

The Professional Role of a Teacher in the Era of Globalization on the Example of Poland

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Abstract:

The globalisation process and the social changes associated with it demand the introduction of permanent changes and reforms in the educational systems. The teacher's new role is undisputable. It is the challenge of modern times and social needs. In their new role, teachers should support both the students and their parents. Teachers should act as guides for their students and direct them in their individual processes of development, taking into consideration the challenges of the globalisation process. In my article, I would like to show how secondary school teachers are prepared for their work in Poland. I will also discuss the system of professional preparation, with particular attention given to secondary school teachers in Poland, to find an answer to the following question – does the system of teachers' professional preparation really exist? In what way, if at all, does it take into account the specific character of work in a secondary school? I would also like to present the procedure of teachers' professional advancement in Poland and its influence on the standards and quality of school work. My intention is to discuss the issue of professional preparation of secondary school teachers and to answer the question of how such teachers should be prepared for work to be successful in coping with the challenges of modern school as well as the challenges from the society. Another question I wish to answer is what kind of support and from whom teachers should be given so that they are able to fulfil their duties, particularly those related to motivating students to self-study and unassisted work and to coping with life in a global society. What will be essential for my considerations is the notion of a good teacher in the context of a social function that is expected from teachers these days.

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Key words: role of teacher; teachers' identity; personal development; Secondary School teacher.

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1. Introduction

What kind of teacher does the modern society, and, in particular, the modern school need? Does the system of teacher education really meet the needs of the school, the society and the challenges of the modern world? Issues like these are considered and analyzed permanently regardless of the time when they are put under discussion. Contemporary teachers, particularly in Poland, have difficulties in catching up with the challenges of the modern and fast developing world. The globalisation process coerces societies into taking specific actions and introducing some changes – changes in the way of thinking and mentality in order to adjust to the changing reality. These processes require the society to introduce such mechanisms that will allow adaptation to the new situation in the best possible way. From the social point of view, the best and the simplest way to face such challenges is to invest in education and train teachers who will be able to meet the demands - teachers who will be genuine guides for the students and who will support the parents and the local community, teachers who will manage the student's individual development, who will take into account the students' individual expectations, their potential, capabilities and predispositions., teachers who understand the parents, who get them involved into a direct cooperation with the school and, finally, teachers who provide the students not only with physical, but first of all emotional and mental safety.

This article gives an answer to the most important questions included in the text and describes the situation in Poland based on the observations of the author, who worked for many years in an institution that supervises and supports the functioning of schools and education

establishments.

The article also presents the current legal provisions in Poland concerning the organisation of teacher's work, in particular the procedure of teachers' professional advancement and the influence of this procedure on the improvement of work quality in schools and education establishments.

The author also presents his own vision of the procedure of preparing teachers for work, particularly in secondary schools, taking into consideration the expectations of the head of school, among others.

The professional role of a teacher in the era of globalization and its actual state in Poland

The globalisation process is a process in which the markets and economies of individual countries become more and more dependent on one another as a result of the continuous increase in the dynamics of goods, services, capital and people exchange. In a very simplified way, the globalisation process can be described as the process of creating one economy and one market on our globe. Integration within the framework of the European Union is one of the stages of globalization. However, it is worth noting that some processes, like for instance regionalisation, are contradictory to the globalization process. Similar reference can be made to the European economy which in a peculiar way 'shuts itself' away from the economies outside the European Union. As emphasized by Elizabeth Helen Essary, globalisation has become a component of social public dialogue (Essary, E.H. 2007). That is the reason why it has a direct influence on the tasks of school.

The globalisation process requires the school to prepare students to play future social roles, and in particular for effective functioning in a modern democratic society, with special

emphasis on effective functioning on the labour market. The point is to make them able to compete for a position with other potential candidates, not only from their own country, but from any country. According to Yang (2004) the school should equip students with suitable knowledge and skills that must be perceived as understanding the reality through personal experience and emotional reactions with the surrounding world of objects and specific situations. Such knowledge should be preceded by appropriately designed and organised learning process – learning that brings about substantial changes in the perspective of individual vision and perception of the world (O’Sullivan, 2008).

Bearing the above in mind, one can indicate the most important tasks faced by teachers in the era of globalization. These tasks are directly related to teacher’s identity. Referring to and adapting the approach of Graham and Pelps (2003) to the issue of teacher’s role in the modern world, the teacher’s most important tasks include: (1) Understanding and working in a defined school system; (2) Developing skills as well as the applied strategies and methods; (3) Teaching in the context of extended existing programme; (4) Integrating theory with practice, (5) Responding to social demands and problems; (6) Creating an atmosphere that facilitates learning; (7) Working in a group as a team member; (8) Assessing and forming lifelong learning habits.

How do teachers and the Polish education system respond to the challenges?

In accordance with the Polish law, the right to exercise the profession of a teacher, both in primary and secondary school, is granted to a person who has a

master’s degree in the taught subject or a subject that is related to it. Exceptions are made for teachers of vocational subjects in basic vocational schools who may have the title of an engineer and teachers of foreign languages who must have at least a bachelor’s degree. Every teacher is obliged to have pedagogical training acquired either during higher education studies or in the form of postgraduate studies, or in the form of a special qualification course organized by schools of higher education or in-service teacher training centres.

In 2000, a special procedure of teachers’ professional advancement was introduced in Poland, which defines four categories of teachers:

-Trainee teacher.

-Contract teacher.

-Appointed teacher.

-Certified teacher.

Apart from that, outstanding teachers may be awarded the title of honorary school education professor.

In order to get to the next stage of promotion, teachers have to complete a specified traineeship and fulfil the tasks that are strictly defined in the ordinance of the Minister of National Education. Having completed the traineeship period for each degree of promotion and having filed all the required documentation, the teacher must take an examination (or come to an interview) before: i) the principal, a committee appointed by the local education authority; or ii) in the case of the highest degree before a committee appointed by the school superintendent. Considering the length of traineeship periods and the obligatory breaks between achieving a degree and beginning a traineeship period for the next one, the teacher can be awarded the degree of certified teacher after eleven years of service at the earliest.

The procedure of professional advancement is highly formalised and

bureaucratic – consequently, the main emphasis is put on meeting the formal bureaucratic requirements and not on the actual quality of teacher's work.

This procedure turned out to be just another path of teachers' professional advancement, having no influence on the improvement of the quality of work in individual schools and education establishments. Data and experience gained by the school superintendent's offices (responsible for the quality of work in schools and education establishments) indicate that there is no correlation between the number of certified teachers in a school and the quality of work in this school. It is true that one of the requirements of this procedure is in-service teacher training, but it does not translate into an improvement of the quality of school work. The forms of in-service teacher training are usually based on programs which are not innovative or creative enough and the expected results fail to be achieved.

Preparation to work as a Secondary School¹ teacher; is there any special way of preparing teachers to work in secondary schools?

How should a teacher be prepared to effectively fulfil all the roles and tasks mentioned above? Is there a system of teacher training followed by in-service teacher training that works efficiently and fulfils all the requirements?

The teacher, as an element (an important link) of a specific school system, understands the structure of the school system and the mutual connections and mechanisms governing the system. Within the system, the teacher should be aware of the tasks that he/she is supposed to fulfil depending on the

individual levels and stages of education. That is why the system of education and the tasks to be fulfilled at different stages should be clear so that all teachers can understand them. Teachers should know their rights and, first of all, their obligations.

At present, in Poland schools of Higher Education training students to become teachers pay no attention to this aspect of the teaching profession. By analyzing the curricula of different teacher education faculties in different universities, one may draw a conclusion: in this respect, teachers have no preparation for work. They do not know and do not understand their tasks and responsibilities. They are usually not able to define the requirements they should pay attention to at their stage of education in the context of the requirements of further stages. They do not understand or know the tasks related to individual stages of education. Teachers are also not prepared from the psychological point of view to play such an important role. They do not know or understand the guidelines of the educational policy of their own country. They have no idea of the teaching profession in other countries or the functioning of other educational systems in Europe or in the world.

Teachers who create new strategies and methods of teaching and who continue to improve their methodological skills are almost non-existent. Most teachers simply come to the school with very poor methodological preparation and low skills of using the technological teaching resources. The placement they have in schools during their studies at university does not correlate with the needs of future teachers. It often happens that, during such training, a teacher-to-be is left on his own, with no assistance from the school of higher education, which is against the idea of training. The only help such a trainee is sometimes offered is the help

¹ In Poland, secondary school is understood as a non-obligatory school for students aged 16-19 in the form of general secondary school, technical secondary school or vocational school.

of the teacher who agreed to have the trainee teacher under his supervision. However, such help is not provided by an actual master in the profession, but just 'one of the practising teachers'. One can hardly talk about developing teacher's skills and abilities in such circumstances as the teacher is not even fully aware of his own level of methodological work and needs in this respect. Teachers are often not able to cope with the basic school documentation (class register, grades records, etc.) and there are still many more complex procedures to learn to perform the profession of a teacher. Teachers, in particular the young ones, have no idea of their obligations in this respect as the university curricula do not include such courses.

A very important element of training and improving a teacher's attitude is a wide, holistic approach to the issues included in the followed curriculum or core curriculum. Teachers should see their subjects on the level of metacontent and set the tasks and organize the type of activities related to their subjects starting from this perspective. The reality is, however, different – teachers, particularly in secondary schools, are specialists in their subjects understood as an academic discipline. Only after many years of work, do they understand the place and meaning of their subjects in the holistic comprehensive development of their students. They start to understand the significance of the correlation among different subjects and the need to cooperate with other teachers.

Only after many years of work, do teachers start to notice the possibilities and possess specific skills to correlate and combine the theory with practice. Those with poor methodological preparation do not see the need or rather the possibility to combine theory with practice. It is more comfortable for them to teach the theory, often unrealistic, within the

scope of their scientific discipline.

It is especially noticeable in the case of teachers of foreign languages. Not knowing the general principles of the educational system or the tasks related to their subjects and following only the guidelines and requirements for the final 'matura' examination (published in Poland by the Central Examination Board that is responsible for the organisation and administration of final examinations in secondary schools). The teachers are not able to get students interested or to motivate them to learn. Not to mention showing the beauty of the language, which absolutely exceeds their capabilities. All this results from the inability to use authentic materials and the teaching aids which are available in the school. It also results from the fact that preparing an interesting and inspiring lesson takes time, and teachers in contemporary schools, Polish ones in particular, do not feel like that as they do not understand their tasks and obligations arising out of the general principles of the educational system. Teachers' financial situation, remuneration or the work conditions have no influence on such attitude, which has been proved by the negative experience of non-public (private) schools in this respect.

How close and important social problems are to the teachers is reflected by the way they fulfill their pastoral duties and how they manage as form tutors. Teachers are not prepared for this kind of work at all. They have absolutely no preparation for it, particularly in the early stages of their employment. Teachers are supposed to recognise and identify the dangers of the modern world so as to counteract them and they lack basic knowledge in this respect. Teachers cannot name the symptoms of taking drugs and other abusive substances, so how they

counteract them? To what extent can they identify with social problems they do not understand as they know nothing about them? Teachers whose psychological and pedagogical knowledge is very limited try to understand their students' problems, but in fact they do it without real involvement and belief in their success and, as a result, the success of their students. Their decisions and actions are often based on intuition which is not supported by sound knowledge or abilities. The result of such actions is often inadequate to the involvement and time spent on solving a given problem.

Teachers' own skills and tools, usually developed hastily, allow them to meet the requirements of the modern teaching and education process to a minimum extent. Teachers seldom arrange the space so that it can facilitate the achievement of better results. They mechanically pass on the theoretical knowledge and too often forget about developing skills.

They are often unaware of their responsibility and the need to liaise with the other members of the staff. They are afraid that the share of influence will be unfair. They do not see the importance of team work. They do not believe that the success of the student is the success of the whole staff. It is a consequence of a typical class-lesson system of teaching which totally eliminates the elements of direct liaising with other teachers.

In such circumstances, teachers' continuous assessment of their own development as well as the development of individual students seems highly unreal unless teachers are provided with proper assistance by relevant institutions or people responsible for teacher's development. Does that mean the end of the era of traditional education, education within the framework of a school system, education with the participation of a

teacher who is a master in his subject area?

Contemporary teachers face the dilemma, teach or learn? However, a solution to the dilemma, which seems to be thoroughly philosophical or a kind of category of academic discourse, can be found.

Nowadays teachers should be the guides in the process of transforming student's knowledge, skills and abilities to a higher level and their work should be based on their own knowledge and experience and on the knowledge and experience of the students who take part in the learning process. Teachers should also be critical practitioners who are able to draw conclusions from their own work and analyse the school reality. This way, they will learn and teach others at the same time.

Esson (2002) defines teachers' professional development as an extremely important factor and the possibility to develop as an essential element to enable solving problems related to the teaching profession and to meet the challenges this profession faces.

Harpe & Radloff (1999) suggest, referring to Graham and Pelps (2003), that the future teacher will be a teacher who is an efficient participant in both the teaching and learning process.

Taking the above into consideration, it can be concluded that, in Poland, an efficient system of teacher education, including Secondary School teachers, is non-existent. Teachers have to cope with many different problems, actually without any institutional support from those responsible for the organization of the teacher education process as well as the process of teacher in-service training and development.

How should the process of teacher education and teacher professional development proceed?

The situation described above should stimulate those responsible for teacher education to change the methods and the system of teacher education, and in the case of those already in service, the system of teacher in-service training and professional development.

It is essential for the education and the didactic process to be based on values education. Future teachers must be shown the actual role of education, both in the process of individual development and the process of sustainable social development. It is very important to genuinely combine the process of education with school practice and obligatory forms of teacher placements before the right to exercise the profession is granted.

Programs of studies should be changed and adjusted to the needs of a given type of school, with special emphasis on a block of subjects in psychology and pedagogy. In the course of studies students should study a block of subjects related to general and detailed didactics of a given subject (academic subject area) that is adjusted to the type and level of a school. The differences in methodological approaches to teach the same subject in primary and secondary schools should be taken into account. The course should include general didactics and detailed methodology of a given subject.

The program should also include a block of activities during which the students (teachers-to-be) would have an opportunity to get familiar with the basic school documentation. Such a block should be combined with practical classes (properly organized placements) in schools of a given type. Before the future teachers are awarded their university diplomas, they should definitely complete at least a one-year placement in a school, followed by assessment and only then be awarded the title, the diploma and the right to

exercise the profession.

Teachers who are already in service must change their idea and philosophy of being a teacher – not an infallible expert in his field, but an expert in the teaching and learning process. They should act, according to Graham and Pelps (2003) as a learning expert, in the meaning defined by Ertmer and Newby (1996), who knows and is able to act, who plans, observes and evaluates his own actions.

In this context, according to Beattie (1995) and as emphasised by Graham and Pelps (2003), the continuing development of teacher's knowledge and skills, both in the form of organised training and self-directed training, which aims at improving teacher's practical skills and abilities is extremely important. The present situation requires an appropriate reforms in the system of teacher in-service training that would take the community needs into account.

After starting work in a school, the newly qualified teachers should be assigned supervising teachers who would be responsible for their induction into work in the school. A supervising teacher should also offer actual assistance in situations which are too difficult for the newly qualified teacher to cope with. The Ministry of National Education should be responsible for additional institutionalised assistance and methodological consultancy.

Which philosophical approach is the most adequate in the case of teacher training?

Definitely, the most essential is the phenomenological understanding of the nature of educational processes, and as such, this approach should be highly important in the process of teacher education. The perception of the

world (here the school reality) as it is, without unnecessary interpretations and evaluations, allows authentic definition of its problems as well as finding the right solutions to the problems related to a given reality. It is also important for the educational process to be understood as a whole, without separating any of its part – important or less important.

Another vital approach is constructivism, which first of all puts emphasis on students' autonomy in the education process and their own initiative within the process. In the context of constructivism, the teacher must lead to situations of students' autonomic activity and stimulate their independent thinking and acting. What is of great importance is developing students' ability to formulate problems and problem-solving teaching. Education must be combined with experience; the student should experience specific situations or phenomena. The holistic approach to a given phenomenon and the process of its interpretation are extremely important in this context.

How should the secondary teachers' selection process proceed in schools?

After completing appropriately organised studies, including courses which allow students to get familiar with the requirements of secondary school, and after being granted the right to exercise the profession, the teacher should be definitely under the obligation to get acquainted with the school work, starting from the lowest type of school. That would allow the teacher to get to know the place and role of this type of school in the education system.

Teachers' personality and their skills are also extremely important. Work in a secondary school requires the teachers to have appropriate predispositions. Secondary school teachers should be not only excellent teaching specialists and

experts in their academic fields, but also excellent psychologists and they should have managerial and organisational skills. Secondary school teachers should also have appropriate skills to maintain cooperation and run international exchange programs. It is essential to bear in mind the fact that the European Union adopted the organisation of cooperation and exchange programs, such as Socrates or in present edition the Lifelong Learning Program, as one of the elements of cooperation among schools from member states. Actually, it is the only element of common EU educational policy. Other educational issues have been left at the disposal of individual member states.

For this reason, the command of foreign languages is extremely important and serves as a selection criterion, as it is absolutely necessary to run educational projects within the above mentioned programs.

In order to meet the requirements imposed by the surrounding reality and the society, the teacher should also be a perfect organiser of the teaching and learning process, an authentic expert in his field.

2. Conclusions:

Analysing the theoretical assumptions and confronting them with practice and the actual state, one can say that no organised system of teacher education for Secondary School teachers exists in Poland. This situation is extremely serious and alarming taking into consideration the educational tasks in the contemporary world. Education of secondary school teachers is an integral part of the system of teacher education and it fails to include the specific character of work in a Secondary School. The existing procedure of teachers'

professional advancement needs to be changed so that it focuses on the factual assessment of teachers' work and their tools and skills, and not on the bureaucratic aspect.

The situation demands immediate reaction from the authorities responsible for education and teacher education. The political changes which take place every four years, according to the parliamentary elections calendar, make the situation even more complicated. Changes in the government lead to changes in the Ministry of Education.

Education, including education at a secondary level, calls for considerable financial outlays as schools need new equipment, mainly secondary vocational schools.

However difficult the situation of Polish education is and no matter what problems Polish schools face, we cannot forget the multitude of great Polish teachers who work hard and in the best possible way to keep the Polish school at an appropriate level and who strive to provide their students with conditions for their individual development and satisfaction from learning. Many Polish teachers perceive their profession not only as an occupation, but as a social mission to carry out. For many, despite all this, a teacher sounds proud. This profession may be extremely rewarding and it is held in high esteem by the wise members of the community who look into the future.

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