

COMBATING SCHOOL FAILURE IN POLAND: A REMARKABLE INITIATIVE

Since the beginning of the month of January 2006, thousands of Polish children with learning difficulties of all kinds can access the Tomatis method through 200 psycho-educational centres located around the country. In fact, the Polish national Ministry of Education, under which these centres come, decided at the end of 2005 to provide them with an efficient tool to resolve problems of integration in schools, such as dyslexia, dysorthographia, dyscalculia, psychomotricity and laterality problems and behavioural disorders which affect a number of children. Keen to find an effective way of combating school failure, its choice fell to the Tomatis method, after observing the astonishing results obtained by the Warsaw Institute of Hearing Physiology and Pathology.

For several years, the Institute has actually been successfully applying this method, the effectiveness of which is world-renowned. Perfected more than 40 years ago by Professor Alfred Tomatis, an otorhinolaryngologist and psycho-physiologist specialised in hearing and language disorders, this original method works on the existing relation between the ear and the voice and, by extension, between listening and communication: it is a way of educating the ear, which enables the subject to recover the desire to communicate by learning how best to use the auditory system at his disposal. *“The quasi-totality of children who can neither read, write nor count correctly suffer from disorders which are auditory in nature,”* observed Prof. Tomatis. *“Traditional tests often miss them, for the information they provide concerns hearing alone. The first sensorial organ developed by the foetus, the ear is the true gateway to our inner world. It operates like the dynamo of the brain and the nervous system.”*

Alfred Tomatis demonstrated that good hearing is not sufficient to be able to reproduce sounds correctly. In effect, the majority of language difficulties, whether spoken or written, are not related to hearing disorders but to listening problems: it is possible to hear well without necessarily being capable of decoding the sounds experienced. In other words, distortions in the perception of sounds lead to difficulties of comprehension and therefore to difficulties of verbal reproduction. Consequently, reading is rendered difficult and difficulties in written restitution occur, as do difficulties in concentration and memorisation: communication is impeded...

At the age of 18 Gérard Depardieu already wanted to become an actor, although he was suffering from severe problems with his speech and elocution. In his biography written by Paul Chutkow in 1994, Gérard Depardieu confided: “Alfred Tomatis made me discover the art of speaking. Before Tomatis I was incapable of finishing a sentence. Thanks to his method I have been able to achieve some type of continuity in my thoughts, a sense of synthesis. This has been a true linguistic rebirth”

All of the Polish centres which have chosen to apply the Tomatis method are now equipped with an electronic appliance constructed and referred to by Prof. Tomatis as “the Electronic Ear”, which makes it possible to re-educate the ear by restoring its proper listening function.

So will there soon be fewer children with learning difficulties in Poland? Obviously, it is too soon to say. But this initiative, the first of its kind in the national education system of a member state of the European Union deserves attention. Funded in part by the European Union, which is also lending its support, it could be extended to a number of other psycho-educational centres in the country and, if results are satisfactory, offer incentives and open up new perspectives throughout Europe.

Fortunately, Luxembourg can tune its ears, too: The local Tomatis Institute has been successfully providing valuable support to children and adults with learning difficulties for over a year.

(DS-E)