



**DOING FAMILY**  
IN A TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXT



## **Expert report on the characteristics of Polish primary education**

Prof. dr hab. Bożena Muchacka



# 1. The role and mission of Polish schools in children's education and upbringing

Children's education and upbringing are processes which require participation and collaboration of many parties, centred mainly around two environments: the family and the school. Although a full co-operation of these environments is assumed, in regard to taking responsibility for the effects of the upbringing and education, the environments are divided; moreover, they often formulate different expectations.

In modern Europe each nursery and each school has specific educational and cultural functions in their environment, meeting both individual and collective needs of children, as well as the needs of the local community, while also influencing the local environment and interpersonal relations. For that reason the educational and non-educational activity of nurseries and schools more and more often becomes the subject of analyses undertaken by the principals and administration boards of those facilities, which aim at establishing the mission and identity of the individual nursery, and more importantly – the individual school. The educational mission defines the functions which the individual educational facility wishes to fulfil for the benefit of the children and the local environment, while formulating mission tasks helps explain to both the parents of the children and the teachers themselves what educational problems and in what scope the school/nursery aims to address, and most importantly, in what way they are intended to be solved. As a result, the fundamental educational objective is established for the individual facility, which creates the basis for establishing educational strategy for the given school or nursery to lie at the centre of all activity and educational initiatives, including educational forms, methods and aids. Establishing the mission of a given educational facility facilitates shaping the identity of the facility. The adopted principles of educational and non-educational activity in regard to the mission and the identity of the educational facility, and in particular their implementation, create a positive (sometimes, regrettably, a negative) image of the nursery/school, which is an important indicator of the educational position of the given facility in the local environment, allowing for the efficiency and quality of the facility's educational activity to be established (Muchacka: 2012a: 34-35).

In order to explain the role and mission of Polish schools in children's education and upbringing, we need to take into consideration the scope of social expectations formulated by the parents in regard to the school, as well as the formal expectations formulated by the state through its legislation. The output of Polish academics is also significant, as in their research they attempt to establish the mission of Polish schools and their role in the upbringing of successive generations, although it must be stated that the research falls behind the dynamically occurring social changes.

Even though more than a half of Poles currently think that the political transformation in Poland and its consequences have not impacted their family lives, it is worth noticing that such perspective concerns personal experiences and most frequently relates to the current financial situation of the respondent's household (Badora, 2013: 10). The introduction of the free-market economy has radically transformed accessibility to material goods and to the labour market (Wachowiak, 2010: 105). It was accompanied by a change in the amount of quality time which parents spend with the child and their expectations towards the school. Another consequence of those changes is also the transformation of the perspective on the role and mission of Polish schools in regards to children's education and upbringing, which reinforced the necessity of Polish educational reform and which commenced in 1999.

These days the school is seen as an institution providing education and upbringing (*educative teaching*), and a growing number of Polish people is of an opinion that in the light of digitization of information and ease of access to knowledge, the school should indeed concentrate on educative processes (Zubrzycka- Maciąg, Wosik-Kawala, 2012: 9). The generation of today's parents of children attending Polish schools is aware of the significance of their children's education on the labour market, and declares investing funds into the education of their children (Frątczak-Müller, 2010: 124), at the same time acquiring new skills and qualifications themselves, as they are required to do so by the ever changing labour market.

Opinion polls among Poles regarding children's upbringing and the role of schools conducted in 2009 showed that the biggest issue for parents is a lack of time (over 70% of all respondents and over 80% of parents from big cities), which is a result of both the change in the working hours (quite often it is 9.00AM to 5.00PM), as well the necessity to travel long distances from home to the place of work. Parents are aware of the shortage of quality time with their child, therefore they assign the responsibility of supporting them in the child's socialisation and upbringing to the school (Smak-Wójcicka, 2009: 2-11).

The expectations of parents towards the school are very high - apart from spreading knowledge, they bestow on the school the need to: shape moral and personal values, encourage interest in social and political issues and prepare the pupil for living in the society. Interestingly, in the light of those demands only 4% of parents, while choosing their child's school, took into account its educative achievements (ibid. :12), the rest of the respondents - which can be assumed - considered it obvious that their expectations should be fulfilled by any school.

In the same year (2009) Polish academics concluded their two-year studies of the effects of the first phase of the Polish educational reform in the scope of early childhood education, publishing a report illustrating the situation of the child in the area of education, perceived through the results of education and upbringing on the youngest pupils. The findings exposed the superficiality of the changes and often their incidental character, showing in many areas of schools' activity a discrepancy with the declarations of the reformers (Sowińska, 2011). At this point it is worth looking closer at those declarations.

While analysing the key pieces of education legislation in Poland we find that the mission of Polish schools consists of *supporting the educative role of the family* (Art.1, cl. 1, item 2 of the Act on Education), and *exercising the right of each citizen of the Republic of Poland to education, and the right of children and young people to care and upbringing suitable for their age and development stage* (ibid. cl. 1). The preamble to the Act on Education contains a brief description of the intended role of Polish schools (and nurseries) - it reads:

*"... Education and upbringing - while respecting the Christian values system - shall be based on universal ethical principles. Education and upbringing facilitates the development of a sense of responsibility, love for the homeland and respect for the Polish cultural heritage in young people, while being open to cultural values of Europe and the rest of the world. The school should provide each pupil with the conditions necessary for their development, prepare them for their duties as part of a family and the society, based on the rules of solidarity, democracy, tolerance, justice and freedom".*

An analysis of the appendixes of to the Regulation of the Minister of Education of the 27th of August 2012 regarding the core curriculum for nursery and general education in individual types of schools allows for the role of schools to be broadened by the addition of tasks in relation to 1/ developing a positive attitude in the child towards learning and encouraging curiosity in regard to becoming familiarised with the world around them and seeking the truth, 2/ developing the skills of working individually and as part of a team, 3/ encouraging independence and responsibility for self and the surroundings. The result of providing education and upbringing shall be *equipping the child with the ability to read and write, with mathematical skills and knowledge required in everyday life, in school environment and in problem solving and finally equipping the child with foundations for further development of the personal characteristics which are necessary in order to play an active and ethical role in the social life* (see: Journal of Laws [Dz. U.] of 2012, item 977).

In the light of the principles postulated in legislation, or the "commitments", each Polish school formulates its *mission* individually by drawing up the Statute of the facility<sup>1</sup> and the school's Education Programme<sup>2</sup>, which specifies precisely the educative tasks the school aims to undertake and which will shape the graduate to possess the characteristics described by the key pieces of legislation.

A priority for formulating a school's Education Programme is establishing the values considered superior by the group of teachers, parents and pupils who prepare it, acting in the particular social (local)

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<sup>1</sup>The Statute is the basic document which governs the school's activity. It contains information on school bodies and the principles of their operation, defines the rights and obligations of each of them, describes in detail the graduate's profile - source: Regulation of the Minister of Education of the 21st of May 2001 on general statutes of public nurseries and public schools, Journal of Laws, No. 61, item 624 as amended.

<sup>2</sup> The school's Educational Programme is a mandatory document for each school, prepared pursuant to numerous pieces of legislation, including the Constitution of the Republic of Poland (Art. 48, cl. 1, Art. 53, cl. 3, Art. 72, cl. 1), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Journal of Laws of 1991, No. 120, item 526), the Act on Education, the Teacher's Charter and the School Statute.

environment of the school. The source for defining the values are catalogues of attitudes and behaviours found in scientific literature, which is accessed by the authors of school documentation, and among whom the most popular publication seems to be the classification by Wolfgang Brezinka, discussed in Polish literature by Marian Nowak (2008). According to Brezinka's classification, values are expressed in the attitudes of: 1/openness to life and the world, 2/ activity, 3/realism and 4/ an attitude marked by the culture of the heart (ibid: 371-373). Each of the attitudes contains a message to the teachers and educators, directing their efforts as part of the school's activity with the objective of implementing the school's mission and achieving results defined by the Education Programme.

The attitude of *openness to life and the world* contains a suggestion of frequent, substantive talks between the educators and the children aimed at showing them the world in a positive way and strengthening their self-esteem. The *attitude of activity* entails activities aimed at stimulating pupils' motivation to work, as well as preparing them to accept the difficulties that come with it, and encouraging patience for awaiting its results. The attitude of *realism* suggests to the educators that they should prepare the pupils to perceive the world in a realistic way and to build an appropriate self-esteem, which should happen through substantive education (acquiring objective knowledge). The attitude *marked by the culture of the heart* is accompanied by a suggestion for the educators to care for the emotional education of the child, including preparing them to admire beauty and help others (see: Zubrzycka- Maciąg, Wosik- Kawala, 2011: 40).

Transferring the descriptions of the values and the consequent declarations into educational programmes does not create any difficulty to the teachers - authors. We cannot be sure, however, to what degree the description becomes an actual indicator for the teachers' efforts, especially that each of them - despite the collective declarations contained in school documentation - has their own ideology in terms of education and upbringing and a personal sense of educative competence (Baranowska, 2014: 6-9) and organisational competence (Muchacka: 2012b). Research among older students suggests that the educative competence of Polish teachers is not great, although the teachers themselves rate it rather highly (Kocór, 2012: 182). This state of affairs prompts a question of the success of *schools' mission* and the actual level of fulfilment in terms of the role they have been given.

In the general opinion of parents on Polish schools, positive views constitute around 60%, also the growing satisfaction of the parents is worth noticing (an increase of 8 percentage points between 2007 and 2014). Unfortunately, more than a half of the parents with higher education qualifications, who assess the activity of schools more thoroughly, have critical opinions on the mission and the role of schools in children's education and upbringing (Kowalczyk, 2014:1). The ratio of positive and negative opinions in specific categories of activities related to the mission and role of Polish schools is shown in the table below.

Table 1. Assessment ratio based on the opinions of Poles (including parents) in regard to the operation of Polish schools

<b>Opinion</b> "Polish schools....."	<b>% of positive views<sup>3</sup> (including parents)</b>	<b>% of negative views<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>% of ambivalent views</b>
....provide pupils with a high level of knowledge"	62 (69)	27	11
...teach patriotism, love for homeland"	62 (69)	24	14
....develop interests"	62 (71)	26	12
....look after pupils' physical development"	59 (69)	31	10
...teach to think independently"	57 (67)	30	13
....teach team work, working with others on problem solving"	52 (67)	30	18
....prepare for playing an active role in the life of the local society"	42 (48)	39	19
.... prepare for playing an active role in the social and political life of the country"	36 (37)	43	21
....teach how to tackle problems associated with the modern life"	35 (42)	50	15

Source: compiled on the basis of Kowalczyk K., *Polska szkoła AD 2014*, p.2 and 5.

While analysing the data from the table above we can draw a conclusion that Polish schools "are good" at educating (so this part of the mission and role is implemented), but there is a problem with *educative teaching*, the essence of which we can see in the category of *teaching how to tackle problems associated with the modern life*. Nevertheless, it is worth noticing that in terms of the assessment of skills contributing to *resourcefulness (independent thinking, team work and physical development)*, they are seen as being developed by the school's activity by more than half of the respondents.

The mission of Polish schools is, as stated before - supporting the educative role of the family, which should be achieved through collaboration, ensuring safety at school and protecting pupils from risky behaviours (addictions, corruption and so on). According to over 80% of the parents surveyed, schools co-operate with parents, and over 60% of parents think that schools ensure pupils' safety, protect them from drug addiction and violence (Kowalczyk, 2014: 5). However, can we "praise" Polish schools for fulfilling the role they have been assigned, when 30% of the respondents claim that schools do not provide safety and protection from negative social phenomena? Moreover, 38% of the population thinks that schools do not provide equal opportunities for the future to young people from different backgrounds, which was declared in various pieces of education legislation.

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3 The positive views comprises answers: "definitively yes" and "rather yes"

4 Similarly- the negative views comprises answers: "definitively no" and "rather no"

Looking at the findings of the studies from 2009 once more (see: Sowińska, 2011), it is worth noticing that in the subsequent years full advantage was not taken of those findings, which pointed out, among others, that integrated teaching neglects research activities of pupils and that the teaching process is based entirely within the walls of the school, which undermines developing a sense of control and the ability to use pupils' skills in practical, real life situations (Michalak, 2011: 151), consequently affecting their *resourcefulness*. It was also stated that teachers occasionally use resources from the local environment, overusing handbooks (Basińska, 2011: 466), which, during the child's further development stages, significantly weakens their ability to play an active role in the local community. A study on the emotional competence of pupils finishing their primary education showed that most of them had problems with recognising emotions related to self-satisfaction, but had no real difficulty with feeling a sense of disappointment (Mikołajczyk, 2011: 261). In the light of the above, how is the *attitude of realism* shaped, referred to while formulating the catalogue of key values for upbringing?

In summary it can be said that Polish schools have been changing constantly for nearly 20 years in an attempt to follow the social changes. Formulating their mission and role correctly, they declare noteworthy and optimistic values and tasks. However, the implementation of the role still requires significant improvements, starting with concentrating on the co-operation with the family, and in terms of the relations between the teacher and the pupil. It seems that the negative view on Polish schools is a result of the lack of master teachers and guide teachers in modern educational institutions in this country. Also the competition ("the rat race") is a factor preventing many children from achieving the full potential of their personality and individualism. In addition, the wishes of many parents to have the most talented child in school create other unhealthy phenomena in the school's daily life: jealousy in some children and frustration in others. These in turn lead to stress, neurosis, aggression, and often childhood depression (Muchacka 2014: 35).

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## **2. The role and involvement of parents in Polish schools, parental initiatives in the scope of school operation and teaching contents**

Even though since the beginning of the political transformation and the commencement of the education reform in Poland scientific publications, legal acts and various documents have been mentioning the importance of the parents' role in shaping the future of Polish education and children's development, it can be said that there are no significant actions behind those words. Parents seem to be "invisible" in Polish schools, and positive examples of smoothly running parental organisations or particularly involved individuals among parents remain very rare. Interesting ideas coming from

teachers and principals in terms of making use of the autonomy and subjectivity of parents are not a frequent occurrence. In some cases, the institutions responsible for education include stereotypical views in their perspective on the parents' role in the school's development, for instance, by approving a History handbook for year 4 of the primary school, which reads: *"From your first day at school you are a member of the school community. It includes all pupils, as well as the school's administration board, teachers and other personnel"* (Piotrowska-Gromniak, 2013: 3).

The role and involvement of the parents' in the operation of Polish schools after the political transformation in Poland should be analysed from two perspectives: 1/ the rights of association and collective decision-making in regard to school matters granted to parents through education legislation, and 2/ on an accurate scale of the level of the exercise of these rights by the parents.

Parents' rights to association and co-deciding on the operation of Polish schools have evolved since 1999 and begun with a multiannual education reform, which declared *establishing a permanent partnership between the school and the family for the benefit of the comprehensive development of the pupil*, while aiming at the empowerment of education. The formulation of the demand for this partnership was included in the amendment to the Act on Education from 2007 (Journal of Laws of 2007, no. 80, item 542), which obliged schools to establish **Parents' Associations** by way of the state's efforts to turn parents into active partners of the school in regard to problem solving (especially problems related to the growing level of violence in schools). As defined by the legislators, parents' associations are a social, opinion giving and advisory collective body of the school, established to co-operate with the school in the scope of all matters related to its statutory tasks, in regard to its functioning and providing education. Associations represent only collective rights of parents, they do not exercise their individual rights. Parents' associations have specific competences, among which the following were listed in 2007: *providing opinion on the school's educational and prevention programme, on the school's curriculum and handbooks used, and the right of the parents' association to submit to the school's principal or other bodies, as well as other instructing or supervisory body, opinions and requests regarding all matters related to the institution.*

The parents' association comprises of representatives of department boards, one from each department in school, chosen in secret elections at a parents' meeting at the department (ibid: Art.53.2). This formal provision means that a parents' association in a small school may only have a few members (for example six, with the assumption that the primary school has six departments, or only three members in case of a small rural lower-secondary school<sup>5</sup>) or a few dozen members, in case of school complexes<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Polish lower-secondary school consists of three levels of teaching (a 3-year learning cycle).

<sup>6</sup> Polish legislation allows for the creation of primary and lower-secondary school complexes (combining primary and lower-secondary school) or other school complexes, which most often combine a lower-secondary school and an upper-secondary school

Since the amendment of the Act in 2007, the catalogue of competences of parents' associations has changes a number of times, also the activity of non-school, opinion-giving and advisory parental bodies was initiated, whose voice was supposed to become inspiration for further changes in Polish education. Two trends of this kind of initiative were observed

- non-governmental and governmental.

While discussing the governmental trend (with more than 50 national organisations) it is worth noticing the three organisations whose operation has a true impact on the changes implemented. In 2006, the "*Parents for the School*" ("*Rodzice Szkole*") *Foundation* was established, which still operates to this day. The aim of its founders is broadly understood socialisation and democratisation of Polish schools achieved through supporting activities for the benefit of the school conducted by the parents, parents' associations and other parental organisations. The foundation's objective is to increase the role and involvement of parents in the life of the school and the local community. One of the foundation's main forms of activity is training aimed at providing practical and effective preparation for parents in order to play the role of a rightful and responsible partner for teachers and school principals. An institution with similar objectives is the "*Parents in Education*" ("*Rodzice w Edukacji*") *Association*, established in 2010 and still operating. Also the *Friendly School (Przyjazna Szkoła) Association*, conducting its activity since 2001, sets the direction for the changes in education by organising initiatives to implement its key objective "... that a modern school, apart from its educational role, should also constitute a local centre of social activity, where the parent and the child - as recipients of educational services, should actively participate in those processes".<sup>7</sup> The aforementioned organisations are especially active in terms of collaboration with Polish governmental bodies responsible for changes in education.

Among governmental initiatives aimed at activating parents, an important example was establishing in 2011 a *Parents' Association* at the Ministry of Education, with the task of integrating parent communities and creating a platform for discussion and exchange of opinions regarding all matters concerning Polish schools. The basis for establishing the Association was the Polish government's belief in the impact of parents' involvement on the improvement in the efficiency of teaching and in school operation. The necessity of including parents into school reforms was stressed while the initiative was being introduced, as "only then is the school able to use its full potential"<sup>8</sup>.

The Parents' Association was replaced by *Parents' Forum* in 2012, as a permanent platform for dialogue and co-operation between the Ministry of Education and representatives of parents. The website of the Ministry reads that "*The Parents' Forum is of an open character, parental non-profit organisations can*

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.ps.org.pl/portal/pokaz/o-nas.html>, accessed: 11th of November 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Announcement on the Ministry of Education's website (no author), <http://www.men.gov.pl/index.php/dla-rodzicow/rady-rodzicow/181-rady-rodzicow>, accessed: 1st of January 2015.

*apply to collaborate in its work, whose objectives include co-operation between parents and the school"*

9. It is worth noticing that within a month from the Ministry announcing its invitation, over 30 organisations applied, and 25 of them took part in the induction meeting for the initiative (4th of April 2012), which can be seen as an expression of a high interest of parents in associations in taking part in activities aimed at creating a modern education system in Poland. The Parents' Forum is still an active group to this day which discusses many important aspects of Polish schools, pupils and their parents, an indirect result of which are consecutive amendments in education acts, changing the scope of competences of the aforementioned parents' associations.

The catalogue of competences of parents' associations towards the end of 2014 took the form defined by the amendment to the Act on Education of the 30th of May 2014 (Journal of Laws of 2014, item 811). An essential change in comparison to the previous regulations concerns withdrawing the ability of parents' associations to *provide opinion on the school's curriculum and handbooks used*. It caused a strong level of dissatisfaction among parents, who, as members of the Association and Foundation of the Ombudsman for Parents, tabled their own draft at the Sejm (Polish Parliament) on the 17th of December 2014 for the Act "*Parents want to have a choice*", among whose demands were broadening parents' associations' competences and a guarantee of a real influence of parents on the core curriculum and the selection of handbooks used. The parental project for the act also includes the ability of the parents to decide on the age when the child begins their school education (6 or 7 years old), making provision of nursery education the responsibility of the state and the child's right (and not the other way round), and reinstating extra-curricular classes in nursery schools, which were decided on by parents (and paid for by parents) before the last amendment to the Act on Education<sup>10</sup>. The Sejm of the Republic of Poland has already verified 100 thousand valid signatures on the draft for the Act "*Parents want to have a choice*", which means that the Speaker of the Sejm has to give the first reading before the 17th of March 2015.

Currently the competences of Parents' Associations, in the wording of Art. 54, cl. 2 of the Act include:

1) adopting, in consultation with the Teachers Council:

a) the school's educational programme, to include all teaching contents and educative activities aimed at pupils and implemented by the teachers,

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<sup>9</sup> Minister's invitation, <http://www.men.gov.pl/index.php/dla-rodzicow/forum-rodzicow/169-zapraszam-do-uczestnictwa-w-forum-rodzicow-przy-ministrze-edukacji-narodowej>, accessed: 2nd of January 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Announcement of the Ombudsman for Parents, <http://www.rzecznikrodzicow.pl/>, accessed: 20th December 2014.

b) a prevention programme adapted to the developmental needs of the pupils and the needs of the community, to include all contents and activities of a preventative character aimed at the pupils, teachers and parents,

2) providing opinion on the programme and schedule for improving the efficiency of education or upbringing provided by the school or facility, (..)

3) providing opinion on the draft for the financial plan, submitted by the school's principal. (...).

In spite of the competences of parents' associations having been limited, it can be stated that they still have a strong enshrinement in legislation and a rather wide scope of co-decision making on the activities of the school. Unfortunately, in practical terms associations often become facade institutions and do not represent the voice of parents; moreover, they emphasize the poor activity and the actual lack of involvement of parents in the development of Polish schools.

The studies conducted in 2009 as part of the social programme "School Without Violence" showed that on average one in four parents has no contact with their child's school. At the primary school level (especially during the first stage of education) this contact is significantly more frequent than during the later stages of education (Czapiński, 2010: 37-39).

Parents' Associations shy away from the competences they have been granted, quite often due to the lack of their awareness, which in turn is a result of not being interested in taking real action (Muchacka 2013: p. 86-87). Objectifying the assessment of the level of parental involvement in school matters we cannot omit the general context of Polish parents' life, which includes factors such as: a lack of time in case of working parents and a general discouragement of unemployed parents, a common disbelief in possibilities of influencing school activities, and a lack of interest in social activity (Poraj, 2011: 19). The legacy of old social beliefs is also not without its significance (from the period before the political reform in Poland), which suggested that education should be taken care of by omniscient teachers, and parents should not interfere (Bobula, 2012: 297). In the years 1998-2001 Polish parents were seen by over 80% of teachers as "trouble" (see Mendel, 2002). Nearly fifteen years later the situation has not changed dramatically, but of course there has been "some" change.

Among the conclusions from the study of parental autonomy in Warsaw schools (Papierowska, 2009) we can read that members of parents' associations feel that their influence on the decisions of principals and teaching staff is limited. Cases in point in regard to co-deciding on school matters are usually limited to special school events. Associations do not really see possibilities of influencing teaching matters, and implemented tasks are limited to collecting funds and funding initiatives that are considered important by the administrative body of the school, for instance awards for pupils, financial support in difficult circumstances, renovations and purchasing equipment. According to the findings of the studies concerning members of parents' associations, the principles of school activity are defined in 98% of

cases by the school's administration board, whose members participate (and at the same time direct the activities) in parents' associations meetings, and in 36% of cases those meetings are initiated by the administration board. In addition, only 37% of parents' associations members have provided opinions on programmes for improving the efficiency of education and upbringing provided by the school, and 22% have provided opinions on drafts for teachers' performance evaluations, which they are entitled to and which was not mentioned earlier, as well as a right to give opinion on the school's dress code. An important aspect in terms of planning new changes is that members of parents' associations see the lack of parental involvement as the main issue in regard to developing their autonomy (ibid.: 5-8). Therefore, for the future of education in Poland it is essential to activate not only collective parental bodies, but individual parents as well, as over 50% of them is unable to say whether the principal is open to a dialogue with them as they have never tried to get in contact despite valid reasons to do so (Banasiak, 2013: 134).

The aim of parental activation became an important basis for many initiatives in Poland. Among them is the national system project of the Ministry of Education *"School of collaboration. Pupils and parents as the social capital of a modern school"*, whose main objective is introducing in over 1000 Polish school and nurseries a modern model of co-operation between pupils, parents and teachers in the scope of school life arrangements. The project began in March of 2013 and will last till the end of February 2015. The idea behind it is to introduce permanent changes in the perception of the roles of pupils and teachers in the activity of the school or nursery, and the direction of those changes will be based on a substantive analysis of the current state of co-operation and the expectations of all parties which create the school community. The findings of surveys already concluded had helped to plan training for each group, they will also play an important role in the creation of system solutions of a formal and legal nature to provide foundations for defining practical models for this collaboration. The objective of the project includes promoting good practices by awarding certificates to educational facilities, and in a long-term perspective it should inspire school and nursery environments nationwide to implement good practices of co-operation in their facilities. The website for the project includes a Parents Portal, which provides information on the role and activities of parents in European education systems, the European Charter of Parents' Rights and Obligations and a range of other aspects of activity of associated and individual parents<sup>11</sup>.

The principles of the project and its implementation to date inspires optimism for the development of parental autonomy and exercise of their rights, much like the high level of activity of national, non-governmental parental organisation. Nevertheless, combining the knowledge of the past (the declarations that were made but not fulfilled) and the general, social perspective of the life of Polish

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<sup>11</sup> Reference material on the Project  
[http://www.szkolawspolpracy.pl/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=26&Itemid=6](http://www.szkolawspolpracy.pl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=26&Itemid=6)

families (and of schools in regard to the negative population growth rate in Poland) it is difficult to formulate an entirely positive forecast for years to come.

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Act of the 30th of May 2014 on the amendment to the Act on Education and other acts, Dz.U. 2014 item 811.

### **3. The challenges faced by Polish schools in regard to citizenship education including social diversity in terms of religion, ethnicity, disability and in regard to sex education**

The report on the state of citizenship education in Europe (Eurydice, 2012) indicates that its main objective, in all Union states, is shaping the ability of critical thinking, analytical skills and attitudes which are favourable to an active participation in the life of the school and society. It also informs that citizenship education is included in curricula of Polish schools, constituting separate teaching contents in the education of pupils over the age of 10 and a separate teaching subject for pupils over the age of 13 (ibid: 20), which is called "Social Science" in Polish schools. Teaching contents

included in curricula contain aspects related to the social and political system of the state, human rights and the rights of the child, democratic values, law and equality, cultural diversity, tolerance and discrimination, as well as national, European and historic identity (ibid: 30), while from the teacher's perspective the most important aspects for pupils to become familiar with are human rights, followed by the ability of critical thinking and independent thinking (ibid: 35). From the formal point of view everything is correct and we can assume that citizenship education is implemented by Polish schools. However, if we focus on its individual aspects in terms of "subjects" or "skills", the optimistic perspective arising from the aforementioned report becomes slightly clouded.

On the 2nd of December 2014, on the occasion of celebrating the International Human Rights Day, the Minister of Education of Poland addressed a letter at school communities, calling for reinforcing anti-discrimination education in schools, emphasizing this action as a mandatory condition for building a democratic civil society. The Minister wrote:

*"The responsibility for providing anti-discrimination education, as well as spreading knowledge on human rights and shaping an attitude of respect towards human rights lies with the school and each teacher-tutor of young people and children. Providing education and upbringing to the young generation with a belief in equality of all people regardless of their gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion, beliefs, disability, age or sexual orientation is the only way forward for developing an aware, responsible and democratic civil society"<sup>12</sup>.*

The announcement is correct, however, it raises questions quite frequently asked by the Polish media, namely: *"Is educating an open and tolerant society only a slogan? How do teachers treat the diversity among pupils exhibited in a variety of attitudes, interest, lifestyle choices and finally ways of learning? Is school an institution which provides an example of tolerance towards diversity? (...) What attitudes are modelled after the attitudes of the teachers themselves? Do our schools look after the basic psychological needs of the pupils, including the basic need of safety? Are we able to recognise and name our emotions? Is there room for mutual respect in the classroom? How do we talk about this to each other?"* (Kołodziejczyk, 2014).

In addition, as it is emphasised by theorists, each teacher has the right to choose their philosophy or ideology of education. For instance, perennialism can be a useful tool for modern education as an educational philosophy/ideology based on the principles of dialogue between people of various views and value systems. In the context of the perennialism theory of education, a dialogue is possible not only in a religious sense between Catholics and non-Catholics, but also in terms an ideological (philosophical) dialogue between religious people and atheists, including a dialogue in regard to ethics. A dialogue which will not be harmful to anyone but it will facilitate getting familiarised with other views and respecting them, as well as seeking ways of solving various, often apparent problems (Muchacka

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<sup>12</sup> The Minister's letter to education Officers and school communities, [http://www.ceo.org.pl/sites/default/files/news-files/list\\_pani\\_minister\\_z\\_okazji\\_miedzynarodowego\\_dnia\\_praw\\_czlowieka.pdf](http://www.ceo.org.pl/sites/default/files/news-files/list_pani_minister_z_okazji_miedzynarodowego_dnia_praw_czlowieka.pdf) ; accessed: 3.01.2015.

2012a: 32). While analysing the challenges faced by Polish schools in the scope of citizenship education, taking into account the social diversity in terms of religious beliefs, they can be seen from the perspective of the sphere of needs of today's youth, which certainly includes the obvious needs for, for example: friendship, group affiliation, social acceptance and social recognition, and also the needs of: autonomy, psychological independence, erotic needs, sexual needs, but also religious needs, meaning the need for identification with the Absolute, perhaps also: a spiritual need for identification with the universe. It is worth adding that religiousness (beliefs) in the lives of young people – over millennia in this country – has been the subject of a study conducted by the Institute of Sociology at the Mikolaj Kopernik University in Torun. The studies showed that nearly 60.0% of all young people surveyed described themselves as religious, and nearly 15.0% of all respondents declared to be "above average" and very religious. It can be assumed that in reality those indicators could have been around – respectively: circa 65.0% of all youth, and perhaps circa 20.0% of all youth. This means that Polish youth requires methods of satisfying their religious needs. Sources of satisfying those needs often include the mass media and the Internet (Muchacki 2014: 94- 95).

The research conducted in 2011 regarding the state of Polish formal anti-discrimination education brought a conclusion that although this subject is generally present in the core curriculum and general teaching contents, 1/ it needs to be properly organised and 2/ an anti-discrimination perspective needs to be included into the first stage of formal school education. It was also requested that the subject of diversity and discrimination on the basis of gender, age, disability, religious beliefs, sexual orientation and socio-economic status is included into the core curriculum (Janczy-Adamska, 2011: 115). In addition, a need was highlighted for removing from school handbooks texts and pictures reinforcing stereotypes, which will lead to discriminative behaviours in the future, and to add contents which will show the diversity among people in regard to their various characteristics. Among recommendations it was also requested to commence the process of teacher training in order to prepare the staff for conducting classes on this area of citizenship education (Abramowicz, Janczy-Adamska, 2011: 292-293). In the opinion of Polish academics reviewing the aforementioned report, it exposed discrimination present in the contents and tools of Polish education (Czerepaniak- Walczak, 2011), and in many other areas it showed a social and cultural collapse of the Polish education system, revealing compromising behaviours of school officials (who are not interested in anti-discrimination education) and what is more, it showed "*Polish public schools as museums which cultivate harmful trends and perpetuate prejudices*" (Kopciwicz, 2011).

Although changes in citizenship education in Polish schools are taking place, it seems that it is happening too slowly, moreover, their source are often initiatives of non-governmental organisations benefitting from assistance from the European Union. Foundations and associations organise training for teachers, conduct research and spread knowledge on the diversity of the social world and people, on democracy and timeless values which lie in the centre of global education. One of such organisations which needs to be mentioned here is the *Citizenship Education Foundation (Centrum Edukacji*

*Obywatelskiej*, CEO), which is an autonomous educational institution established in 1994, whose objective is spreading citizenship knowledge, promoting practical skills and attitudes necessary for building a democratic state and the rule of law, and a civil society. The Centre has initiated many valuable projects, among others *The School of Tolerance*, which provides teachers with "access to a comprehensive database of materials and enables contact with experts who deal with anti-discrimination education, equality and multiculturalism. Therefore counsellors will be able to introduce into their work with the youth subjects related to multiculturalism, tackling prejudice and national, ethnic and religious stereotypes, as well as integration activities".<sup>13</sup>

Polish schools deal with citizenship education "somehow", with this education being understood as shaping pupils' autonomy (for instance, establishing pupils' associations and installing pupil representatives in school administration bodies) or respect towards disability, but it lacks in the aspects of shaping attitudes of acceptance and tolerance based on the understanding of cultural diversity among people. It is worth stressing, however, that Poland is a rather homogeneous country in terms of race, ethnicity and religion, which allows for teaching theory but makes it more difficult to understand it (such diversity is not a natural social environment, it is hard to put it into practice in the local community), which also makes it more difficult to acquire attitudes and behaviours of an anti-discrimination nature. This argument, however, is not justified in terms of the assessment of the state of sex education, which is an important component of creating a civil society based on knowledge.

Sex education in Polish schools is implemented as part of the subject *Family Life Education*, introduced to the curriculum in 1998 and based on the model of type A education. The subject is not mandatory for pupils, it constitutes an educational offer which they can take advantage of - according to the decision of the parents - starting from year 4 of the primary school, in lower-secondary and higher-secondary schools (which are the second, third and fourth educational stage). The educational contents at the second educational stage are directed at stimulating the development of the pupil's integrated personality, presenting family values while providing knowledge necessary to understand the physical and mental changes connected to puberty. Among the subject's objectives at level three is adopting an integrated vision of human sexuality, developing an ability to protect own private sphere and sexual integrity and respect for the body of another person. The fourth stage focuses on familiarisation with human emotions, development of love and on those basis familiarisation with the developing sexuality and maturity.

Although there is a common consent and approval for the objectives formulated in this way, there are many disputes regarding the state of sex education in Poland in political, public and media environments, not much research takes place on this subject. The Sex Educators Group "Ponton" conducted surveys in

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<sup>13</sup> Taken from the description of the project School of Tolerance, <http://www.ceo.org.pl/pl/szkolatolerancji/opis-projektu> , accessed: 6th of January 2015.

2014 on a population of over 3 thousand people aged between 11 and 3014, regarding the organisation, attendance and assessment of the quality of Family Life Education classes. The research showed that over 98% of this population regards sex education classes as necessary in schools. 86% of the respondents had a possibility to attend Family Life Education classes, most of them did so at the primary school level. The dominant method of education in the respondents' opinion was the teacher's input (over 90% of cases), nearly half of them watched films during classes. 57% of the respondents thought that the knowledge shared during the classes was compliant with scientific knowledge. 44% thought that it was a moralising talk, which in many cases did not leave room for questions or discussion (Skonieczna, 2014).

The ongoing discussions - especially in the light of the lack of a common consent for a radical change in the model of education - in reality weaken the efforts to improve the quality of the long adopted Polish solutions. Improving the level of knowledge and skills of teachers, which are needed to teach citizenship, still poses a challenge.

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14 The biggest group- 42% were people aged between 21-25, people aged 11-15 constituted 6% of the respondents.

Skonieczna Joanna (2014), Sprawdzian (z)WdŻ, czyli jak wygląda edukacja seksualna w polskich szkołach? Grupa Edukatorów Seksualnych Ponton,

## 4. The role and place of children in Polish schools

For a long time Poland was under the influence of the authoritarian education trend, whose main objective is to prepare individuals for life in the existing conditions. The main task of teachers was to design educative activities which in an efficient and possibly reliable way should shape the person to reflect the values defined by the idea. Human subjectivity was only a slogan as in reality a person was seen as an "outer contained" being. This view is characteristic for behaviourism, which states that human behaviour is controlled by the external environment which consists of cultural institutions, political parties, school, family, the mass media and so on.

The political transformation in Poland contributed to the establishment of new democratic culture based on three pillars: freedom of thought, democratic politics and capitalist market

(Szempruch, 2011: 214-217). Social changes, having a significant influence on the activity of teachers and the future school operation, directed the development and aims of education, which should strengthen the sense of freedom, responsibility in an individual, help develop the ability of making decisions independently and critical thinking. The teacher should shape the pupils' development to focus on the person, their personality and preparing them for the future and for changes.

Education studies started referring to humanistic concepts. The starting point for the process of upbringing and education became spiritual, universal or personal values, which unlike material and social goods cannot be measured with the established scale. The source of these values is human life, which entails freeing oneself to reach new aims, allowing for a full self-fulfilment of the individual and the people around them. According to the humanistic concept, human development is conditioned by external factors. The human being lies in the centre of focus, a person - being capable of valuing their existence, setting its meaning, aim and direction for actions taken. According to these principles the human is a unique unity, which cannot be broken down into its individual elements, such as reactions, emotions or needs

(Kosiorek, 2004: 106-107).

The basis for the modern education concepts is therefore the view that the human is a personal being, a spiritual reality constituting a separate world. Human existence is described in a processual way as becoming a whole person through the confirmation of own existence, freedom and individuality. The process of becoming needs to have a set objective, which is the full humanity. While realising own humanity the person focuses on the values which allow them to overstep the current state of life, the current situation. Therefore, in education studies, the subject of upbringing is a self-fulfilling pupil. The tutor, adopting the principles of

the established stages of the child's development, takes on the task of supporting this development. It is possible through openness to new experiences, spontaneity and an ability to feel own and other people's emotions, combined with a team work ability. Supporting and assisting the pupil cannot, however, be done against their will, as it would pose a threat for their autonomy.

Humanistic education is now understood as an educational process which, through an established objective (comprehensive development of human personality) on its own terms becomes close to every person's heart, and requires for the education to be based on substantial, stable ideological foundations. Such stable basis for humanistic education in modern Europe can be achieved through perennialism (Muchacka 2012a: 31).

In accordance with the abovementioned principles educational activity in Poland is currently based on such aspects as (Milerski, Śliwerski, 2000: 148):

- negation of the traditional, authoritative and repressive education and upbringing,
- requesting a partnership between adults and children,
- demands to support uninhibited development of the child's personality,
- a premise that the child is naturally good and freedom in upbringing is possible and it does not have to entail intentions for manipulation,
- giving the child the right to uninhibited development and autonomy,
- seeing upbringing as supporting the child through providing them with an area of freedom and suitable conditions for their development.

The process of education and upbringing in Polish schools is directed at the child who has the right to set the direction for their life truly and creatively. Focusing on the pupil is inseparably linked to respecting their autonomy and dignity. The adult should provide the child with an opportunity for developing their own skills and freeing their potential. The teacher, in their relation with the student, creates open educative situations, assuming a collaborative attitude based on partnership. They treat the process of education and upbringing as a meeting of two subjects engaging in a dialogue. The dialogue in this context increases the authenticity of the contact, facilitating achieving a better understanding of self and others, and is a way of life. Its essence is an exchange of thoughts leading both parties to achieving solutions which are important to them (Feiner, 1995: 14).

The research confirms that education is moving towards educating for the sake of knowledge, activity and skill. Shaping the integrity of all areas of life is significant. Therefore the starting point for establishing the axiology and theology of today's education, and in consequence the specific concept of the pupil, is the holistic approach to the human being (Byra, 2004: 2-3).

Schools of the 21st century, seeing the pupil as a subject of education, adopt the educational personalism approach as the basis for establishing their objectives for education and upbringing. According to its principles, the school should offer its students access to such information and skills which will encourage and enable them to:

- 1) "find" the harmony and inner balance (getting to know themselves, living in harmony with themselves);
- 2) co-exist with the natural environment of our planet;
- 3) efficiently collaborate as part of various groups and association on a micro- and macro-social scale;
- 4) utilise the resources of our civilisation (Kujawiński, 2010: 48).

With objectives formulated in this way, the pupil is seen as the main subject of education and not just part of the collective. Therefore the teacher's task on every level of education is to support the pupil in becoming familiar with themselves, which means to be able to recognise own cognitive, motivational, operational and other abilities, to know own strengths and weaknesses and to know what one can achieve, what is of interest to oneself, to know own temperament and character, advantages and disadvantages of own character, what needs to be improved and what corrected, etc.

The development of the sense of subjectivity and active learning is reinforced by the privileges contained in documents such as the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Pursuant to the Act on Education, the school should provide each pupil with the conditions necessary for their development, prepare them to fulfil their obligations in the family and the society based on the principles of solidarity, democracy, tolerance, justice and freedom. According to the Act, pupils can carry out all kinds of activity in school premises. It includes a possibility to participate in the activities of school bodies (Art. 51). In addition, the student board acts as the representation of the general pupil population of a given school. Pursuant to Art. 55 cl. 5 the student board is entitled to submit motions and opinions to the school or facility's administration board, teachers' council or the principal on all matters regarding the school or facility, in particular those related to exercising the basic rights of pupils, such as:

- 1) the right to become familiarised with the curriculum, its contents, objectives and conditions,
- 2) the right to an open and justified assessment of progress in terms of learning and behaviour,
- 3) the right to the school life being organised in such a way as to enable for the correct balance to be maintained between school efforts and a possibility of developing and pursuing own interests,
- 4) the right to edit and publish a school newsletter,
- 5) the right to organise cultural, educational, sporting and entertainment activities according to own needs and organisational abilities, in consultation with the principal,
- 6) the right to choose the teacher for the role of the student board administrator.

This form of autonomy is essential as it revolves around assigning the responsibility for the implementation of pupils' aims to the pupils, as well as fulfilling all the functions that are part of managing the life and activity of a given group.

Pursuant to Art. 60 of the Act, each Polish school has a statute, which is a document describing in detail the organisation and operation of the facility. The school statute defines, among others, the level of education provided by the school to its graduates, the objectives and tasks of the work in terms of education and upbringing, the scope of competences of the school's bodies, the tasks of the teachers and

other staff, as well as the rights and obligations of the pupils. The Statute is adopted by the administration board, based on a draft prepared by the teachers' council. On the basis of the statute various student organisations can be established, including voluntary work, associations, scout groups. An important part of the statute of each school is the one concerning the rights and obligations of the pupil. An example of such catalogue contains the pupil's right to:

- be informed about their rights and means which can be used if the rights are violated,
- for the educational process to be organised correctly,
- educative care and conditions which ensure safety and protection from all kinds of violence, and respecting their dignity,
- take advantage of financial, medical, social, psychological and educational assistance,
- being treated kindly and subjectively,
- being called out by the first and last name and not the number from the record book,
- express their thoughts, views, conscience and beliefs freely (views and opinions which are controversial or non-compliant with the teacher's views cannot influence the periodic substantive assessment),
- an open access to educational classes (this right should not be limited by asking the pupil to leave the classroom or not allowing them to leave the classroom for insignificant reasons),
- develop interests,
- use the school library, canteen and sport facilities,
- fair, objective, open and justified assessment,
- receive help in case of difficulties with learning,
- individual tuition and external examinations,
- the right temperature in classrooms. If it is impossible to ensure the minimum temperature in classrooms (+15°C) the principal should temporarily suspend classes,
- to choose the class representatives' body and members for the Pupils' Association,
- influence the life of the school through the activities of student bodies,
- pupils attending year one, at the beginning of semester one, have the right to the so called period of protection, which lasts for the first two weeks of the semester, during which time the teacher is not allowed to award them the grade "fail",
- rest during recess between classes; there should be no homework given for holiday periods.

Respecting the rights of the child and pupil and disseminating knowledge on those rights is the school's responsibility.

The concept of subjective upbringing demands subjectivity of the pupil and the teacher. The teacher who wants to achieve subjectivity of their pupils allows them to carry out activities, stimulates the sense of perpetration in them, recognises their emotions and respects their views. This approach means respecting the dignity and personal value of pupils, their need of security, approval and self-fulfilment.

An important task of the teacher-tutor respecting the principle of subjectivity is stimulating the pupils' motivation, as well as creating an appropriate atmosphere for the working environment.

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## **5. Challenges faced by Polish schools in regard to migration and children returning from migration**

The data of the Office for Foreigners, the Central Statistical Office, the Ministry of Interior, Employment Offices and other institutions shows that the population of immigrants in Poland has been growing systematically for a few years. It is mainly a result of the gradual stabilisation of the economy, which means that Poland is becoming an attractive destination for immigrants. In 2012 immigrants constituted 0.13% of the general population of Poland, a slightly bigger number of citizens emigrated from Poland for a permanent residence abroad. At the same time the population growth rate was at zero (Dmochowska, 2013), which means that Poland is becoming a country under a demographical threat.

According to the report entitled "Children in Poland. Data, numbers, statistics" (2013: 58), the population of foreign children in Polish educational facilities is not significant. In 2011 there were 1 258 children in nursery schools, 2 876 in primary schools, and 1 104 in lower-secondary schools. At the same time, among the children attending nursery schools, the biggest group were children who were not Polish citizens from the EU and those who had a temporary residence permit for the territory of the Republic of Poland (respectively: 297 and 257 children). The situation was similar in terms of the pupils

attending primary and lower-secondary schools. In 2011 there were 599 pupils in Polish primary schools who had been given a permanent residence permit, 542 who were not Polish citizens from the EU and 302 with a permit for residence in the Republic of Poland. In lower-secondary schools the biggest group were students with temporary residence permits (322 students).

Foreigners in Poland, just as Poles, are subject to international legislation to which Poland is a party. Immigrant affairs are regulated by a range of legal acts, including the Constitution of the Republic of Poland (Art. 32 – "each person has the right to be treated with dignity regardless of their origin or legal status" ), the Act on Foreigners (Journal of Laws of 2013, item 1650) and the Act on Providing Protection to Foreigners in the Territory of the Republic of Poland (Journal of Laws of 2003, No. 128, item 1176). Detailed provisions are also contained in many other acts and regulations

The acts granting free of charge education to children of foreigners in Poland are: 1/ the Constitution of the Republic of Poland (Art. 70 cl. 1 - "every person has the right to education" - the term "every person" means not only a Polish citizen, but also a person without Polish citizenship who resides in the territory of this country); 2/ the Act on Education of the 7th of September 1991 (Art. 94a cl. 1 "foreigners who are subject to compulsory education (until the age of 18) benefit from education and care provided by public primary schools, lower-secondary schools, public art schools and facilities under the same conditions as Polish citizens"). The aforementioned document was amended in January of 2010 and - what is more important - principles of charging foreigners for the provision of education in Polish upper-secondary schools were abandoned. Abolishing fees for upper-secondary education opened access to this level of education to many people, especially from outside the European Union. However, postsecondary education still incurs fees; 3/ The Resolution of the Minister of Education of the 31st of March 2010 on admission of foreigners to public nursery schools, schools, teacher training institutions and facilities and establishment of additional Polish language classes for foreigners, additional compensatory classes and classes on the language and the culture of the country of origin.

In terms of immigrants' access to education in Poland, the integration model is used (Todorovska-Sokolovska, 2009), which entails children attending mandatory classes together with children from the receiving country, and language support being provided individually during supplementary language classes. Supplementary Polish language education involves all immigrant pupils who are receiving compulsory education and whose ability to speak the language is not sufficient to learn or they do not speak Polish at all. Classes should be conducted to such an extent so that they allow for the pupils to learn the language at a level enabling the foreigner to actively participate in the education process. The minimum number of classes is 2 weekly, but the district - depending on the needs and resources - can provide more hours of tuition. Apart from language-related issues it is also requested that the education process involves cultural contents.

The report published by the International Relations Centre entitled "Integration and Education Policy" (Szelewa, 2010: 33) indicates that the main issues and challenges concerning education of immigrants' children are:

- the lack of systematic monitoring of school-aged children,
- the lack of appropriately qualified teaching staff,
- the low level of teachers' interest in the immigrants' children group,
- insufficient involvement and co-operation of local authorities, school administration boards, social workers for the purpose of an effective integration of foreign children.

The aforementioned points are also confirmed by the information contained in the report on the international project Portfolio of Integration (POI), whose participants were Polish teachers experienced in working with immigrant pupils. An analysis of the functioning of those pupils in the reality of Polish educational facilities clearly showed that in spite of the legal provisions in place, there still are a lot of organisational and educational problems, such as:

- insufficient recognition of immigrant pupils' needs,
- insufficient preparation of teachers for working with immigrant children,
- insufficient preparation of schools to admit foreign children,
- poor level of cooperation of the school with parents, including a frequent lack of interest of parents,
- low attendance at classes, discontinued education, high rotation of pupils,
- poor level of equipment of schools/pupils with handbooks, books, educational aids,
- material and emotional negligence towards some children,
- cultural differences,
- isolation from peer groups, cases of discrimination (Baranowska, Kosiorek, 2013).

To tackle the abovementioned problems, in order to improve educational and adaptive processes in schools which are attended by immigrant pupils, an especially effective tool can be creating a support team, similar to support teams in integrated schools for students with special educational needs. Members of such teams could include: the tutor (as the coordinator of the team's activities), another teacher, the school counsellor, psychologist, teacher's assistant (cultural assistant). It is necessary to prepare staff - administrative personnel and teachers - to implement the issue of multiculturalism in educational facilities through training and educational activities. Informational material should be prepared for immigrant parents concerning the operation of the Polish education system, written in the

languages spoken by the biggest immigrant groups in Poland. It should contain information on legal provisions regarding compulsory education, schools' admission procedures, schools' operation on various levels, the rights and obligations of pupils, teachers, parents, financial assistance opportunities directed at children (Todorovska-Sokolovska, 2010).

In response to those needs the amendment to the Act on Education (of the 19th of March 2009) introduced a new institution in the Polish education system from the 1st of January 2010, the so called "teacher's assistant". According to the abovementioned document, the immigrant student has the right to receive assistance from a person who speaks the language of their country of origin, employed as a teacher's assistant. This assistance is provided no for longer than 12 months. Employing a "teacher's assistant" helps understand the child and important cultural aspects brought over by the child, communicate and overcome difficulties connected to cultural or language-related differences in the relations between pupils, teachers and immigrant parents (Act on Education, Art. 94a, cl. 4a). The person looking after the child from an immigrant family can be a teacher, another school employee, a representative of the local department for education responsible for providing support for immigrant families.

Although in Poland the emigration trend still dominates the immigration trend, a new dynamic process of return migration is noticeable, which means returning from emigration to the country of origin (in this case concerning children of Polish citizens returning from abroad). In most cases the level of Polish language-based competence is low, which causes problems with learning. The growing trend of return migration has created a necessity for the law and education system to be adapted for the benefit of the returnees. The conditions and procedures of admission of returnee pupils to public nursery schools, primary schools, lower-secondary schools are defined by the same act as in the case of immigrant students, which is the Act on Education of the 7th of September 1991 (consolidated text, Journal of Laws of 2004, no. 256, item 2572 as amended), in particular Art. 94a, cl. 4b and 4c and the Regulation of the Minister of Education of the 1st of April 2010 on admission of non-citizens to public nursery schools, schools, teacher training institutions and facilities and establishment of additional Polish language classes, additional compensatory classes and classes on the language and the culture of the country of origin. Pursuant to the regulations of the Ministry of Education, Polish citizens who have completed education at school (a year, education level) abroad or at a school for children of Polish citizens temporally residing abroad are admitted to the appropriate levels of public primary schools, lower-secondary schools and upper-secondary schools, based on a certificate issued by the school abroad and the last school certificate issued in Poland. The certificate issued by the school abroad does not have to be nostrified. In addition, pupils have the right to supplementary, free of charge Polish language classes organised by the school's authorities, are entitled to attend supplementary compensatory classes in the scope of the subjects taught, but no longer than for the period of 12 months, and have the right for curricular differences to be compensated for, on terms set by the teachers conducting the classes.

Schools play an essential role in cultural adaptation and social integration of children from immigrant and returnee families. Spreading awareness of the key elements of the culture of the receiving country, including the language, values, norms, customs helps integrate pupils and prevent their social exclusion. Through developing skills, competences and motivation to take part in the social life, schools are able to contribute significantly to providing the pupils with a good start for the next level of education and for their later activity on the labour market.

In theory, Polish schools are open to admission of immigrant and returnee children, however, in reality, local government authorities, school principals and teachers themselves still lack experience and substantive assistance. Another important issue is the lack of system support for teachers in terms of multicultural competences. It is necessary to prepare training personnel – consultant teachers and educational counsellors to implement the issue of multiculturalism in educational facilities through training and educational activities (including projects), as only suitably qualified teachers are able to help children from other cultural backgrounds in the process of cultural adaptation and social integration (Kosiorek, 2014: 74). Perhaps we should take advantage of the experiences of other European Union states whose multicultural education is part of curricula for individual subjects, for example History and Geography, foreign languages, Religion, mother tongue education, Social Studies or as cross-curricular themes. In Poland multicultural education appeared in public discourse during the 1990s, however, despite the presence of this subject in the core curriculum it is still treated as inferior and is not implemented on a large scale (Kubiszyn, 2007). Proprietary projects concerning multiculturalism and interculturalism tend to be implemented in schools. The Polish state has no system model of support for this kind of education.

The issue of migration and return migration will grow in the years to come, which means that schools in European states will be attended by more and more children from other countries, other cultural and religious backgrounds. The success of the education process in a culturally diverse group is a big challenge, however, it is worth stressing that with an appropriate recognition of the problem and with measured system solutions migration can certainly enhance educational experiences of all participants in this process, and linguistic and cultural diversity can become a valuable asset for pupils.

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