

The Reform of the Inservice Teacher Education System in Poland

By Janina Zawadoska

Changes in the Educational System in Poland

Abandoning a totalitarian system in 1989, and choosing democracy, Polish society entered into a new era and a new social deal. We started on the road to an open society, open market, and open economy. It seems to me that nobody can understand better what it means than the people of such nations that were in similar conditions as Poland and did likewise.

Positive changes affected all institutions in our society. Our national educational system was no exception. But educational systems are always the most immune to change and the most conservative. And so is ours. Some changes were made right away, *e.g.*, a new approach to history based on facts and sources rather than on ideology. Other *ad hoc* changes were rather superficial and cosmetic.

At the same time, intensive work was undertaken for planning general reform of the whole educational system. This reflected sweeping change of new pedagogical ideas, and a new educational philosophy. The main concern was changing the general education of the whole younger generation. They are to live in the new society and new economy, and we must prepare them for it.

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We want less of encyclopaedic education in schools in favour of more operative education; less emphasis

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on “knowing that,” and more stress on “knowing how;” less of passive memorization, more of initiative. Such changes require:

active pedagogy,
individualised learning, and
diversification of teaching styles.

The problem is where to start such changes first—in schools, in teacher education colleges, or at the universities. In all of these institutions at once or, just to begin, only in some of them. In the centralized system in Poland of the past 40 years, the power of taking initiative and making decisions in such matters was at the ministry or even higher. At the present time in Poland, such changes must grow as a grass-roots movement. They cannot be ordered from above. They must come from schools and teachers. There is no other way. We encourage all such endeavours and movements wherever they arise. To this aim, direct contacts with other educational systems are very stimulating and helpful. This comes through exchange of professional journals, conferences, fact finding and study missions, and private visits and communication. Such actions help the development of new ideas and initiatives, which must then be followed by the entire logistics and administration of the system.

Teacher Education in Poland

In Poland, the majority of teachers are specialized by their initial education in teaching of only one subject. This condition was imposed in the past by academic institutions, mostly universities which were unable to provide such teacher education that would produce teachers for two or more school subjects, *e.g.* mathematics and physics, or mathematics and science, or Polish language and some foreign language, *e.g.* English or French, or mathematics and music, etc. Cooperation between two departments at universities was too difficult and time-consuming. They were usually located a long way apart. Big academic campuses were considered politically “dangerous.” Such separation once accomplished turned out to be very convenient for the administration, and so it remained. But of course separation of subjects and single-subject teachers is not what the schools like most. At present, initial teacher education in Poland is mostly theoretical. Contact with schools is rather weak. Especially at universities, those who choose the teachers’ stream have usually lower grades of the main subject than those who choose other streams. Points of view focus around two options of teacher education:

the option of theoretical knowledge and technical skills;
the option of practical professional mastery.

In the first option, we pretend that we know a lot—almost everything—about teaching and learning, and students must first acquire knowledge about effective rules and procedures which are theoretically correct and technically feasible, and

then try and practice it the proper way, in school.

In the second option of professional mastery, we admit that our knowledge is subject to change, and there is still a lot we do not know about learning and teaching, and so professional mastery is related to personal development and contacts in stimulating environment. It is more than the sum of partial skills. In the second option, contact with practice should come early. In the first one it is not so essential.

Inservice Problems

Because of changes in programmes of study, we have surpluses of teachers of some subjects and at the same time shortages of staff in others. One such example, and a big problem, is the surplus of teachers of Russian language, and shortage of those of English, French, and German.

Changing specialization from one subject to another or adding an additional specialization to the one which is already acquired is a constant problem of in-service education.

The new approach to school programmes of study gives priorities to:

- foreign languages;
- computers across curriculum;
- education to democracy;
- ecological education.

This again imposes some tasks on inservice education. Successful fulfillment of these tasks requires teaching staff, teaching material, and apparatus. These are only prerequisites. Teaching style is essential. If we want to see workshop style teaching, individualised learning, and courseworks in school, then we should first of all adopt such teaching style of inservice courses in colleges and universities.

In languages, we stress communication skills and correct pronunciation rather than grammar and theory. In computers, their use rather than separate courses in computer science. Education to democracy means first of all treating students as responsible persons who have their rights in schools and freedom of choice.

A new approach to vocational education and training implies specialization coming rather later—even after the baccalaureat—and a rather wide-ranging education instead of narrow specialities and new technologies. This cannot be achieved without new equipment and teaching aids and help from the European Economic Community.

At present, our specific problem is that a lot of the vocational schools were supported by the corresponding state industry. Now that industry is in a state of constant crisis, many such schools have lost their rich sponsors and some of them are being closed. This again means that some teachers must change their teaching subjects or face unemployment.

Changes in Relation to Specific Subjects

Changes in the national curriculum impose requirements on inservice teacher education in otherwise traditional subjects like history, economics, etc. Even sciences and mathematics as school subjects are being changed. The change is in the content, teaching methods, teaching style, and general organization. Some new teaching subjects have appeared on the scene, like business studies and statistics.

Conclusion

There is a deep reform of the entire educational system of Poland, involving schools, academic institutions, and administration. The reform of inservice teacher education in Poland is only a part of this plan. But it is an essential part of it.