them to be confident in themselves and in their capabilities. Our schools transfer knowledge but lose or even destroy individualism whereas the task of American teachers is to notice students' individual abilities.

The ‘DiAMEnT’ Project was designed as a systemic project whose goal is to introduce such changes in the school system which will:

1) Enhance and shape pupils’ creativity and creative thinking at the initial stage of education and through that, will result in an increase in entrepreneurial and innovative attitudes during the stage of puberty and further education;

2) Recognise and enhance pupils’ individual talents during the process of their education until the secondary school graduation examinations, allowing for intensive development of the most talented pupils.

The ‘DiAMEnT’ Project was designed at WSB-NLU and it is currently tested and implemented in the Province of Małopolska. For the next 4 years, the ‘DiAMEnT’ Project will be financed by Urząd Marszałkowski [the Marshal’s Office] and it is co-implemented by Małopolskie Centrum Doskonalenia Nauczycieli [the Małopolska Teacher Enhancement Centre].

The ‘DiAMEnT’ Project consists of two basic segments:

I. The programme for developing creative thinking addressed to all pupils of early education (grades 1 through 3, children ages 6 – 8);

II. The programme of supporting pupil’s abilities, including the system for diagnosing pupils’ abilities in four areas (English language, entrepreneurship, mathematics and information and communication technologies) starting from grade 4 of primary school through middle school and the two first grades of high school).

The first segment of the programme, namely developing creative thinking in early–school education will be implemented in 899 primary schools.

In 2009/2010, 923 teachers from these schools underwent special preparatory training.

Three stages of developing creative thinking:

I.Inspiration;

II.Mind-opening – noticing and identifying problems;

III.Solutions, creativity – problem-solving.

The major task for the first segment of the DiAMEnT Project will be to change teachers' attitudes and through this, the philosophy of teaching, so that acquiring knowledge would be **a means to creative self-development** and would not be the value in itself.

The focus here is on transition from transferring knowledge to **assistance** aimed at **each pupil** in order to recognise their talents and individual abilities, to help in developing their problem-solving skills and strengthen their sense of self-confidence in their abilities.

The ‘Creative World Discovery’ programme, including supporting materials developed for teachers, finishes with a list of 84 messages enhancing a creative atmosphere during classes.
Examples:
- You are full of great ideas
- You have exhibited good work today;
- You have an interesting view on the topic;
- You have outdone yourself;

All of the above best exemplify the nature of the programme.

The program for supporting pupils' abilities (the second segment)

- Preparation of a group of school principals and teachers (through conferences, workshops and training courses);

-A two-stage programme of diagnosing pupils' abilities (stage 1 – pupils selected by teachers; stage 2 – diagnostic tests – checking predispositions and achievements);

- Enhancing the effectiveness of working with gifted pupils at school (individualisation of teaching and didactic process);

- Extra-curricular activities at POWUZ – The Poviat Centres for Gifted Students, held separately for grades 4 through 6 of primary school and grades 1 through 3 of middle school and separately for secondary school pupils;

- E-learning research clubs;

- Summer schools for gifted students.

‘DiAMEnT’ Project:

1. The number of teachers to be trained – 2635;
2. The number of workshop groups preparing the teachers –106;
3. The total number of pupils participating in the extra-curricular activities at POWUZ:

- from primary schools: min 3760 to max.7520 in 376 groups;

-from middle schools: min 3800 to max. 7600 in 380 groups;

-from high schools: min. 3800 to max. 7600 in 380 groups.

Experiences to date from the implementation of the DiAMEnT Project (I):

- Big enthusiasm and good results of working with early-school teachers;
- A much bigger reserve towards the project on behalf of middle and secondary school teachers;
- Problems in recruiting the best teachers to work regularly at the Centres for Gifted Students (POWUZ).

Experiences to date from the implementation of the DiAMEnT Project (II):

The experience we got from the project indicates the need to change the awareness and attitude to working with gifted pupils:

- Too much importance is placed on the system of subject competitions which are based on encyclopaedic knowledge whereas the importance of building key competencies is neglected;
- Very often teachers identify 'the gifted pupils' taking into account their societal skills (high GPA, good behaviour) and not by considering the term 'gifted' in the psychological sense (high intellectual potential, high level of creative thinking, high motivation);
- In working with gifted students, not enough emphasis is placed on enhancing their creative-thinking skills.

Changes taking place in the world's economy and the situation in the EU pose particular challenges for the countries which underwent the process of the systemic transformation 20 years ago. We are still faced with the question if we will be able to catch up with the richest countries or whether we will remain the second or third category countries. Sometimes, it is possible to use the so-called 'delay benefit.' The DiAMEnT project is an example of such activity.

If the educational authorities of the Małopolska region permanently adopt the new systemic activities across the whole primary and secondary education system, then in 15 to 20 years there will be an increase in the percentage of young people in our Province who exhibit creative, entrepreneurial and innovative attitudes.

If this percentage is larger in Małopolska than in other regions, it will surely contribute to a faster growth of the GDP in the Małopolska region and thus to facilitating the creation of the knowledge region. Finally, it should enable us to compete with the best regions and corporations in the world.

Thank you for your attention!

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