



National Perspective on INPRO - Poland

Ad. 1

In Poland there have been many reforms in child care recently, especially when it comes to initial education (which means lower primary school, so grades I-III) and kindergartens. One of the aspects that have undergone several changes is qualifications of teachers at this lowest level of education.

At present to become a teacher of classes I-III (lower primary), one needs to complete 5-year studies at the university level, thus becoming an M.A. in this area or 3-year studies (at the teacher training college), thus becoming a B.A. It needs to be highlighted that a special faculty must be chosen, namely “Initial Education” with a special course in pedagogy. The name “Initial Education” is now more and more often being replaced with Integrated Education, to stress the fact that in the first three years subjects are taught in an integrated way. A kindergarten teacher must possess adequate qualifications and, thus, must graduate from the teacher training college also with a special course in pedagogy of teaching preschool children. The specialization is called “Kindergarten Education”. An initial education teacher, however, can also teach preschoolers (actually a lot depends on the head teacher of the kindergarten). The situation was different a few years ago when to be able to do that such a teacher had to complete his qualifications by taking postgraduate studies, so called qualifying courses, or graduate from special teacher training college to complete his/her qualifications. It should be added that some universities offer a specialization called “Initial Education with English” thus giving its graduates the qualifications to teach at the lowest level of education (grades I-III of primary school and kindergarten) both integrated subjects (Polish, elements of Maths, Art, Physical Education, Home Education) and, additionally English, so a foreign language. Then children have one teacher, who decides how to integrate this foreign language into the overall curriculum. Nowadays the tendency is visible to bring lower primary school and kindergarten (kindergarten and school) together, which is connected with the reform concerning the age of starting compulsory school education.

Children between 3 and 5 may attend kindergartens if parents agree to it. In special cases even a 2,5 year-old child can be accepted by a kindergarten. According to the latest ammendment (of the other ammendment concerning accelaration of children’s starting school) it is obligatory for six-year-old children to start school from 1 September 2014. The date has been postponed several times. It means that in school years 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 parents can decide to send their children to school if they turned six in the given year. So far school education has started from the age of 7. Parents (and kindergartens or special units organised within schools) are obliged to ensure one year of preparation before the obligatory schooling starts. By the year 2014 this preparatory year will regard 6-year-olds. The postponement of the date of introduction of obligatory schooling for six-year-olds caused some problems, mainly the change of the curriculum in kindergartens, which means lowering the requirements. The result is the impression of the parents that their children do not work to their fullest potential, which means that they are not stmulated enough.



When it comes to kindergartens there are considerable changes connected with their privatisation, too. Nowadays there are both public and private kindergartens. Everything depends on the cities. In some (like in Kalisz), the law has been passed to privatize all of them.

To compare the ways they function we can notice that a public kindergarten is obliged to cover/realise core curriculum and to organise assistance and support to the special needs children. What is more, it obviously ensures care and education free of charge and the care it provides is not shorter than 5 hours. A public kindergarten accepts children without restrictions according to the legal documents (general availability, openness). It also employs teachers and other workers according to the regulations included in the legal documents.

There are also *private kindergartens*. They also realise the core curriculum but how they do it depends on them. Also organisation of support from specialists is done according to their own regulations. Such kindergartens are not free.

Kindergartens are under the obligation to organize early support for children's development. The kindergarten has to offer from 4 to 8 classes a month to a retarded child or the one with psychomotor problems. The classes are either conducted individually with the child and parents or in groups of 3-4 pupils. The help is provided by specialists having qualifications to work with children.

As regards the transition from kindergarten to school by April every year the kindergarten teachers are obliged to evaluate the child's achievements (it means so far a 6-year-old's but from 2014- a 5-year-old's), point out his/ her strengths and weaknesses, suggest a further course of action. These written opinions concerning 'school readiness' are given to parents. Because there is no law concerning that, there is no duty to inform future teachers of first graders (in lower primary school) about the problems diagnosed at the kindergarten level of education. Thus, each child starts from the "clean slate" (avoiding any labels). The initial (integrated education) teacher starts getting to know the child and his potential from the first day of school year. There is a tendency, though, for the people working in the Ministry of Education and other educational units to encourage teachers in the kindergarten and lower primary school to hold voluntary meetings for the children's wellbeing.

In some schools and kindergartens there exist integrative classes for children/pupils with special needs. The idea is to enable children with special needs (physically handicapped, hard of hearing, of poor sight, autistic, mentally retarded... etc) to learn with healthy children. The overall number of children/ pupils in such a class ranges from 20-25 and there are 3-5 ones with some disabilities among them. A special assistant teacher with pedagogic qualifications may be employed and take part in the lessons apart from the regular teacher.

Ad.2

The existing legal documents say that head teachers can employ: pedagogues, psychologists and speech therapists. The head teacher, being responsible for ensuring psychological-pedagogic help, decides about it.



Pedagogues, for example, can be employed by the head teacher of a particular school and this is conditioned by, obviously, demand for a pedagogue (students requiring psychological-pedagogic help), qualifications of teachers already employed and access to the psychological-pedagogic centers and other specialised centers

When it comes to speech therapists there is a tendency in kindergartens and schools to employ them part-time or only to offer them a few hours.

Generally, head teachers tend to encourage teachers already working in their kindergartens or schools to further their qualifications through postgraduate studies or other courses so that they can conduct therapeutic classes (for ADHD children, those with Asperger's syndrome etc) or special physical education lessons (for children with orthopedic problems).

Employment of specialists is strictly connected with the finances that the school or kindergarten possesses and availability of these professionals. The schools cooperate with the local Psychological Pedagogic Center.

In each town and city there exists the Psychological-Pedagogic Center, which provides counselling service. They are responsible for:

- providing children (at all ages) and their parents and teachers with psychological and pedagogic help;
- supporting childrens' and teenagers' comprehensive development and effective learning;
- promoting healthy lifestyle.

The opinion and decision of the Psychological- Pedagogic Centre is necessary:

- to accelerate initial education;
- to provide the help of a speech therapist, extra classes (physical therapy- curvature of the spine and other orthopedic problems, in case of subjects the child seems not to cope);
- to organize an individual schooling program for children with health problems;
- in case the child must take the course of a particular year again (repeat a class);
- in case the child is mentally retarded and others.

The workers of the centre are obliged to conduct workshops, organize therapies (for dyslectic children and all sorts of problems mentioned above in the part concerning tasks) . All services are, of course, free. In order to subject the child to examination of any kind parents' or lawful caretakers' consent is necessary.

What can be observed nowadays in Poland is an increase in dysfunctions and disorders of different kinds in children. The Psychological-Pedagogic Centers cannot cope with such a big number of problematic cases of children. As a result, the periods of waiting for the appointments with specialists are becoming longer and longer. Thus, providing regular assistance of specialists is hardly possible.



When it comes to interprofessionalism in child care the latest reform from November 2011 is an attempt to make cooperation between teachers, psychologists, pedagogues, parents ...etc more effective by creating so called interprofessional teams.

On 17th November 2010 a new law was issued about the principles of organizing psychological-pedagogic help in public kindergartens, schools and other educational centers.

In case there have been some developmental and educational problems noticed in the student, for example problems connected with outstanding or ,in other words, above average learning potential (very high IQ), handicap of some sort (problems with poor hearing, motor skills... etc) the kindergarten, school, educational centre is obliged to meet those special needs. Such children's individual capacities are to be catered for.

There has been prepared a catalogue of individual educational and developmental needs. Obviously it is still open, ready to be completed. This flexibility will allow addressing the newly observed and diagnosed problems.

According to the new law, there should be interprofessional groups formed in kindergartens and schools. The first phase will be devoted to activities enabling recognition of interests, talents, difficulties or other individual developmental and educational needs.

At the kindergarten level the stress is put on the pedagogic observation by the teacher resulting in the analysis and evaluation of the child's readiness to start education in the primary school.

The stress in the lower primary school (grades I-III) is put on the recognition of the risk of the existence of specific problems in learning. This is important for the further work with children and organizing support for them.

The group/ interprofessional team will be formed for the child possessing the document (statement) about, for example, the necessity of individual education, with the opinion from the Psychological-Pedagogic Center concerning dyslexia, ADHD, with the document from other specialised center e.g. about Asperger's syndrome. Thanks to the interprofessional group, the help that will be provided to a child will be fuller as a common approach will have to be worked out. The interprofessional team may consist of just the workers employed by the head teacher but also of the representatives of the Psychological-Pedagogic Centre and, following the request from the parents, other specialists. The head teacher is obliged to inform the parents about the date of the meeting of the team. The parents have the right to take part in the meeting devoted to the analysis of the child's situation and identifying the areas in which support is needed.

The head teacher (director) decides how to use the extra hours that he has at his disposal. Such hours can be devoted to developing interests and potential of gifted children or levelling out the chances of children with special needs and overcoming difficulties of many sorts, which means putting into effect the educational-therapeutic program.



The Psychological-Pedagogic Centers will cooperate with schools and kindergartens offering help in creating programs and plans supporting the development of the child.

The interprofessional group starts and completes the Card of Individual Student's Needs (Karta Indywidualnych Potrzeb Ucznia-KIPU). The aim of the card is to collect all the information gathered about the child. It will become an invaluable source of information for the parents, teachers and generally interprofessional teams, also in case of the situation when the child changes the kindergarten or school.

All opinions/statements from the Psychological-Pedagogic Center (and other specialised centers) are to be signed not only by the director of the center but by the specialist who examined the child and filled in the opinions. This way the parents will know who diagnosed the problem in their child. As a result, also the consultations between the pedagogue and psychologist (and other specialists) will be easier to organize.

Ad.3

Polish INPRO partners hosted a meeting in Kalisz on 12th-13th May 2011. On the first day NKJO – Nauczycielskie Kolegium Języków Obcych – Foreign Language Teacher Training College in Kalisz organized a workshop for both INPRO partners and its 3rd-year students (graduating that year). The workshop was conducted by Jolanta Raszewska. First there was an outdoor ice-breaking session with a special kindergarten aid (called a KLANZA parachute) to let all participants integrate. It was also a lead-in to the topic of child care. After inviting everybody inside, the task was suggested requiring participants to go back with their memory to the times when they were children themselves. They worked in groups of four sharing experiences. In the mini-lecture that followed the reference was made to Maslow's pyramid of needs. Later the participants were reminded what communication involves and what success in communication depends on (three basic components: non-verbal communication, voice tonality and words). Concentrating on non-verbal communication the participants were asked in groups (mixed INPRO partners and NKJO students) to enumerate aspects of non-verbal behaviour that have to be controlled in communication with a child. After the discussions finished, the ideas were pooled and compared to the ones prepared by the person conducting the workshop. The issue of touching triggered discussion. The stands of different countries were presented. What followed was the discussion concerning active listening and the importance of non-verbal signals and sounds. Later on the participants, still in small groups, analysed the cartoons taken from the book by Faber & Mazlish (2001 *How to talk so kids will listen & listen so kids will talk* Picadilly Press: London, 2003 *How to talk so kids can learn at home and in school*. Picadilly Press: London), chose some of them and acted them out. Both versions of the cartoons: English and Polish were distributed. Another part of the workshop was devoted to the way of informing the child of the adult's feelings in a non-violent way by introducing the idea of a 4- piece message:

I feel.....(naming emotion)

....when YOU (describing behaviour)



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...because (effect on me)

I expect.....(what behaviour)

The practical task was then suggested to put it into practice (the participants were to suggest how an adult can express his feelings in two provided situations using the model given)

At the end the key message of avoiding closing children in specific roles was presented and a child-rearing anthem by Dorothy Low Nolte read out loud.

What followed was Stephan Rietmann and Hubertus Voss-Uhlenbrock's training session introducing basic concepts for well functioning interprofessional teams. At the beginning an example of a school support network was given. Then a critical incident – school bullying – was introduced. The participants, split up into different groups, and representing different parties like parents, psychologists etc were to decide how they would react as a group, what solutions they would suggest and then communicated the outcome of the brainstorming done within their own group to the other groups of professionals. What followed was the discussion on the principles of well-functioning teams. This was the last training that took place on this day.

The second day of the visit of INPRO partners in Kalisz was devoted to the celebration of the Day of the Forget-me-not, which means the Day of Publiczne Przedszkole no 3 in Kalisz together with children and their parents and teachers. For the INPRO project and for the Polish partner this was an excellent dissemination event. The aims and objectives of the INPRO project were explained to all participants including the president of the City Council and the head of the Education department.

Ad.4

The INPRO project started at the right moment in Poland as it coincided with the onset of the reform concerning creation of interprofessional teams. Thus, it can support putting this reform into effect. Teachers and other specialists have just been informed about the reform but they still lack practical knowledge and tools concerning building interprofessional structures. There even exists a kind of anxiety connected with this. Thus there is a need to organize courses bringing teachers and other specialists (pedagogues, speech therapists ...etc) together and letting them work out forms of cooperation and common language. The INPRO four modules with the outlines of courses will offer substantial help to training centers to plan workshops devoted to putting the reform into effect. The courses are flexible enough to allow for modifications, free choice of tasks thus being universal and helpful also to Polish institutions having conducting courses in its programme. Out of all four modules prepared by INPRO partners two seem particularly valuable, namely "Case management" and "Recording personal and educational development" as they are most relevant to the reform's most important assumptions - the duty to write and carry out Individual Educational-Therapeutic Programme (in Polish IPET) for students with special educational needs and the obligation to record all steps taken to help the child by keeping the Card of Individual Student's Needs (in Polish KIPU).