

The Polonia teacher of early education

Nauczyciel polonijnej edukacji dzieci młodszych

Key words: Polonia teacher, competences, knowledge, teaching skills, Polonia early education, Polonia teacher's occupational needs, Polonia educational environment, pedagogical diagnosis.

Słowa kluczowe: nauczyciel polonijny, kompetencje, wiedza, umiejętności nauczyciela, polonijna edukacja wczesnoszkolna, potrzeby zawodowe nauczyciela polonijnego, edukacyjne środowisko polonijne, diagnoza pedagogiczna.

Streszczenie: Wyjazdy młodych ludzi z naszego kraju do państw UE są elementem stałym naszej rzeczywistości. Nauczyciel polonijny za granicą jest łącznikiem pomiędzy dużą rzeszą młodych ludzi, zwłaszcza dzieci a Polską. Problem braku nauczycieli chcących uczyć dzieci polskie za granicami naszego kraju rodzi pytania dotyczące wiedzy, kompetencji i umiejętności takiego nauczyciela, ale także specyficznych warunków środowiskowo-kulturowych w krajach, w których funkcjonuje zawodowo nauczyciel polonijny, a także pytania na temat czynników, które umożliwiłyby mu skuteczne nauczanie dzieci w innych niż polskie warunkach. Te i podobne pytania w zakresie socjologiczno-pedagogicznym stoją u podstaw badań podstawowych dotyczących działań i środowiska funkcjonowania nauczyciela polonijnego, stąd w planie badawczym przewidzianym na trzy lata ujęto po trzy wyjazdy w roku szkolnym do państw UE. Konstrukcja modelu nauczyciela transferowego może posłużyć do tworzenia tak potrzebnego obecnie kierunku akademickiego, a przede wszystkim wzbogaci wiedzę pedeutologiczną o teoretyczną konstrukcję nowej nauczycielskiej specjalności nauczyciela transferowego.

The era of permanent change is conducive to posing questions referring to people who are responsible for shaping of our future by teaching and furnishing the youth with knowledge, skills and values necessary for social existence. Posing questions concerning the functioning of teachers who exert critical influence upon future generations is within the scope of social sciences. "Those questions reach the very foundations of our conception of the teacher. They refer to the specificity of this particular occupation, developing competences that combine to create this, as well as

the significance of activities undertaken to facilitate their development.” (Kwaśnica, 2011 in: Kwieciński, Śliwierski, 2011). New conceptions concerning the preparation of teacher for assuming occupational roles have emerged in opposition to the classical conceptualization which, as a matter of fact, could be reduced to the idea of in-born predilections or talents. Already at the end of the XX century, cognitive and humanist conceptualizations in the fields of psychology and pedagogy started to move beyond the teacher’s personality development and refer to their interaction with the environment, which is manifested by experiential synergy, reflection and scholarly expertise (Lewowicki, 2007). Revolutionizing postulates forwarded by contemporary pedeutologists with reference to the so-called “new approach” indicate a necessity to support teachers in their continuous occupational development, especially when the teacher’s competences are confronted with practical needs (Kuma, 2000; after: Marciniak 2008).

The rapid unification of our world as well as the emerging foundations of the global civilization have paved the way for the phenomenon of mass migrations which reached its critical moment in 2004, when 10 countries of the former Eastern Bloc joined the political structures of the European Union. The said period was characterized by the greatest intensification of migration processes as far as the history of this transnational political-economic system is concerned. In 2005, The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy estimated the total number of Polish emigrants as ranging from 550,000 to 700,000. Concurrently, the relevant figure for 2007, according to approximations provided by the Central Statistical Office of Poland, amounted to 2 million. In the forthcoming years, the total number of emigrants increased by 60 thousand. In 2013, 70,000 citizens decided to leave Poland, and the provided figure is only an estimate. Until 2014, the aggregate number of 2.2 million Poles had emigrated, though a small fraction of them decided to come back home. Presently, 1,891,000 Poles reside in European countries, which includes 1,789,000 who decided to stay in EU Member States.

Since 2005, as a consequence of the aforementioned processes of mass migration, diversified types of Polonia-related public utilities (including schools) have been established with a frantic intensity. At the very beginning of the process, the schools were granted a community status, but the situation changed with the establishment of The Centre for the Development of Polish Education Abroad in Warsaw on January 1st 2011. Being founded by the Polish Ministry of Education, the institution subsumes The Polonia Teachers’ Centre in Lublin. The Centre for the Development of Polish Education Abroad functions as a ministry coordinator whose aim is to run School Consultation Points linked with diplomatic missions of the Republic of Poland which are localized on six continents and in 37 countries all over the world. These facilities function to provide educational support for Poles residing abroad by organizing a range of supplementary classes of the Polish language and knowledge of Poland. The institution is also responsible for the organization of labour with respect to Polish teachers who teach classes in the school year 2015/16 for 15.9 thousand pupils of

diversified age. The school instruction takes place at schools which have been established by Polonia and which function within the framework of local systems of public education. The pedagogical supervision over these facilities is provided by The Centre for the Development of Polish Education Abroad.

There are approximately 80 teachers who are assigned to teach abroad each year. Although the present school year is still in progress, approximately 125 teachers are still required to work only for the sake of School Consultation Points. These vacancies refer mostly to chairs of School Consultation Points and European Schools and teachers assigned to didactics. It is worth remembering that not all vacancies have been filled so far. The Centre for the Development of Polish Education Abroad and the Polonia Teachers' Centre work in conjunction with each other to provide methodological and content-specific support for educators who teach the Polish language and other classes in Polish. The methodological support assumes diversified forms of additional training (i.e. workshops, courses, trainings) organized in both Poland and abroad. At the moment, the Polonia Teachers' Centre provides approximately 22 courses of diversified scope for Polonia teachers, together with a 20-hour-long qualification course for those educators who have already been assigned to work abroad (The Centre for the Development of Polish Education Abroad employs 600 approx. teachers but there are still further demand). At this point, however, the deficiency of teachers who are willing to work abroad seems sufficient enough to pose questions concerning both a transfer teacher's skills, competences or knowledge, and, on the other hand, socio-cultural conditions that have to be met in order to effectively organize education for children in the social circumstances that are completely dissimilar to the realities of life in Poland.

Objective of the Research Project. The postulated research project may be inscribed into the notion of "late modernity" (Śliwerski, 2010) and Anthony Giddens's theory of structuration (Giddens, 2003) in such a way as to situate the agent (i.e. the Polonia teacher) in a role of creative constructor of social life who is capable of reconstructing the sphere of his/her native country by means of establishing children's relationships with their distant motherhood. When the theory of structuration is assumed as a methodological starting point for our considerations, theoretical underpinnings of our research imply and validate the necessity of field research in the following areas of interest:

- The Polonia teacher is an occupationally reflexive agent who undertakes activities in a defined sphere of everyday reality.
- The said reflexivity may be crippled by occupational ignorance, and inability to recognize the relevant circumstances or unintended consequences of actions.
- Researching into Polonia teachers' everyday occupational life constitutes an integral element of analysis aiming to understand institutionalized practices.
- Occupational routine is a dominant form of everyday activities.

- The analysis of contexts of activities undertaken by Polonia teachers (i.e. circumstances of interaction) cannot be separated from studies aiming to understand processes of social reproduction.
- Social identities and related environments of teaching practices could be perceived as “signs” residing in the real time-space of social structure.
- Limitations associated with structural properties of social systems constitute a mere fraction of determinants typical of social life as well as teachers’ occupational activities.
- The degree of closure of social systems is changeable; furthermore, there are social entities that are not identical with established territorial borders, as it is in the case of enclave of Polishness in the context of Polonia teachers’ occupational activities.

Our research project refers therefore to phenomena which exist actually, are endowed with their own scope, structure, sense and rank (Giddens, 2003).

The postulated study aims to provide an answer to the following research question: “which socio-cultural and didactic-organizational factors determine the effective professional functioning of a Polish teacher of early education in the context of Polonia-related schools situated in EU Member States?”

Our study is sufficient enough to classify relevant factors and, in the future, it will be conducive to forwarding more detailed research hypotheses. The study aims to validate the following major research hypothesis:

There are interdependencies between the Polonia teacher’s skills and competences, organizational and legal determinants or the specificity of the foreign external environment, and the occupational functioning of early education teachers in Polonia schools situated in EU Member States.

The main research hypothesis may be supplemented by the following accompanying hypotheses whose aim is to verify the entire research process:

- H1:** Teachers’ agential practices are conducive to the formation of new rules and actions deployed in specific circumstances of didactic processes realized in a given socio-cultural environment and, at the same time, could be seen as results of the said practices.
- H2:** Diversified legal-organizational circumstances are at place to backfire the fulfilment of a Polonia teacher’s occupational self-actualization.
- H3:** Distinct determinants associated with the external environment exert influence upon the didactic processes at Polonia schools and the work of Polonia teachers.
- H4:** Distinct occupational characteristics typical of the Polonia teacher are combined to form a profile of the transfer teacher in a specific, novel environment of action.

Significance of the Research Project. The reaction of Polish public opinion to a hypothetical plan concerning the imminent liquidation of School Consultation Points in 2009 demonstrates the significance of foreign education for children and parents who decide to leave Poland either permanently or temporarily. Needless to say, local, grassroots initiatives – such as the grassroots protest organized in the Hague – rendered the presumed effects and paved the way for various legal and systemic solutions.

The Worldwide Congress of Polonia Teachers in Ostróda has been organized for five years. In addition to presenting diversified problems, needs and methodological support for Polonia teachers, the conference aims to provide solutions to such problems as time contracts, unrealistic workload, lack of promotion prospects, lack of continuity with professional career in Poland. Since the number of Polish schools abroad does not increase and the amount of students rises each year, this introductory analysis indicates a need for a relevant in-depth, pedagogical study. At present, the Centre for the Development of Polish Education Abroad supervises 15,000 Polish pupils, and the most recent data, referring to the sample of selected EU Member States, suggest that 797 children are taught in the Polonia school in Oslo, 1500 in Paris, and the relevant figures for Athens are 256 (basic courses) and 487 (supplementary courses).

Since the necessity to provide employment for Polonia teachers in EU Member States is increasing, one could observe an urgent need to provide effective solutions in this field, especially when one realizes that the Polish constitution obliges the government to provide all Polish children with an opportunity to learn Polish. At this point, it should be said that exercising this difficult profession in the context of specific, native circumstances of foreign societies postulates a requirement to perform a thorough diagnosis with reference to a transfer teacher's professional activities, conditions of work, specific needs, expectations, as well as professional prospects and opportunities. Teachers assigned to work abroad are willing to specify many obstacles which restrain their actions in a legal-organizational manner. Likewise, they also indicate methodological and content-specific shortcomings whose origin may be traced to the very specificity of working abroad. The aforementioned drawbacks might be seen as a reason for increasing demand with respect to tuitions and courses whose aim is the perfection of Polonia teachers' professional qualifications. This has been verified by the sheer number of educators – more than 2,200 since September 2011 – who have already taken part in a diversified range of improvement courses in the area of pedagogy. Being a ministry coordinator for the Polish education abroad, the Centre for the Development of Polish Education Abroad undertakes a number of educational initiatives whose aim is to aid teachers working abroad by means of providing them with intramural courses, on-line courses, didactic materials, and – first and foremost – indicating target Polonia schools to teachers wishing to work abroad. The teacher recruitment rules have been devised, which state that candidates for assignment abroad must be characterized by having qualifications required in Poland to teach a given subject, a command of one EU official language (it applies to work opportunities within the European Union), an assessment of work done of at least the “good” level obtained in the five-year period immediately preceding the assignment, and a state of health allowing working abroad. Concurrently, a model candidate's profile has been delineated, which indicates such features as: commitment to work, reflexivity, agency, professionalism, or being passionate at teaching. The teacher is also in a position to become a representative of Poland in terms of being an versatile, proactive and self-improving ambassador of Polish culture, literature and education.

The sheer scale of migration-related phenomena justifies attempts to cope with this problem in a scholarly way, especially when it comes to such a critical issue as education which could be inscribed within the idea of changing social practices (Giddens, 2003). Although there have been attempts to diagnose the migration tendencies typical of Polish society, no one has attempted to study Polish educators in terms of their adaptiveness to novel circumstances of work, their specific knowledge and professional skills, theoretical and practical qualifications, and other determinants (e.g. personality-related and profession-related factors) that may influence exercising this difficult profession. Hence, in this context, the study may be considered as innovative. The broad range of professional requirements indicates a necessity to hire professionals (or even luminaries) whose knowledge and talents are multidimensional. When perceived from an individual teacher's perspective, the multifaceted analysis of Polonia education nowadays aims to indicate the most salient elements and circumstances that influence the effectiveness of educators working abroad. The study also strives to capture the critical stimulators – or, contrariwise, restraints and problems – that characterize both the Polonia teacher and a foreign educational *milieu*.

In order to collect data required for a complete analysis of the problem, the research procedure must be conducted by an impartial, external spectator; namely, by a university research worker. This specific choice may be validated by the fact suggesting that teaching children, who have been born abroad, is a particularly problematic challenge as far as the didactic of the Polish language is concerned. Furthermore, providing young children with basic skills and knowledge concerning Poland could be regarded in terms of a fundamental element of their further educational development taking place within both foreign and domestic systems of schooling.

Our research aim is to construct a model (a profile) of a Polonia, transfer teacher who is equipped with operational, pragmatic and interdisciplinary knowledge, as well as skills with reference to the didactic of Polish language, pre-school education, Polish studies, history, geography of Poland, and glottodidactics. When it comes to the reservoir of acquired skills and knowledge, a transfer teacher should be able to combine their own cultural heritage with the relevant elements of target country culture. Moreover, the postulated research will give rise to an entirely new specialization in pedagogy – that is, a new field of study in pedagogy to be implemented at the university hosting the research (referred to as the “proposer”) – which, as a consequence, may help to adjust university education both to authentic requirements of the contemporary reality and visible educational necessities of Polish children living abroad. Needless to say, university studies of that kind should provide graduates with necessary knowledge, skills and other competences, so that teaching abroad will not pose serious problems, and the teacher will not be faced with an obligation to take part in supplementary courses or trainings. At present, such studies are not obtainable within the Polish educational market: students are only offered studies in glottodidactics (i.e. teaching Polish as a foreign language), and introductory research indicates the lack of comprehensive studies designed especially for Polonia teachers. At the same time, the developmental tendencies of pedagogy, apart from the

obligation towards satisfying societal educational needs that are enforced by the present day, could be seen in terms of a response to current pro-migration tendencies which – to consult global, universalistic sociological forecasts – are deemed to constitute stable occurrences. Likewise, a discernible chorus of societal dissident against outdated university fields of studies forces educational authorities to seek for a new educational offer whose focused, specialist and pragmatic character fits the real requirements of the present day. A university field of study dedicated to the tuition of a future Polonia teacher is undoubtedly one of those cutting-edge educational initiatives, which, additionally, point to a certain social reality that awaits to be diagnosed.

Conceptualization and the Research Plan. The research procedure has been divided into 13 tasks with a time span of 36 months. By encompassing a three-year cycle of field studies that includes nine research trips (i.e. three trips a year) to the selected EC Member States, the research plan aims to verify a Polonia teacher's competences, knowledge, and study factors that determine didactic processes in foreign environments on the basis of EU Member States where the biggest number of Polish educators work (the methodology of purposeful sampling). The study will be followed by a further analysis of documents concerning teaching abroad, communication with the chosen School Consultation Points, and negotiation of the research plan (the field studies will take one week in each of the selected countries). Each research trip will be also followed by the construction of relevant research tools. The collected data will be interpreted after each study trip, and a more comprehensive study will be conducted at the end of each year (i.e. when the three consecutive study trips are completed). First of all, the diagnostic procedures will focus on teachers of early education. Further on, the research will concentrate upon other educators, pupils and their parents, as well as supervisors of the selected facilities. The study will be culminated by a detailed analysis of the gathered data involving drawing conclusions, evaluation, and preparing final comments on the relevant inferences.

Our introductory study – which comprises an analysis and overview of documents, and theoretical and practical references concerning the Polish diaspora and the Polonia system of education – indicates the following results:

- The current tendencies in migration have resulted in the increase of number of Poles residing abroad, and, as various societal forecasts put it, the said inclination is of progressive character.
- Since 2004 the Polish community Schools have paved the way for the establishment of School Consultation Points linked with Polish diplomatic missions, which – as a matter of fact – function as Polish schools run and financed by the Republic of Poland via the designated agency; namely, The Centre for the Development of Polish Education Abroad.
- Various attempts to reduce the number of School Consultation Points, to liquidate these facilities, or to transform intramural education into on-line teaching were faced with the Polish diaspora's categorical protests.
- The number of pupils in Polish schools abroad is increasing.

- The Centre for the Development of Polish Education Abroad indicates a necessity to assign 125 more teachers to work among Polonia and Poles abroad.
- Polish teachers assigned to working abroad tend to complain about numerous problems and obstacles that are related to the specificity of working as a Polonia educator.
- Having been positively responding to diversified educational indicatives, teachers assigned to working abroad are willing to indicate a necessity to rise their professional qualifications.
- A special attention should be devoted to the analysis of didactic and external determinants in the work of a Polonia teacher of early education who teaches educational attitudes to pupils (very often children who have been born abroad) whose personal experiences are totally related to their permanent residence abroad.
- A diagnosis of problems and circumstances of a transfer teacher's work seems to be a must.
- There are numerous publications, both academic and popular, that point to the high socio-theoretical rank of investigating into educational problems faced by the Polish diaspora.
- The lack of academic publications which analyse the phenomenon of Polonia educational initiatives, including these focused on children of younger school age, points to the innovative character of our research.
- The implemented systemic, legal regulations concerning educational problems of the Polish diaspora indicate a necessity to provide relevant educational and pedagogical regulations.
- The introductory analysis of shortcomings related to the pedagogical qualifications of Polonia teachers should pave the way for the establishment of at least one state-owned university providing a major of pedagogical studies dedicated to future Polonia teachers, and whose curriculum will be constructed in response to realistic and pragmatic needs of the profession.

Research methodology. The study, methodologically speaking, will be based upon the following methods of research:

- Diagnostic survey comprising a technique of anonymous, audience-targeted questionnaire, as well as a technique of structured, personalized interview.
- A technique of standardized (categorized) observation will be deployed together with a photography-based observation.
- Document analysis comprising traditional forms of internal and external document analysis, as well as modern types of quantitative and qualitative formal content analysis.
- Dialogic method that involves taking part in direct, face-to-face conversations and presumes assuming an attitude of active listener by the research worker.

The study will be conducted on the basis of the following research tools: questionnaires for didactic and administrative staff employed at the selected Polonia schools, questionnaires for teachers of early-school education, questionnaires for teachers of different specializations, questionnaires designed for pupils and their parents, observation tally sheets referring to classes conducted by teachers of early education at the selected Polonia schools.

The received data will be subjected to procedures of verification, selection, classification, and graduation prior to the final comprehensive analysis. The final qualitative and quantitative analysis will render a pluralistic and complementary approach to the study subject-matter, which means that qualitative – namely, interpretative and descriptive methods (e.g. content analysis) – and quantitative (e.g. statistical analyses) methods will be deployed.

Apart from its role in the improvement of education of Polish children abroad, the devised study wishes to indicate that Polonia schools constitute an answer to socio-educational needs of the Polish diaspora. At the same time, competent Polonia teachers, as well as their pupils, automatically become the emissaries of the Republic of Poland in the multicultural societies of EU Member States.

Having been based upon previously collected data, the postulated study (cf. K. Konarzewski) aims to understand problems, needs, determinants and difficulties that are met in the specific professional environment of Polonia education. The designed cognitive procedures (Cf. S. Nowak) allow us to provide effective solutions not only to problems concerning the effective functioning of a Polish teacher abroad, but also to the verification of research hypotheses aiming to provide a diagnosis of specific competences, skills and knowledge that help a Polonia teacher fulfil didactic processes in the area of early education taking place in the selected EU Member States. Since the aforementioned research problems have not been investigated upon by the Polish pedagogy yet, the study is original and theoretical in a way that its aim is to search for factors determining the effective functioning of a transfer teacher. More specifically, the study concerns the conditions that has be met in order to equip a Polonia teacher of early education with knowledge, skills and competences that are relevant in the education of younger children in the distinct – that is, strikingly different from our own – circumstances of social, cultural, civilizational and educational descent. By acquiring knowledge concerning the fundamental determinants of a Polonia teacher’s work, one is able to understand the very specificity of the said profession by means of referring to observable facts that can be classified, analysed and evaluated in the course of organized research project. As a consequence, the study’s aim is to construct a theoretical model of a transfer teacher who should be equipped with determinable knowledge, skills and competences that may be converted into pedagogical effects to be realized within a number of social environments abroad. The very notion of “transfer teacher” is also innovative because this term has not been properly defined in the relevant literature in the field. Hence, this study aims to provide necessary conceptualizations and specifications related to the concept of transfer teacher. The planned study fits the model of basic research because of its original and theoretical character, and the fact that the research has been devised in order to collect new data concerning a novel type of pedagogical profession that has not been represented within the scope of pedagogical theories yet. When seen in a more general context, our study could be subsumed within a social theory that seeks, as Giddens puts it, to understand human action and social practice in the context of empirically oriented studies (Giddens, 2003).

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