

Today's matura (end-of-school exam) student would not manage to pass the old exam to get to high-school – states Krzysztof Cywiński, the author of “Mathematics for humanists, the dyslexic and other hopeless cases”

School lessons must be reformed

Krzysztof Cywiński, mathematician of Zabrze, interviewed by Katarzyna Piotrowiak

Is the easy matura exam – not only the mathematics part – the proof of a student's skills? What will the Central Examination Committee measure with such exams?

Nothing. They will only show they are doing something. They will try to prove that the whole effort, also in the media, have not gone to waste. And it does not matter if it's the matura exam or another. As a country, we are shown in a grotesque manner, I have a feeling I participate in a theatre of absurd. I understand the idea of the government, that we must somehow survive it, because the educational level is very low. Because how would it look like if 100 thousand students out of 400 thousand failed. In this case, the interests of math teachers would clash, as well as private schools that would probably need to close due to lack of students. If we now fail about as many potential University students, we will stop making money.

School has become ineffective?

Before, private tutoring was chosen by weak students. After class, they mostly studied scientific subjects. Nowadays there is even tutoring regarding social class, history or geography. I do not understand it, in fact if someone wants to pass history during matura and cannot study it, they should not choose this subject. On the other hand, schools do not teach. This is why tutoring suddenly became so costly. Meanwhile, it would be better to lengthen high-school by one more year.

One second please, but there are teachers among tutors. Does teaching seem better to them once they earn money?

I think that teachers lack ideas for classes. Various projects and programmes look pretty on paper. There are many ideas, a lot of things are said about this, but... nothing comes out of it. Those ideas are not brought to life. However, if we take into account, that 2 milliard zlotys has been spent on innovative methods of teaching, then the question is: what are the effects?

While observing students, have you noticed any improvement of their skills? Do they solve problems better?

High-school students still have a problem with fractions. And as for teachers, not many of them have ideas for classes. As a positive one, I will give you the example of a teacher from Toszek, that brings a drilling machine to math classes. She attaches geometrical models to it, turns the machine on and leads a class on the solid of revolution. Still, there are not many teachers like that.

Such ideas are worth spreading across. Why don't teachers share their ideas?

A perfect solution would be to create a social website for teachers. They would have the opportunity to talk about their innovations on forums, and others could make use of them. This would be a great plan. The government could finally spend money on something truly valuable.

What do you suggest?

Students have a right to defend themselves against a bad math teacher or another subject...

Is this a joke?

No. Not long ago have I suggested to the officials of MEN (The Ministry of National Education) to record all the classes with a video camera and show them in public. May a good teacher have the chance to show off, while others make use of it too. It was about showing the best classes on television. Later, I found out that the department of education had spent 20 mln PLN on recording short videos which were aired on the lesser known TV4. Each video was three minutes long. In one of the videos there was a task for the students to picture a collar around the Earth's equator. The question was: "How much should we lengthen the collar so that a Dachshund ("winnie dog") can fit through between it and the Earth?" Who needs that? A waste of money for such things.

Do you believe we can learn something from other countries?

Certainly. The right to criticize the system, the opportunity to interventions at school. Education is a must everywhere, but not every teacher gives their best. If a parent pays taxes, and the child does not know mathematics, they must be able to do something.

Do you think that our schools are as bad as they seem?

And why wasn't it possible to find a tutor before matura? Because of our educational system we are in a big hole in the ground. Even amateurs and university students have taken part in this. The value of education has plummeted drastically in all types of schools. Of course there are elite schools and elite students who still keep their level stable. That is the group that one passed matura, while the rest was choosing occupational schools. Now the majority is in high-schools, hence the low value of education. Fifteen years ago during pre-high-school exams, one had to solve five questions. The students had all been preparing themselves really well. Today's matura students would not handle the old exam.