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Teachers in the Changing Polish Social Reality

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Abstract:-The aim of the article is to show how social changes impose specific requirements on the school and teacher, affecting the modification of goals, tasks, content, methods of education and upbringing. This puts the teacher in a new and constantly changing situation and affects the conditions and content of the teacher's work. The existing interdependence between social progress and the development of education decides about the necessity and continuity of the modernization of the education system. The changing function of education leads to changes in the work of the teacher, who has to face growing and increasing requirements. The teacher must be familiar with new scientific findings and the possibilities of their practical applications, the requirements of various types of human production activities, and essential professional skills. The main characteristic of the evolution of the social role and task of the teacher is expressed in the gradual transition from the teacher's role as the sole source of knowledge and values to the role of the organizer of the educational process, the counsellor of the students, the guide to the world of scientific information and cultural values. This trend is present in many educational systems today. A teacher without thorough knowledge, without the ability to shape modern thinking, cannot fulfil his or her basic tasks.

<u>Keywords</u>: teacher, roles, changes, Polish education

Introduction

In today's societies, characterized by a great dynamics of change, reforms and educational modernizations have become a necessity. They are implemented in different ranges and at different levels. The curriculum, which has become the least constant element of the school system, is particularly transformed. With scientific progress, economic and cultural transformations, and social division of labour it becomes necessary to prepare curricula that enable children to participate creatively in the production of material and spiritual goods, to follow the progress of science, to develop the motivation and skills of continuous learning, the pursuit of knowledge. etc. The characteristic tendency of the present day is the search for new ideas, concepts and solutions whose implementation would allow for better adaptation of educational

systems to the requirements of the society and individuals. The ideas of lifelong learning have changed the views on the role of school and the teacher. They have emphasized the need to learn throughout life and to direct one's own development and the need to create an integrated system of institutions that would meet human different educational needs. Owing to parallel learning, attention has been drawn to the fact that school is not the only, although primary, educational and informational link. In today's civilization, the number of sources and stimuli that influence the pupil's development process is expanding. These include mass media that complement the school system or perform autonomous functions (Bogaj, Kwiatkowski, Szymański, 1997).



The causes of pedagogical progress

The essence of educational progress is expressed in two areas: the adaptation of educational systems to dynamically changing social, economic and cultural systems and the creation of sufficient conditions for the work of teachers as the implementers of pedagogical progress. The most modern reforms will become blank externally, formally, unless accompanied by appropriate preparation of teachers. However, they will not be able to carry out their tasks in accordance with the requirements of the present time, if they are constrained by the barriers of the traditional, conservative school system (Magda-Adamowicz, 2007, 2009).

Transformations of school systems have a direct impact on the role and tasks of the teacher. The teacher's role undergoes intense revolutions, and the current tasks change their content. These requirements make the teacher improve their knowledge and skills continuously. Although the consequences of the reform of the education system are primarily borne by teachers working with grades 1-3, their responsibilities are only slightly modified adequately to the increasing tasks of educational staff (Lewowicki, 1997; Szymański, 1996).

Social transformations impose specific requirements on the school and teacher, affecting the modification of goals, tasks, content, and teaching methods. This puts the teacher in a new and constantly changing situation and affects the conditions and content of the teacher's work. The existing interdependence between social progress and the development of education decides about the necessity and continuity of the modernization of the education system (Lewowicki, 1997; Szymański, 1996).

The changing function of education leads to changes in the work of the teacher, who has to face growing and increasing requirements. The teacher must be familiar with new scientific findings and the possibilities of their practical applications, the requirements of various types of human production activities, and essential professional skills. Teachers

need to know the specific needs of the environment in which they work (Szymański 1996).

Social transformations taking place in Poland raise the role of the school and the role of the teacher in shaping the attitudes of people, their relation to work, teamwork, discipline, conscientiousness and sense of duty (Kwieciński, 2002).

An important factor modifying the social role of the school and teacher is also the rapid development of scientific knowledge and the need for a wider implementation of scientific achievements into practical human activity. As a result, issues such as the requirements for the teacher, their professional qualifications, the level and the amount of scientific knowledge required to teach at school, the acquisition of skills within scientific organisation of work, which requires a thorough preparation for work as well as pedagogical continuous improvement of qualifications through further training and self-education, are seen in a new light. The obvious and common view today is that every teacher, regardless of the type of school at which he/she works, should have a university education.

The needs of education, which change dynamically, imply the need for thorough assimilation of knowledge by the teacher and explanation of the processes of its application. As a result, the teacher should increasingly become its recipient and cocreator in available ranges (Kwieciński 2002). Science does not develop only through academic staff, but also through practice. It is the result of the exchange of experience between education staff. The result of closer collaboration between theorists and practitioners in seeking new and more effective solutions are not only dynamic changes in science and technology but also active co-creation of science and influencing its development and practical application.

The impact of social cultural scientific and technological changes increasingly undermines the stability, permanence and invariability of the social role of the teacher. It now becomes more dynamic, open to changes in social life, in culture, in science



and technology (Bogaj, Kwiatkowski, Szymański, 1997). In different areas of production new jobs emerge, while old jobs change or disappear. The clear disappearance of physical work in agriculture, the outflow of people from the countryside to towns, the displacement of old jobs by new technologies and techniques and the introduction of new jobs make knowledge and skills outdated. Also other changes occur. Large housing districts are a factor that reduces contacts between people. Transformations in the family cause that it is no longer the primary focus of family life or ethical and cultural values. These dynamic transformations make today's people focus their attention on cognitive processes necessary for the functioning of individuals and society in complex production technology. This is at the expense of emotional life, which leads to the disappearance of individuality. Therefore, it is now crucial to read consequences of progress and prevent its negative system consequences. Undoubtedly, the education, school, the teacher, preparing people to live in ever-changing conditions, play an important role in it.

The properties of the social system affect the process of disseminating innovation created by a pedagogically creative teacher. This is related to the position of the teacher in the environment. The individual recipient of innovation belongs to the social system that influences his/her adaptive behaviour. The place of the individual in a given social group also allows to anticipate how fast the individual accepts the idea of innovation. Informal interpersonal contacts affect the assimilation of innovation. Also, the strength of association with the group and the degree of identification with it is a determinant of the assimilation process. The adoption of innovation takes place through the pressure of the group. Innovations are products of culture. And the process of their assimilation can take place in a spontaneous or controlled way (Przyborowska 2013; Schulz, 1994).

The social role of the teacher is strongly linked to a specific system of values. The teacher faces the need to assess phenomena, facts, information. However, in the teacher's activity it is not sufficient to accept a particular system of values and ethical norms, their presentation and justification. It is necessary to direct educational work from the point of view of represented axiology, to identify educational problems and the most effective ways of solving them, to identify the teacher's commitment. which is expressed in the implementation of the ethical values he/she prefers (Denek, 2009).

It is always emphasized that the main role in the educational system should be played by the school and the teacher. The development and deepening of the educational processes taking place in the whole society depend primarily on the course and strengthening of their educational functions. The development of these tasks in different institutions does not always harmonize with the goals, principles and pedagogical methods of the teacher. The educational activity of institutions, as they become stronger, becomes more and more autonomous, independent, guided by their own principles, and manifests itself in its own specific forms. This affects the change in the teacher's social position and role. These changes, in consequence, make it difficult for the teacher to influence the process of education outside the school, in the local environment and in its institutions.

Therefore, one may agree with J. Szczepański who claims that the school systems will have to cooperate with all non-school institutions to increase their own pedagogical effectiveness. And these institutions will gradually learn to cooperate more and more effectively with each level of education. And in this process teachers will play an important role (Kwieciński, 2002).

Pedagogical progress in education depends on many conditions, but its creator and producer is the teacher. Central institutions that govern the entire system are also its initiators and organizers. The school reform of the 1990s brought the increased activity of teachers, provoking self-education and self-improvement. They became innovators,



pedagogical creators (Przyborowska, 2013; Schulz, 1994). In the organizational structure of education, the Ministry of National Education has a prevailing role. Provincial, municipal, district and local authorities are indirect links. This structure has both advantages and disadvantages for the educational work of the teacher. The characteristic feature of this structure is the extensive network of institutional and personnel relations. Vertical dependencies play an important disseminating innovations (Przyborowska, 2013). On the other hand, its advantage is the clarity, transparency of the structure, the division of formal competences of its individual links, which promotes the optimization of management. However, the personal dependency system is dangerous. The functioning of this system is close to a classic bureaucratic organization in which hierarchical competition (which occurs when gaining individual degrees of professional advancement) favours individualization and manifestation of mutual distrust. It is an area of rivalry with conflicts and tensions, which is perceived as a potential threat to a stable power relationship in an organization.

Teacher's working atmosphere

The climate of the teacher's work and their professional position proves their low level of organization, lack of internal integration, stimulation and communication, which introduces a rigid system that prevents changes, such as innovation. In this situation the creative activity of teacher's decreases, the patency of information and the two-way communication between levels disappear. Their place is taken by an autocratic style of management. Even if decisions are relevant and necessary, potential contractors treat them as unnecessary and imposed. The mode of taking them immediately results in their rejection or delay, or unreliable execution. In this situation, reforms and modernisations imposed by higher authorities are carried out by teachers with difficulty. The hierarchy of the education system also hinders the emergence and realization of individual and group innovations (Lewowicki, 1997). The lack of communication and the lack of information flow within the structure limit the exchange of teachers' experience, which introduces psychological discomfort among them. It would therefore be desirable to modify the internal structure of the education system so as to foster the creation, organization and dissemination of innovation at all levels. Of course this phenomenon occurs in the social system, which determines the directions and strength of its internal transformations.

The teacher is a special person with dual affiliation. Thanks to his/her professional importance the teacher belongs to the group of "teaching people" and the "learning and developing people". One may suppose that certain specific features are desirable in this context. For these reasons, I draw attention to the typology of creative attitudes of teachers.

The common opinion that women have natural predispositions to care for children, based on the belief that social roles are a simple consequence of biological differences between men and women, results in strong feminization of this professional group. It is not surprising that the study by L. Kopciewicz (2012) revealed the category of "mothers - hens", which in terms of the professional role of early education teachers limits the teacher's work to maternity taking care of children. The professionalism of the teacher emerging from this role is determined by nature, and since it is possible to build the foundations of pedagogical authority, it is possible to justify the lack of continuous education and professional development. In my opinion, this is one of the main, if not the most important, reasons for the infantilization of teachers of early education. It is worth mentioning, however, that this kind of social expectations directed at this professional group is evident not only in Poland but also in many other countries, which is undoubtedly influenced by the Christian religious tradition, in which the image of the mother-caretaker is cultivated (Lewowicki, 1997).

Sources of infantilization can also be found in the current discourse of the political economy of education, characteristic of neoliberalism. The



expansion of this ideology goes beyond the economic sphere, we experience its manifestations also in culture and even in human mentality. At the heart of corporate economics, which implements the principles of neo-liberalism in the economic sphere, is the person who responds to specific needs. The educational programme of corporate economics, that is the intentional actions of economic forces aiming at shaping human attitudes according to the neoliberal vision guarantees the realisation of assumed goals. This programme implies educational modesty that will stop the student from the critical analysis of the surrounding reality so that the student can "fit" into the desired model categories of the nonreflective producer, unsatisfied (Komorowska 1999), human waste. Its realization takes place by filling traditional forms of education with contents and methods that favour the formation of the aforementioned models.

Teaching programs

School programmes convey a simplistic, onedimensional image of the world, limiting reflexive, critical and interpretative knowledge in teaching, which in effect favours infantile, primitive views of or specific-sensory-motivational Play elements, which are dominant teaching methods, especially in early education, are conducive to the attenuation of the intellectual dimension of education, replaced by its specific dimension. This is probably the consequence of the way of defining childhood, which implies a vision of a child as an incompetent, incapable of truly scientific cognition individual. Shifting the emphasis from realization of intellectual needs to satisfying emotional needs and developing artistic skills at the early stage of education reflect the common belief that emotional needs are predominant in the child, which are satisfied at the expense of cognitive needs (Klus-Stańska, Nowicka M., 2014). The infantile nature of the meanings and forms of transmission can also be traced back to teachers' education and their additional training (ibid). Formal requirements (eg further education or documentation of own professional achievements) that the teacher has to

fulfil to get promoted and earn a higher salary, which is extremely important due to progressive pauperization of the environment, lead to the production of false, fictitious activities, instead of creating conditions for in-depth reflection and self-analysis. Significantly, the level of courses offered to teachers as various forms of further education and training is an important factor in the intensification of their infantilization - this is due to the use of infantilizing demonstrativeness by lecturers and a widely-held assumption of the need to constantly equip early childhood teachers with a wide range of play techniques in order to carry out the aforementioned care function (ibid).

Teacher in the time of changes

Despite the fact that Polish teachers have high formal qualifications to do their job, the studies indicate that a significant part of this group has low understanding of the cultural and social context of the surrounding educational reality. This "intellectual incompleteness", as it is called by H. Kwiatkowska (2008), whose source is inadequate to current conditions education, limits the teacher in action: makes him/her passive, helpless, dependent on authority, educational administration, scientific authorities (ibid). The acceptance of official educational ideology, often in conflict with personal worldview, is an attempt to escape the inconsistency of social expectations (Kwiatkowska, 2008). By escaping, teachers fall into the trap of educational stereotypes, which in a specific way determine their professional identity, marking it by infantilization.

The teacher influences the extent to which the progress of pedagogical sciences will shape the practical, that is educational and innovative, activities of the school. In the system of institutional and personal relations, the lowest level is occupied by teachers and their professional work. Their environment, situations and work programmes contribute to the development of pedagogical innovations. The teacher, as a subject in the educational practice, develops a programme of his/her professional work in a suitable favourable environment and situations, and can implement



innovations, which fosters pedagogical innovativeness.

It is also necessary to prepare teachers in a way that will allow them to recognize and predict the developmental processes of a particular scientific field and their consequences for the content of school programmes. Pedagogical knowledge is an important element of the teacher's professional awareness. The teacher needs to modify his/her knowledge and skills according to the changing needs of education.

Teachers should be able to keep up with the development of the fields they teach. They should skilfully use the acquired knowledge in the teaching process and develop research related to their own pedagogical work. It is also important for teachers to participate in pedagogical research, and even to conduct it themselves (Zaczyński, 1997). It would be ideal if teachers were involved in conducting research when they are still at university, especially in the last period of education. This would give them an opportunity to contribute to development of pedagogical theories, to change their professional habits, to liberate from routine and patterns, to develop creative possibilities and independent research. The teacher cannot apply the same well-known teaching methods, because they need to be improved, enriched and modified.

It is important that in the process of change the teacher should become a co-host of education, having the right and ability to influence it. When the teacher is included in the process of educational transformations, but not convinced of their purpose, he/she will always be sceptical of innovation, due to a strong sense of responsibility for the results of their work. Therefore, for effective educational reforms it is necessary to include the teacher into the preparation of change concepts in education, taking into account their influence on the functioning of particular elements of the system. The influence exerted by the teacher on the student highly depends on the teacher, his/her commitment and professional development.

There are clear interdependencies between the evolution of the goals and tasks of education and the transformations of the teacher's social role. The main cause of this lies in the process of democratization and the popularisation of education Kwiatkowski, Szymański, (Bogaj, 1997). involves the integration of the activities of state and educational institutions in creating conditions for making education available to different social groups and environments to give children equal educational opportunities. The democratization process introduced more diverse groups of students into schools in comparison to elite schools. The teacher must change his/her mind-set, behaviour and teaching methods when children from lowerclass and poor families enter the classroom. Nowadays, the teacher should penetrate the cultural and social context of the student more deeply in order to determine precisely the student's needs and motivations they apply to acquire knowledge and values, and then choose teaching content and methods. The popularization and democratization of education have created a completely new situation for the teacher, whose job has become a mass occupation. This resulted in the need for accelerated forms of preparation for the teaching profession, the development of extramural forms of qualifications, lower selection criteria for teachers, increased difficulty in solving their financial situation, and consequently lowering their authority, prestige and position.

As far as the objectives and tasks of education are concerned, it is essential to identify the appropriate relationship between them and the goals and needs of pupils, parents, adults, institutions and local communities and to draw conclusions for pedagogical practice.

If the teacher is to work effectively, he/she must be a co-creator of school programmes and not just their implementer. He/she is the person who identifies the elements of the teaching process (which needs improvement), introduces corrections and complements, and simultaneously pedagogically evaluates the effects of the changes being made. As



a specialist the teacher is aware of the development tendencies of a given scientific field (Komorowska 1999).

Currently, there is a growing tendency to emphasize the role of teachers in "teaching to learn", and not just in proving and checking the knowledge. This leads to far-reaching modifications or even complete transformations of the curriculum. It is also important that the teacher is responsible not only for the way of teaching, but also for the selection of teaching material (ibid). This will substantially affect the professional competence of the teacher, who will have to understand the psychosocial determinants of the student's development, to be aware of the student's individual capabilities, the causes of success and failures.

Also significant changes occur today in teaching methods, which greatly modifies the role of the teacher. From the point of view of the relationship between them, one should pay attention to the current process of technologizing in teaching. The impact of new teaching techniques on the intensity of school work is high. The possibility of using modern technical means at school makes the teaching and educational activities of the teacher absorb less energy of the teacher (Bereźnicki, 2001). It also increases the prestige of education and the teacher's profession in society. It does not mean, however, that the individual contribution and participation of the teacher in the process he/she directs and controls can become unnecessary. Technical measures (such as radio. television, computers) may help to increase the teacher's capacity, but they will never replace him/her.

Therefore, the primary task becomes to prepare the teacher to direct their own development, education, self-education and self-improvement. The teacher should combine the ability to acquire knowledge and experience individually with teamwork, exchange of scientific information and values, the ability to use various sources of knowledge, assessment and self-assessment, a focus on change and innovation. It is assumed that knowledge can

be enriched and renewed not only through formal education, but also through the use of various sources of knowledge and experience. The teacher should therefore explore the issues of the environment and society, learn about its culture, traditions and customs, broaden his/her knowledge and enrich personality not only by learning certain areas of knowledge but also by participating in the environment and society (ibid).

Today the expectations towards the teacher are much higher. It is expected that he/she would fundamentally influence the transformation of conditions, educate highly qualified employees, decide about the place of the individual in society, fulfil the role of a factor paving the way for new generations. These objectives include various forms of educational activity, such as actions for environmental development, adult education, organization and cooperation with certain institutions such as libraries, clubs, children's and youth organizations, etc. Therefore, the teacher has to have proper education and care for their own intellectual and cultural development and a high level of professional ethics.

Currently, the primary task of the teacher is to prepare children for functioning in society. The teacher acts as the person who directs and organizes the teaching process and various forms of extracurricular activities, s well as a caretaker of children, a social activist in the local community, local organizations and institutions (Szymański, 1996).

The scope of responsibilities of the modern Polish teacher is quite broad. His/her tasks can be classified into the following groups of activities:

- **1.** Organization of the teaching process, taking care of students:
 - a) proper implementation of curricula;
 - b) constant learning about students, their moral attitudes, progress in learning,
 - c) making pupils accustomed to independent,



Prof. Marzenna Magda-Adamowicz, habilitated doctor/ Teachers in the Changing Polish Social Reality

systematic work;

- d) constant concern for students' health and manners;
- e) keeping documentation to ensure continuity and effectiveness of work.

2. Cooperation with other educational entities, i.e.:

- a) with head teacher creating professional kindness, inspiration, culture of criticism;
- with teachers' board attending its meetings, concern for the implementation of resolutions;

3. Cooperation with parents and caretakers:

- a) keeping in contact and exchanging information about the student;
- b) showing mutual respect and kindness;
- c) developing parents' pedagogical skills, increasing their pedagogical culture and increasing their knowledge of child development and educational skills.

4. Activity in the environment

- a) learning the local environment, its culture, achievements, human relations, institutions;
- b) helping to manage social, cultural and educational life;
- c) taking care of the honour of the school and the dignity of the teaching profession;

5. Professional development and self-education:

- a) broadening and updating own knowledge;
- b) deepening the knowledge of educational programmes;
- c) learning new concepts and practical solutions in the implementation of educational policy;

d) Taking care of the teacher's own mental and physical health, which determines his/her ability to work and its effectiveness (Magda-Adamowicz, 2007, 2009).

The teacher must be aware of the factors influencing his/her inspirational and creative role, the essence, the scope and range of affecting the student. He/she must know the pupil's psyche and be able to penetrate into it, and he/she must also be able to analyse his/her own experience, since his/her personality is a determinant of pedagogical work. When discussing the issue of the inspiring and creating role of the teacher in the education process, one can claim that it is decisive for the education process (Magda-Adamowicz, 2015). Obviously, as the changes in the school structure, in the content and methods occur, this role is also modified.

In order to purposefully and deliberately organize the teaching and learning process at school, the teacher must take into account environmental factors and create more favourable conditions for the development of children, and thus for more effective influence of school (Komorowska, 1999). It should also be borne in mind that the placement of the teacher as an important person in institutions and social organizations raises his/her authority and thus facilitates the fulfilment of educational tasks.

For proper development of educational work the teacher needs knowledge that will enable him/her to link the process of education with specific environmental issues. The knowledge about problems, needs, developmental tendencies of the environment, the relationship of children to the elderly, the role of public opinion, personal models, moral norms is a prerequisite to affect them effectively. This requires the pedagogical improvement of teachers in terms of general social and pedagogical issues.

Conclusion

The main characteristic of the evolution of the social role and the tasks of the teacher – which has



Prof. Marzenna Magda-Adamowicz, habilitated doctor/ Teachers in the Changing Polish Social Reality

been discussed in this article - is expressed in the gradual transition from the teacher's role as the sole source of knowledge and values to the role of the organizer of the educational process, the counsellor of the students, the guide to the world of scientific information and cultural values. This tendency is present in many educational systems, but one should not forget that the teacher without thorough knowledge, without the ability to shape modern thinking, cannot fulfil his or her primary tasks. Reliable knowledge is an essential feature that is always highly appreciated by students. The teacher can be a good counsellor only if he or she is wellacquainted with the subject he/she teaches.

First and foremost, it is necessary to develop a more comprehensive understanding between the school, the teacher and the local community. The teacher's activity is impossible if parents do not clearly perceive their duties, limit their contacts with the school to obtaining information about the child's progress. On the part of teachers there must be an open attitude. They cannot believe that they are the only responsible and competent ones or that their role is reduced to teaching only and ends when the bell rings. Improper teachers' attitudes can be aggravated if school management is not looking for a platform for cooperation with parents and the environment.

There is a clear link between the structural and organizational transformations of education and the transformations of the teacher's roles responsibilities. Traditional organizational structures limit the teacher's social role to the effects of his or her work. However, modern structures adapted to current tasks can create optimal working conditions for the teacher, increase the results of his/her tasks. Therefore, it seems that there should be an agreement between politicians and the organizers of education and between reformers and teachers. If the optimal level of their understanding and cooperation is reached, and effectiveness maximum accuracy innovations can be ensured, especially as some structural and organizational changes change the role of the teacher (ibid).

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Prof. Marzenna Magda-Adamowicz, habilitated doctor/ Teachers in the Changing Polish Social Reality

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