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Academic Integrity in Poland: A Culturally Sensitive Code of Ethics Proposal

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Abstract

The chosen problem does not seem to be the most important social problem in Poland, however, this is an issue where we somehow stand out. Perhaps this is due to a certain 'tradition of combining' and a desire to outsmart a superior authority. Unfortunately, pupils who devise ever more ingenious ways to cheat the teacher are sometimes made into heroes by their peers (Bajtos et al, 2020; Davis et al., 2011; Bushway et al., 1997; Schab, 1991). Perhaps their ingenuity and enthusiasm can be compared to the ambitions of young people who in the past secretly founded organisations and schemed how to secretly gain knowledge. However, a dishonest student usually becomes a dishonest student, and at Polish universities, cheating is also common. So much so that when one student loudly points out during an exam that his colleague is cheating, he becomes the target of attacks from other students. In view of this, cheating is more often described as a coping skill than as cheating.

Relegated to the sidelines, the problem is often ignored. In Poland, for generations, cheating has been considered harmless, even normal. People download at every level of education: from primary school to university, and teachers turn a blind eye. Also in view of the recent pandemic situation, when learning took place remotely, the problem of cheating has increased (Parcheta-Kowalik et al., 2015).

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1. Seeing the problem

An attempt to analyse it from the point of view of the child, the education system, parents and upbringing, as well as the consequences for the future generation, makes this issue seem worth noting. All the more so in view of the current situation, where AI is beginning to interfere more and more in the education system and scientific work in the broader sense - students, as well as academics, are increasingly taking advantage of such an opportunity to trick themselves into writing scientific papers and articles (Gwóźdź, 2019; Honzíkova et al., 2020).

In Poland, the acceptance of dishonest exam writing is much higher than in other countries. Beginning with the fact that there are cases of parents doing homework for their children and ending with the purchase of dissertations - every now and then, information about people writing dissertations to order appears in the media (many such offers can be found on the Internet) (Marcysiak et al., 2019, Walker et al, 2012).

A. *Scale of the problem – researches*

According to a survey conducted in 2004 - 2005 in Łódź by CBOS, 58% of Poles are not against such practices as downloading, while only 28% openly criticise such activity. What is more, according to surveys carried out in secondary school, as many as 86-95% of students have downloaded at least once, only 16% consider it something bad, and as many as 60% of students have no opinion on the subject. According to a 2015 CBOS survey, as many as 58% of respondents see nothing wrong with downloading. Only 28% of Poles strongly condemn downloading. And how many students download during tests, exams and midterms? According to surveys conducted over the past two decades, between 66% and 98% of students admit to cheating. The vast majority use unauthorised aids when they have the opportunity. A negligible number of students only use downloading in emergency situations.

To show a broader perspective, it is worth mentioning other studies comparing the level of cheating in schools in different countries. For example a study published in the Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology in 2012 (Rettinger et al., 2012) compared cheating behavior among university students in 18 countries, including Poland. The study found that students in some countries, such as Turkey and Thailand, reported higher levels of cheating than students in other countries, such as Japan and Norway. However, the study also found that cheating rates were generally higher among students in business and economics programs than among students in other fields. Another study published in the journal Science and Engineering Ethics in 2018 (Anderman et al., 2018) surveyed engineering students in six countries, including Poland. The study found that while cheating rates varied across countries, there was a significant problem with academic dishonesty in all six countries, and that certain types of cheating, such as copying from a classmate's exam, were more prevalent than others.

B. *"Ethical awareness" and legal orders*

Cheating by students in Polish schools undermines several ethical principles, including (Maruszewska, 2009):

- **Honesty:** Honesty is a core ethical principle that is essential to maintaining trust and integrity. When students cheat, they are being dishonest about their knowledge and abilities, which undermines the trust that teachers and other students have in them (Błachnio, 2019).
- **Fairness:** Fairness is another important ethical principle that is essential to creating a level playing field for all students. When some students cheat, they gain an unfair advantage over others who are working hard to succeed through honest means.
- **Respect:** Respect is an ethical principle that involves treating others with dignity and acknowledging their worth. When

students cheat, they are showing disrespect for the efforts of their peers who are working hard to succeed through honest means.

- **Responsibility:** Responsibility is an ethical principle that involves taking ownership of one's actions and being accountable for their consequences. When students cheat, they are shirking their responsibility to learn and succeed through honest means, and they are potentially putting their own academic and professional futures at risk.
- **Trust:** Trust is a key ethical principle that is essential to building strong relationships and communities. When students cheat, they erode the trust that teachers, parents, and peers have in them, which can have negative consequences both in the short and long term.
- **Integrity:** Integrity is an ethical principle that involves maintaining consistency between one's actions and values. When students cheat, they are acting in a way that is inconsistent with the values of academic integrity and honesty, which undermines their own sense of personal integrity and can have negative consequences for their future success (Gózdź, 2020).

It seems that ethical awareness of cheating at school as a serious problem is still too low in Poland. Issues of legal regulation and punishment come first. The regulations presented below indicate the attempts made so far to solve the problem on the basis of legal provisions and regulations, which, as already indicated in the previous paragraphs, in many cases remain ineffective.

In accordance with the Regulation of the Polish Minister of National Education of 21 December 2016 on the detailed conditions and manner of conducting the lower secondary school and matriculation examinations, as well as in accordance with the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 28 August 2019 on the detailed conditions and manner of conducting the vocational examination and the examination confirming qualifications in a profession, there is a total prohibition of any form of unauthorised external assistance.

Applicable penalties:

- warning,
- withdrawal of a previously prepared aid,
- transfer to another seat in the classroom,
- attention,
- withdrawal of work,
- change from written to oral assessment,
- a fail mark without regard to the answers,
- giving a failing grade without the chance to take a revision test.

During state examinations. The examination is interrupted and the student is asked to leave the examination room. In the case of a matriculation exam, for example, the next chance to take the exam is not until next year (Szpila, 2012).

C. Teacher's perspective

It is worth also noting the teachers' perspective (Bajtoš, 2020). With regard to the Polish viewpoint Jarek Szulski, an educator, teacher and author of the book 'Nauczyciel z Polski', believes that if a school's most important goal is averages and a high place in the rankings, while at the same time other spheres of development are neglected, it means that the school is not serving students and education. During his career, he has encountered situations where students in their matriculation year have been asked to change schools because they might have lowered their averages. "I have also heard of more sublime forms of this phenomenon, when a student is told that he cannot write, for example, extended mathematics, and if he chooses it, he will not be allowed to take the exam", says a former teacher at Warsaw's Reytan Middle School and Reytan High School, formerly Batory High School. In view of the above, cheating at school is sometimes a condition of survival for pupils.

D. *Researcher's perspective*

Many publications on downloading highlight the need for a change in attitudes to learning (Lupton et al., 2020; Klein et al., 2007; Strom, 2007). Directing more attention from the desire to get good grades and compete with other students to the desire to acquire knowledge would probably contribute to a decrease in the percentage of students who cheat. Researchers who have dealt with this issue in Polish schools have pointed out that the biggest problem is the consolidation of encyclopaedic knowledge, which is easy to write down on a wall, but more difficult to use in practice. Another problem is the vast amount of material that teachers have to pass on and students have to assimilate. In many cases, downloading is the result of a lack of time to prepare thoroughly for each test.

2. Judgement of the problem in the light of values and virtues

Cheating is a corruption of academic integrity, a value upheld by many educational institutions around the world. The Gospel teaches that honesty and integrity are important virtues and, according to the golden rule, we should treat others as we would like to be treated ourselves. Cheating should be interpreted as contrary to these principles. If a student is cheating at school, it is important to address this behaviour and help the student understand the importance of academic honesty. It is also important to promote a culture of honesty and integrity within the school community and to encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning and work hard to achieve their goals.

Honesty as an important virtue is passed on to children by parents, it is then valued by employers. It is therefore surprising that philosophy has not mentioned the virtue of honesty in the last fifty years, which could be considered a serious omission (Miller, 2020; 2021).

In order to make an overall assessment of the problem under consideration, it would be necessary to mention that there are many factors that may influence student cheating at school in Poland, including (Chudzicka-Czupała, 2014):

- Pressure to succeed: As mentioned earlier, there is often a lot of pressure on Polish students to perform well academically. This pressure can come from parents, teachers, and peers, and it can lead some students to cheat in order to maintain their grades.

- Lack of consequences: If cheating is not seen as a serious offense or if there are no real consequences for getting caught, students may be more likely to take the risk.
- Lack of understanding: Some students may not fully understand what constitutes cheating, especially if they come from a different cultural or educational background.
- Lack of interest: Students who are not interested in the subject matter or who are struggling to keep up may be more likely to cheat in order to avoid failing.
- Accessibility of cheating methods: With the rise of technology, it has become easier than ever to cheat in school. Students can copy and paste text from the internet, share answers via text message or social media, or use other methods to cheat.
- Peer pressure: Students may feel pressure from their peers to cheat, especially if cheating is seen as a norm within their social group.
- Ethics and values: Students' own personal values and ethics may play a role in whether or not they choose to cheat.

The above mentioned can be described as 'self-defence lies' analysed in contemporary philosophical and psychological literature on deception and false excuses. These involve lies of self-defence to protect apparent interests, to avoid, for example, a speeding ticket or, in the case of the problem under discussion, a negative grade at school (Hsieh, 2004).

A. Influence of Polish national culture

Polish culture generally places a high value on academic achievement and education, and many parents place great emphasis on their children's success at school. This can potentially contribute to a culture of competition and pressure to succeed, which may lead some students to cheat in order to get better grades. In addition, the role of education in Polish society is seen as very important, with many people seeing it as a means to social and economic advancement. This can also contribute to the pressure to succeed in school, which may lead some students to cheat. The causes of student dishonesty could also be sought in the related problem of corruption, which could potentially extend to academia. If students grow up in an environment where corruption is prevalent, they may be more likely to engage in cheating as a way to achieve their academic goals (Orosz et al., 2018). In Poland, there is social consent to this kind of practice, and if a student notices that, for example, his or her friend is cheating, it is unfortunately better for him or her not to go public with this information (Chudzicka-Czupala, 2016).

Poland has also a long history of being invaded and controlled by foreign powers, which has led to a culture of suspicion and mistrust towards those in authority. This may contribute to a culture of cheating in school, where some students may view the educational system and teachers as part of an oppressive power structure that can only be overcome through deceit. Perhaps their ingenuity and eagerness can be compared to the ambitions of young people who in the past secretly set up organisations and contrived how to secretly acquire knowledge. However, a dishonest pupil usually becomes a dishonest student, and at Polish universities, cheating is also common (Butler, 2007). So much so that when one student loudly points out during an exam that his colleague is cheating, he becomes the target of attacks from other students. In view of this, cheating is more often described as a coping skill than as cheating. In order to show the Polish approach to

many issues including school challenges, the following will be the lyrics of a contemporary song that explains the Polish national cultural approach.

<p>Polak potrafi kto temu zaprzeczy Dla Polaka nie ma nie do wykonania rzeczy Twardy charakter i silne ręce Słowiańska dusza i wielkie serce Kto da więcej Trwa licytacja Nie zabiła go komuna i nie zmieni demokracja Połowa w kraju połowa na wakacjach Pięknie rozkwita emigracja Jak następna stacja drogi krzyżowej Dla narodu w krainie polityki moherowej</p> <p>Ktoś powiedział Polak potrafi On uwierzył bo wiarę miał Ojczyznę i Boga w sercu A dłonie jak stal</p> <p>Polak potrafi wedle powiedzenia Dla Polaka nie ma sprawy nie do załatwienia Polak ma ambicje Polak ma marzenia Na marzeniach wychowane pokolenia Jak zorganizować to czego pod ręką nie ma Kombinatorka drogą do zbawienia Darmowe cyrkowe przedstawienia Klaunów na arenie politycznej W mojej ojczyźnie kochanej platonicznie A tak miało być ślicznie</p> <p>Ktoś powiedział Polak potrafi On uwierzył bo wiarę miał Ojczyznę i Boga w sercu A dłonie jak stal</p> <p>Ktoś pokazał drogę do celu On poszedł tak jak stał Z ojczyzną i Bogiem w sercu I zdobył co chciał</p> <p>Polak potrafi Polak umie Polak nie zginie w tłumie Polak ponarzeka i zaszlocha Ale jaka by nie była Polskę kocha</p>	<p>Polish man can do it There are no impossible things for a Polish man Tough character and strong hands Slavic soul and a big heart Who gives more? The communists didn't kill him and democracy won't change him Half in the country half on holiday Emigration is blooming beautifully Like the next station on the Stations of the Cross For a nation in the land of mohair politics</p> <p>Someone said Polish man can He believed because he had faith Homeland and God in his heart And hands like steel</p> <p>Polish man is able to, according to the saying For a Polish man there's nothing that can't be done Polish man has ambitions Polish man has dreams Generations raised on dreams How to organise what is not at hand The combinatorial way to salvation Free circus performances Clowns in the political arena In my platonically loved homeland And it was supposed to be so beautiful</p> <p>Someone said Polish man can He believed because he had faith Homeland and God in his heart And hands like steel</p> <p>Someone showed the way to the goal He went as he stood With fatherland and God in his heart And got what he wanted</p> <p>Polish man can do Polish man can do Polish man will not be lost in the crowd Polish man will complain and cry But whatever he is, he loves Poland</p>
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B. Who is responsible?

Responsibility for student cheating in Polish schools lies with a number of actors, including students, teachers, parents and policy makers.

- Students are ultimately responsible for their actions and should be held accountable for cheating. They should also be educated about the consequences of cheating and alternative ways to succeed in school without resorting to dishonesty.

- Teachers also have a responsibility to discourage cheating and create a culture of academic honesty in their classrooms. This can involve setting clear expectations for academic honesty, designing assessments that make cheating more difficult, and providing resources and support for students who are struggling.
- Parents can also play a role in preventing cheating by emphasising the importance of academic honesty and supporting their children's education in a positive way. They can also work with schools and teachers to create a culture of honesty and trust.
- Policymakers can play a role in countering cheating by creating policies and programmes that support academic integrity. This can include funding anti-cheating initiatives, developing grading policies that encourage honesty, and training teachers and administrators on how to detect and prevent cheating.

In view of the above mentioned problem sides, it would be appropriate to say that preventing student cheating in Polish schools requires a concerted effort by all stakeholders and a commitment to creating a culture of academic integrity that promotes honesty and trust.

The search for possible solutions to social problem students cheating, which will be considered in the next paragraph of the paper, should be embedded in the effort to follow the path of truth and to live in accordance with the light of truth, since every person is obliged, according to his or her circumstances, to seek solutions to social issues in accordance with the full human truth, bearing in mind that neither truth nor morality can depend on the judgement of the majority. Therefore, also the acceptance by society (the search by teachers, parents and the students themselves for excuses for dishonest acts) is not a sufficient premise to consider these acts as morally good. Of course, any attempt to understand the roots of these actions is extremely important and worth noting, but one must not lose sight of the goal of any solution to return to truth and honesty.

3. Identification of possible solutions

Noticing and better understanding the influence of Polish national culture on inappropriate academic behaviour students should notice the need and concern for honesty in the name of justice so that they perceive honest behaviour as good, wise, useful, enjoyable and profitable. A culturally sensitive code of ethics should therefore be developed! An interesting suggestion for the problem under discussion could be to compare it to a rider on horseback, as the best antidote to self-doubt caused by failure is to get back on the horse. As a rule of thumb, the idea that we should persevere despite the fear of another failure applies to both moral and equestrian pursuits. The process of moral improvement would involve acknowledging bad deeds and motivating oneself to change. In view of this, the primary danger that false excuses pose to moral character is their ability to undermine these two necessary prerequisites for moral improvement, by blinding us to our moral failings and reducing our motivation to reform (Hsieh, 2004). It might be also worth rethinking the inspiration and application of the criteria according to the 1979 Belmont Report in the key of: (1) respect for persons, (2) beneficence and (3) justice, which applies to research ethics (Miracle, 2016) having regard to respect for human dignity, transparency and accountability as well as confidentiality (personal data files and privacy issues).



Above graphic shows the principals of conducting research by source https://edurev.in/studytube/Notes-Research-Ethics-Principles/04e8afee-ab57-4dfb-8cee-40d142bd3aa6_t.

It would be interesting to highlight a study that developed a model of the cultural coevolution of integrity and capital (Somanathan et al., 2004). Honesty and employee human capital were shown to be positively correlated. Such an approach shows honesty as not only an ethical and moral value, but also one whose benefit can be calculated according to a mathematical formula. Such an argument seems to be a valuable reasoning to indicate the legitimacy of certain regulations at the decision-making level of the state and, in this case, the education department.

Perhaps it would be helpful to make Polish students aware of how it is treated in other countries. In the USA and Canada, for example, cheating on examinations seriously undermines the reputation of the university and can even lead to expulsion from the university. The arguments in favour of such a restrictive approach to cheating are simple - a dishonest student will not be reluctant in the future to falsify scientific research and to cheat in their professional work. In Sweden, students police themselves during examinations - if they report on themselves, no one holds a grudge - honesty is the norm. By contrast, in India and China, where exam results have a very significant impact on a young person's future, it is almost impossible to combat cheating. In India, whole families take part in the writing of final examinations - parents hand out the students' statements through the windows. A good exam grade contributes to a much better start in adult life, so students and their parents are able to sacrifice a lot for a favourable result. By contrast, in China, where students are admitted to university on the basis of their exam results, there are cases of people being hired to write exams for students or using professional detective gadgets. In many countries, especially in the developed world, cheating is 'disgusting' and a source of shame. By contrast, in developing countries, where a great deal depends on good results, students disregard

honesty and try to get the best grade at all costs (Rettinger et al., 2012).

Suggestion of a culturally sensitive code of ethics

In terms of the proposed solution of a culturally sensitive code of ethics that would take into account the unique cultural factors that may contribute to the problem, some possible elements of such a code of ethics could include:

- Emphasising the importance of academic integrity: A code of ethics should make it clear that academic integrity is a core value that is essential to the educational process. Students should be taught that cheating undermines the integrity of their education and that they have a responsibility to maintain high standards of honesty and trust.
- Encouraging critical thinking: The Code of Ethics should encourage critical thinking and discourage memorisation by heart. Students should be taught that learning is about more than just getting good grades, and that developing critical thinking skills is essential to their long-term success.
- Addressing a culture of suspicion: The Code of Ethics should recognise the historical and cultural factors that may contribute to a culture of suspicion and distrust of authority. It should encourage students to challenge authority figures in a constructive manner, rather than resorting to dishonesty.
- Creating a safe and supportive environment: The code of ethics should emphasise the importance of creating a safe and supportive environment where students feel comfortable asking questions and seeking help. This may include measures such as peer mentoring, tutoring programmes and counselling services.
- Educate students about the consequences of cheating: The code of ethics should make it clear that cheating has real consequences, both for the individual student and for the wider community. Students should be educated about the ethical, legal and social implications of cheating and the potential damage it can cause to their reputation and future opportunities.
- Encouraging a sense of responsibility: The Code of Ethics should instil a sense of responsibility among students, teachers and parents to maintain academic integrity. Students should be taught that they have a responsibility to themselves and their community to maintain high standards of integrity and trust.

A culturally sensitive Polish code of ethics against student cheating in schools should focus on promoting academic honesty, critical thinking and a sense of responsibility, while taking into account the unique cultural factors that may influence student behaviour. It should be developed through collaboration between students, teachers, parents and policy makers, and should be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure its effectiveness.

4. Further discussion

It seems that solutions could be divided into real and ideal (final) ones. Probably a big step would be public awareness of the problem of cheating as serious in Poland at the level of families, teachers and the whole education system. As it stands, the problem seems to affect only children, for whom appropriate penalties are provided when they are 'caught cheating'. This makes skilful cheating all the more appreciated and, in a way, promoted. Public awareness of the problem

should probably be planned as some kind of additional school programme. It seems that, to be effective, it should take some interesting form - perhaps multimedia, perhaps with guests from other countries showing the value and positive experiences of not cheating - that it is possible and what good it does (to be successful, there should probably be only limited moralistic stigmatisation of cheating and dishonesty, with indication of rather the good and benefits of honesty). Ideally, the whole education system in Poland should be 'healed' so that the pupil is at the centre rather than the grades and level of teaching in the school. A sense of pride and enjoyment in self-performed tasks could also be promoted. The joy that comes from noticeable progress. Perhaps we could think of a more holistic view of a pupil's 'progress' in the learning process so that a poor grade in mathematics could be balanced by a good grade in history or geography. Then, even a poorer grade in one subject would not be a cause for frustration for the pupil, because he or she would see his or her strengths and weaknesses more clearly and would not try "at all costs = unfairly" to raise the grade in the weaker subject. It may be possible to 'organise' extra classes in which pupils with a talent for one subject explain it to other pupils, who in turn could explain something else to them - on a subsidiary basis, in which case, on tests, perhaps pupils would compete less with each other and 'keep their fingers crossed' more. It seems that the school should to some extent take over the task of preparing children for life also in terms of responsibility, honest coping, challenges and finding solutions and not just a lot of material to be memorised. A solution to the problem of cheating at school could be sought in the key of a corporate approach to the education system with the inclusion of everyone: from teachers and parents, to school principals, the Board of Education as well as the Ministry of Education. Such an approach would be consistent with the findings that even a flawed system such as capitalism can be attempted to fix by working with it and judging it. The solution to the problem should also focus strongly on the family - it is difficult to say how to work with parents, but perhaps they could also have systematic meetings at school, perhaps some trips, seminars, workshops that would help them realise the importance of their role in ensuring that their children grow up to be honest, responsible and noble people.

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