
FROM THE HISTORICAL CALENDAR

Wiesław Jamrożek

DOI: 10.14746/bhw.2018.38.38

Department of Educational Studies

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

The Educational Practice and Thought of the Second Polish Republic on the 90th Anniversary of Regaining Independence

Abstract

The situation of the Republic of Poland, which was revived in 1918, in the educational field was dramatically difficult. As a consequence of partitions, the Second Republic of Poland inherited a relatively high rate of illiteracy (over 6.5 million illiterates, which constituted approximately 33% of the entire population of the country older than 10 years). As a result of individual differences in the economic, political, social and legal systems of the states occupying Poland, the educational system on the Polish territories at the threshold of independence was largely different with regard to the number of schools, the organization, program and didactic assumptions. The reborn Polish state was confronted with an important task of unifying the system and the level of education. It must be emphasised that this task was actually accomplished. In this the Sejm on March 11, 1932 (the act conclusively dissolved the remains of the educational legislation of the states which partitioned Poland).

In the interwar Poland, not only the school system but also the so-called extraschool education developed. The period of the Second Republic of Poland was also the time of explosion of pedagogical thought. The most important theoretical trends in the educational sciences emerged at that time, primarily: “psychological pedagogy and the related great movement of New Education (progressive education)”, “sociological pedagogics (social pedagogy)”, “cultural pedagogy (humanistic, personalistic pedagogy)”.

A special object of reflection on the education in the Second Republic of Poland and of controversy in the pedagogics of the twenty years between the First and the Second World War in Poland was the question of educational aims. In the period until 1926 the dominant trend influencing the educational practice to the largest extent was the so-called patriotic education, whereas in the subsequent years citizenship education prevailed.

Keywords: educational system in Poland, Second Republic of Poland, history of education

November 1918 was a turning point in the history of the Polish nation. After many years of national enslavement (123 years), sovereign Poland re-entered the world arena. A dream of many generations of Poles, who had believed in regaining independence, came true.

Nevertheless, regaining independence in November 1918 was only the beginning of the process of establishing grounds for the resurrected state – the process taking place under exceptionally complex economic, political and social circumstances. The shape of the resurrected state's borders had remained unregulated and which, as shown in the consecutive months and even years, had to be fought for not only at the Peace Congress in Versailles and through diplomatic measures, but also in numerous battlefields with our neighbours.

The situation of the resurrected Polish Republic was also difficult in the area of education despite unquestionable Polish society's output both, in the field of practical achievements as well as in the sphere of pedagogical conception and thought from the period before regaining independence. After partitions, the Second Polish Republic inherited a relatively high index of illiteracy. The data obtained in the general census in 1921 implied that Poland had over 6.5 million of illiterate persons at that time, which constituted approximately 33% of country's citizens over 10 years old¹.

As a result of discrepancies in economic, political, social and legal systems of partitioning states, at the verge of independence, school systems in the Polish territory differed quite significantly with regard to the quantity, organisation, curriculum and didactics. Therefore, the resurrected Polish state faced an important task to consolidate the education system and level. Implementation thereof had already been announced in the programme announced on 18 December 1918 by the first Minister of Education in independent Poland, Ksawery Prauss. It was also discussed during sessions of the All-Poland Teachers' Convention on 14–17 April 1919, named due to the importance of issues discussed thereat: the Teachers' Sejm.

Resolutions and motions passed at the aforementioned Teachers' Sejm provided grounds for developing a democratic education system based on the principle of seven years of education in all primary schools and school obligation executed as of 7 years of age.

The following documents had an important meaning for the consolidation and order of the school system at its initial period after regaining independence: the decree on school obligation of 7 February 1919, the decree on educating teachers of primary schools also of 7 February 1919, the Act on the temporary system of school authorities of 4 June 1920, or the Act on setting up and maintaining public primary schools of 17 February 1922, and with reference to higher education – the Act on academic schools of 13 July 1920². Of course, also the provisions of the March Constitution of 1921 were important; definitive-

¹ The phenomenon of illiteracy concerned, in particular, older and the oldest generation (among citizens aged over 60 years old as many as 54.2% of illiterate persons were registered, in the group of Poland's citizens aged 40–59 years old – 42.2%) and it occurred predominantly in the countryside; see: SUTYŁA, J., *Miejsce kształcenia dorosłych w systemie oświatowym II Rzeczypospolitej*, Wrocław 1982, p. 20.

Geography of this phenomenon was also characteristic. For example, the Greater Poland countryside had only 4.3% of illiterate persons, Lvov – 33.9%, Polesie – as many as 78.1% (ROSZKOWSKI, W., *Najnowsza historia Polski 1914–1945*, Warsaw 2003, p. 123.)

² Another legal act regulating the higher education was the Act of 15 March 1933, which, in comparison to the Act of 1920, extended, among others, authorities of the Minister of Religion and Public Education.

ly settling the case of obligatory education in the scope of primary school, stipulating free education in public and self-government schools and the obligatory character of teaching religion in all public schools educating the youth up to 18 years of age.

The remainders of partitioning states' educational legislations were finally removed under the Act on the school system passed by the Sejm on 11 March 1932. This Act (commonly referred to as the Jędrzejewicz Act from the surname of the then Minister of Religion and Public Education, Janusz Jędrzejewicz) consolidated the school system in the territory of Poland, with an exception of the Silesian Voivodeship.

The subject of special care of school authorities and educational environments of the resurrected state comprised ensuring an increase in the commonness of teaching at a primary level. A percentage of children covered with the school education in the 20s has been continuously growing and in the school year 1928/1929, according to the data of the Ministry of Religion and Public Education, reached a level of 96.4%³. Nevertheless, in the following years, in the period of a so-called school crisis, commonness of teaching dropped. In the school year 1935/1936, according to GUS data, this index dropped to the level of 88.3% of children obliged to attend schools⁴.

The process of improving the organisational level of primary schools was too slow. Schools of the lowest level of organisation (not implementing the full curriculum of a primary school) prevailed in the countryside. This situation was not in fact improved as a result of executing provisions of the aforementioned Act of 1932, which maintained the inequality of urban and rural primary schools. The first level school was a prevailing type of a school in the countryside (in the school year 1932/1933 one and two forms schools constituted 74.6% of the total number of rural schools attended by over 50% of rural children⁵).

The Jędrzejewicz Act, which should be positively assessed, introduced a decisive reform of the above-primary school system. It introduced (instead of the hitherto 8 year lower secondary school) a 4 year lower secondary school (consolidated with regard to the curriculum) and a 2 year high school (with a diverse curriculum). It increased the rank of vocational schools, introducing also vocational lower secondary schools and high schools. It reformed the teachers' education by greatly increasing the level thereof.

Furthermore, so-called non-school education developed in interwar Poland. Social and educational associations conducted activity in this field, among which the following should be enumerated: the People's Libraries Society, Towarzystwo Szkoły Ludowej (the People's School Society), the Polish Educational Society, Towarzystwo Uniwersytetu Robotniczego (the Workers' University Society). They were also joined by institutions

³ TRZEBIATOWSKI, K., *Problem powszechności nauczania w Polsce w latach 1918–1931*, [in:] *Rozprawy z Dziejów Oświaty*, 1969, vol. 12, p. 65; p. 77.

⁴ In the opinion of some of then education activists, this index was even lower. According to them, the number of children not attending school was to amount to approximately 1 million at that time (GARBOWSKA, W., *Szkolnictwo powszechne w Polsce w latach 1932–1939*, Wrocław 1976, p. 151–153.)

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 67.

such, as e.g.: Instytut Oświaty Dorosłych (the Institute of Adult Education) (established on the grounds of Centralne Biuro Kursów dla Dorosłych (the Central Office of Courses for Adults)), Instytut Oświaty i Kultury im. S. Staszica (the Stanisław Staszic Education and Culture Institute), Związek Teatrów Ludowych (the People's Theatres' Association), and then, Instytut Teatrów Ludowych (the People's Theatres' Institute). An important place in the non-school education activity was taken by youth organisations including, among others, rural youth associations. The latter were related with the people's universities movement referring to the assumptions and experiences gained in the 19th century by N.F.S. Grundtvig and Ch. Kold, and functioning in Poland, in particular under the influence of the upbringing ideas and conceptions of Ignacy Solarz.

Polish non-school education in the interwar period is characterised with the fact that despite compensatory function still prevailing therein (resulting from specific educational negligence originating from the period of national enslavement as well as shortages of then primary school system), more and more attention was paid to the proper function of that education related with providing more possibilities of education at a level higher than elementary and preparing participants thereof to active participation in the cultural and social life in their closest environment and beyond. This function was executed in rural areas, among others, by the aforementioned people's universities, and in urban areas – public universities⁶.

The period of the Second Polish Republic is also a period, and this statement will not be an exaggeration, of an explosion of pedagogical thought. After regaining independence by Poland, in comparison with the previous period, more beneficial organisational and personnel conditions for the development of pedagogical reflections and research emerged. This development was also promoted by a growing demand for a new, Polish, pedagogical theory (with regard to the development of a new national education system and the role of upbringing in maintaining national sovereignty).

Research centres related with universities took an important place in the development of pedagogical thought and research. It can be reminded that the first pedagogical institute was opened in 1919, in the University of Poznan activated at the same time (initially, the institute was headed by Antoni Danysz, and after his death, by Bogdan Nawroczyński, and then, Ludwik Jaxa-Bykowski). The Free Polish University was an important centre of pedagogical research. The Pedagogical Department has functioned as of the beginning of existence thereof. In 1925, Studium Pracy Społeczno-Oświatowej (the Social and Educational Work College) headed by Helena Radlińska was established at the aforementioned Department. An important role in the development of pedagogical discipline and thought was also played, in particular, in the scope of research related with special education, by the Institute of Special Education established in 1922, in Warsaw and headed by Maria Grzegorzewska.

In pre-war Poland the most important, theoretical trends in education sciences appeared. Stefan Wołoszyn included as the aforementioned, among others: “psychological

⁶ More about the output of Polish non-school education, among others, in two publications: SUTYŁA, J., *Miejsce kształcenia* and STOPIŃSKA-PAJAŁK, A., *Andragogika w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Katowice 1994.

pedagogy trend and related great movement of the New Education (progressive education)”, “sociological pedagogy trend (social pedagogy)”, “cultural pedagogy trend (humanistic, personalistic)”⁷.

Pedagogical thought and theory development in the Second Polish Republic was also influenced by achievements of related sciences, especially psychology and sociology. This impact manifested itself in the classification of theoretical pedagogical trends referred above. In this context, the output of the most prominent representatives of the educational psychology from this period should be indicated: Stefan Baley, Józefy Joteyko, Stefan Szuman⁸, and from the sociology field: Florian Znaniński, Ludwik Krzywicki, Jan Stanisław Bystroń and Józefa Chałasiński, the youngest from the sociologists enumerated herein.

A large impact on the educational thought and practice in interwar Poland was exerted by the aforementioned New Education movement. A special role in promoting its assumptions and ideas was played by the magazine “Ruch Pedagogiczny” (“Pedagogical Movement”), edited (until 1933) by Henryk Rowid, the founder of one of Polish versions of “work school” – “creative school” conception.

An important place among Polish pedagogues of the New Education was certainly taken by Janusz Korczak (Henryk Goldszmit), a writer and a doctor, and, above all, a pedagogue of children deprived of parental care, due to his approach, especially in the “years of trial” during Hitler’s occupation, called Socrates of the 20th century⁹. On the grounds of many years of studies and experiences gained in run by him “Children’s House” (for Jewish children) and its twin “Our House” (for Polish children), Janusz Korczak developed in the care facility an original educational system. He based his conception on the idea of self-upbringing and related project of “children’s society organised and governed by children only”. Janusz Korczak died in the gas chambers of the Treblinka Extermination Camp together with two hundred pupils and personnel of the “Children’s House”.

In interwar Poland “ideas of *scientific pedagogy* based on social grounds”¹⁰ (sociological) were developed by, among others: Helena Radlińska and Marian Falski. At this time, the following persons were associated with cultural pedagogy: already mentioned Bogdan Nawroczyński, Russian emigrant Sergiusz Hessen, Bogdan Suchodolski, in a way also Zygmunt Mysłakowski. Among Polish founders of the personalistic pedagogy trend, also Karol Górski, the representative of the Polish Catholic pedagogical thought, should be enumerated. In the period of the Second Polish Republic, one can also mention the pedagogy practiced in the “Marxism climate”¹¹. It was represented by, above all, Władysław Spasowski and Stefan Rudniański.

⁷ WOŁOSZYN, S., *Nauki o wychowaniu w Polsce XX wieku. Próba syntetycznego zarysu na tle powszechnym*, Kielce 1998, p. 31.

⁸ See e.g.: *Osiągnięcia polskiej psychologii w okresie międzywojennym*, ed. K. CZARNECKI, Katowice 1981, p. 107–116; p. 140–144 and others.

⁹ See: WOŁOSZYN, S., *Korczak*, Warsaw 1982, p. 7 and next.

¹⁰ As cited in: WOŁOSZYN, S., *Nauki o wychowaniu*, p. 52.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 88.

In the pre-war period, the research was developed in the scope of particular pedagogical disciplines, also in the field of related history of upbringing. At this time, the research on history of education was conducted by: Stanisław Kot, Stanisław Lempicki, Zygmunt Kulski, Helena Radlińska, Henryk Barycz, Jan Hulewicz, Stefan Truchim, Wiktor Wąsik, Józef Lewicki, Bogdan Nawroczyński, Hanna Pohoska, Karol Mazurkiewicz and others¹².

A special problem in the reflection on upbringing in the Second Polish Republic and controversies in pedagogy in the twenty years' interwar period comprised the issue of the aims of upbringing. In the period until 1926, a prevailing direction in the teleology of education and the most influential on the educational practice was the so-called national education; in the later years, public education was gaining an advantage. The attempt to define scientific grounds of national education was made in pre-war Poland predominantly by Lucjan Zarzecki. Whereas, the conception of public co-education was co-established by, among others: Sławomir Czerwiński, Adam Skwarczyński, Hanna Pohoska. The discussion on key problems of public education was also significantly enriched by Kazimierz Sośnicki¹³.

The development of both, pedagogical theory and practice in the twenty years' interwar period was also influenced by "the innovative activity of a numerous group of teachers of various types of schools"¹⁴. Stanisław Michalski characterises the most typical forms of teachers' participation in the pedagogical theory development in the Second Polish Republic. He indicates that a part of teachers, who inspired, organised and engaged in the didactic-educational process, provided a specific empirical material, which later on constituted a subject of research conducted as if "from the outside"; whereas, others played "a role of researchers by noticing theoretical problems of professional work"¹⁵. This theoretical and research output of teachers was presented in various publications (posted, among others, in then pedagogical magazines), as well as during pedagogical congresses and conventions, among which, above all, the aforementioned Teachers' Sejm should be listed as well as four congresses: in Poznań (in 1929), in Vilnius (in 1931), in Lvov (in 1933) and in Warsaw (in 1939).

¹² More on the topic of the history of education in the interwar period, among others, in the following works: BARYCZ, H., *Rozwój historii oświaty, wychowania i kultury w Polsce*, Kraków 1949; HELLWIG, J., *Dzieje historii wychowania w Polsce i jej twórcy*, Poznań 2001; *Historia wychowania w XX wieku. Dorobek i perspektywy*, ed. T. GUMUŁA and others, Kielce 1998; *Historycy wychowania II Rzeczypospolitej*, ed. W. SZULAKIEWICZ, Warsaw 2000.

¹³ More, among others, in the following works: ARASZKIEWICZ, F. W., *Ideale wychowawcze Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Warsaw 1978; BARTNICKA, K., *Wychowanie państwowe*, [in:] *Rozprawy z Dziejów Oświaty*, 1972, vol. 15; JAKUBIAK, K. and JAMROŻEK, W., *Idea wychowania obywatelskiego w polskiej nowożytnej myśli pedagogicznej do 1939 r.*, [in:] *Historyczne konteksty edukacji obywatelskiej w społeczeństwach wielokulturowych*, ed.: A. SZERŁĄG, Kraków 2007.

¹⁴ As cited in: MICHALSKI, S., *Praca naukowo-badawcza nauczycieli w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Poznań 1994, p. 5.

¹⁵ Ibidem. More on the topic of innovative and research activity of teachers of the Second Polish Republic in the cited book of S. Michalski and many more, among others, in the following works: BEREŻNICKI, F., *Innowacje pedagogiczne w Polsce 1918–1939*, Szczecin 1984; *Hasła "nowej szkoły" w dydaktyce Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Toruń 1998 and SOB CZAK, J., *Recepcja idei "nowego wychowania" w polskiej pedagogice okresu między wojnami*, Bydgoszcz 1978–1979.

Despite many difficulties and limitations, mistakes and shortages in the implemented educational policy, the Second Polish Republic noted many achievements in pedagogical practice, theory and reflection. On the one hand, the educational practice and related educational sciences adopted experiences and innovative conceptions of the Western pedagogy and on the other hand, developed their own, original solutions and propositions. An overall educational balance of pre-war Poland is certainly favourable. Its unquestionable, the biggest achievement comprised developing the Polish educational system almost from scratch. Its educational results were positively verified by the years of the 2nd World War and Hitler's occupation. Their value was proven by, above all, the attitude of a vast majority of Polish society against aggressors and occupiers, their engagement in organising and operating the underground state and related underground army as well as numerous participation of representatives thereof in various other military formation outside the country.

Bibliography

- ARASZKIEWICZ, F.W., *Idealy wychowawcze Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Warsaw 1978.
- BARTNICKA, K., *Wychowanie państwowe*, {in:] *Rozprawy z Dziejów Oświaty*, 1972, vol. 15.
- BARYCZ, H., *Rozwój historii oświaty, wychowania i kultury w Polsce*, Kraków 1949.
- BEREŻNICKI, F., *Innowacje pedagogiczne w Polsce 1918–1939*, Szczecin 1984.
- BEREŻNICKI, F., *Hasła „nowej szkoły” w dydaktyce Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Toruń 1998.
- GARBOWSKA, W., *Szkolnictwo powszechne w Polsce w latach 1932–1939*, Wrocław 1976.
- HELLWIG, J., *Dzieje historii wychowania w Polsce i jej twórcy*, Poznań 2001.
- Historia wychowania w XX wieku. Dorobek i perspektywy*, ed. T.GUMUŁA and others, Kielce 1998.
- Historycy wychowania II Rzeczypospolitej*, ed. W. SZULAKIEWICZ, Warsaw 2000.
- JAKUBIAK, K. and JAMROŻEK, W., *Idea wychowania obywatelskiego w polskiej nowożytnej myśli pedagogicznej do 139 r.*, [in:] *Historyczne konteksty edukacji obywatelskiej w społeczeństwach wielokulturowych*, ed.: A. SZERŁĄG, Kraków 2007.
- MICHAŁSKI, S., *Praca naukowo – badawcza nauczycieli w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Poznań 1994.
- Osiągnięcia polskiej psychologii w okresie międzywojennym, ed. K. CZARNECKI, Katowice 1981.
- ROSZKOWSKI, W., *Najnowsza historia Polski 1914–1945*, Warsaw 2003.
- SOBCZAK, J., *Recepcja idei „nowego wychowania” w polskiej pedagogice okresu międzywojennymi*, Bydgoszcz 1978 – 1979.
- STOPIŃSKA – PAJAŁ, A., *Andragogika w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Katowice 1994.
- SUTYŁA, J., *Miejsce kształcenia dorosłych w systemie oświatowym II Rzeczypospolitej*, Wrocław 1982.
- TRZEBIATOWSKI, K., *Problem powszechności nauczania w Polsce w latach 1918 – 1931*, [in:] *Rozprawy z Dziejów Oświaty*, 1969, vol. 12.
- WOŁOŻYŃ, S., *Korczak*, Warsaw 1982.
- WOŁOŻYŃ, S., *Nauki o wychowaniu w Polsce XX wieku. Próba syntetycznego zarysu na tle powszechnym*, Kielce 1998.

