INNOVATIVE SCHOOLS IN POLAND: HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY ASPECTS

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Abstract

This paper shows innovative high schools in three historical periods in Poland: between the World Wars, in the period of so-called real socialism and after 1980. The selected schools have had and still have a special contribution in the history of pedagogical thought. Each school is analyzed in those aspects:the leading pedagogical ideas, an outline of the practical innovative activity and the more important achievements of students.

We arrive to the conclusion that in each period those schools were created to: (1º period) a need to educate intellectual and moral elites capable of building a new Poland; (2º period) to strengthen the ideological and political assumptions of real socialism; (3º period) to take the opportunity to build authorial schools fit for the challenges and tasks of contemporary times.

Key words: Poland, innovation, Lublin experiment

Of its nature, school should direct its activity towards the pro-developmental change of its subjects. Not each change, however, has the character of innovation. On the other hand, not each school where innovations are implemented can be called an innovative school. This is a school which consciously, purposefully and rationally designs (or adapts) innovations in a structural and holistic way and implements it in the school practice.

In this context, we will understand a school as a team of teachers working there who are characterized by creative competences and involvement in changing the existing state of realization of the basic functions of school.

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The present paper shows innovative high school in three historical periods: between the World Wars, in the period of so-called real socialism and after 1980. Those schools were selected which have had (still have) a special contribution in the history of pedagogical thought. The structure of the analyzed schools comprises the following:

- the leading pedagogical ideas which provide the basis for the practical pedagogical activity;
- an outline of the practical innovative activity (the character of innovations);
- more important didactic achievements of students.

In the period between the World Wars, junior high school and high school in Rydzyna, established in 1928 by an outstanding educator of those times Tadeusz Łopuszański, deserves attention. He co-organized the educational system in the revived Republic of Poland, co-created the new system of national education and was the Minister and Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Religious Dominations and Public Enlightenment (1919-1926). He implemented his love of searching for innovative solutions and pedagogical innovations by performing the functions of a teacher, school inspector, minister, vice-minister and – at the end of his professional path – headmaster of an original, innovative junior high school and high school in Rydzyna.

The superior aim related to the concept of the theoretical-practical work was to "create a new type of high school whose program of education would refer to the needs of the present nation and the Polish state, still in the process of revival but weak and permanently threatened in Europe, which is torn by numerous conflicts" (Zajkiewicz 2013, p. 14).

He did not perceive the Polish intelligentsia as the factor or source of power in undertaking this task. He attributed numerous faults to them and accused them of weak will, a drive to worthless and low forms of life, disappearance of physical and spiritual vigour, hypocrisy, egoism, no feeling of solidarity, aversion to strong, competent power, avoidance of organic work and work from the basis in addition to aversion to trade and industry (Cf. ibid., p. 15). On the other hand, he blamed school for working on a low educational and didactic level, for focusing its efforts on providing diplomas and maturity certificates, while not fulfilling its tasks following from the social and political situation of the nation and the state (Cf. Okoń 1999, p. 169).

His priority task was to educate the Polish intelligentsia which would have none of the aforementioned faults. According to Łopuszański, the way to do it was through a complex effect of education and upbringing, by developing students' individual interests, their creative abilities, integrity of character,

self-discipline and the sense of responsibility for their own country and passion for work directed to the economic life, social work, sciences, especially exact sciences (Cf. Zajkiewicz 2013, p. 15).

The basis of the innovative concept of his school was formed by the three following principles:

- respecting the truth by the students
- developing students' individual interests,
- love of creative work in the sphere of individual interests (Cf. ibid. p.15).

The structure of the innovative activity of school has two parts:

- Innovative activities in the sphere of upbringing.
- Innovative activities in the sphere of education.

The first innovation in the sphere of upbringing was reducing the number of compulsory subjects and lessons for the benefit of the subject chosen by the students which is of interest to them, increasing the time designed for physical education, sport and community work. Respecting the truth by the students was the priority goal and task. "The idea of truthfulness was harmonized with the «pure atmosphere of life» at school and outside it and such a style of life and work in which the novices adjusted to lies and fibs, to «falsehood and laziness» cut themselves off from the whole environment so if they wanted to stay in the institution they had to throw away all that burden" (Ibid. p. 15).

In the fight for truthfulness a significant role was played by the students' self-government and the "institution of Rydzyna hierarchy" introducing the badges of

- "Rydzyna member" – received by a student (a novice) who earned it with the love of truth, work, an active social attitude, features of character and bravery;
- "permanent Rydzyna member" – received by both students sand teachers. Obtaining it was a great honour. One had to distinguish oneself with work on oneself and the sense of responsibility for the school.

An important foundation of educational work was community work – practical activity for the benefit of others. Young people set up the Educational House in Rydzyna, where they had a library, held festive evenings and theatrical performances; in the village of Dąbcza a common room was established and furnished with hand-made furniture, the Country House was built in Moraczewo and numerous other social initiatives were realized (Cf. Okoń 1999, pp. 171-172).

Manual labour, treated as a factor of spiritual development, performed an important function in the educational system. It comprised the following activities done in free time:

- light work – bookbinding, woodwork, wirework, metalwork;
- harder work – wood processing, metal processing;
- work in the workshop – making didactic aids, producing furniture for the school and the environment, producing equipment for the development of the physical culture (kayaks, boats, sailing boats).

Another factor in the students' moral education was physical education in the form of bodily exercise and sport games. They included the following cycles:

- 10-minute morning exercise;
- two periods weekly of physical exercise;
- everyday extra sport games of compulsory character held in the afternoon;
- holiday camps connected with learning to swim and with water sports (boating and kayaking in the Augustów Canal and the river Czarna Hańcza);
- mountain hiking (Cf. ibid., p. 173).

An important factor of moral education was arousing the students' and the teachers' need and desire of cooperation. The task was possible thanks to the fact that teachers and students lived together in the Rydzyna castle. Therefore, the teachers were available to the students to help them solve many problems.

The basis of mental education was the assumption that mental education can become an instrument of moral education. Three principles were observed, namely:

- "the principle of interest stimulation, mainly in so-called «individual work»'
- the principle of a "100%" realization in studying and in fulfilling the adopted duties;
- the principle of permanent stimulation of the students for big, daring, difficult tasks and their conscientious performance" (Zajkiewicz 2013, pp. 21-22).

In the sphere of humanities, especially the Polish language and history, the main objectives included learning and understanding the history of homeland, its tragic fate and reasons concerning the external and internal causes.

The purpose of work on foreign language classes, especially in German as the obligatory language, was a free use of literature without a dictionary.

Issues concerning the knowledge about Poland comprised economic, social and political problems of Europe and the world.

Individual curricula were implemented in teaching mathematics and science (in mathematics, in particular). In biology, chemistry and physics students' research studies: classes, experiments were introduced. Attention was paid to that work having a scientific character; it was done keeping the methodology of scientific research.

It should be emphasized that 51 research papers were prepared in the school. They were published in Polish and foreign scientific press, including reports of the Academy of Sciences and the English Royal Society (Cf. Okoń 1999, pp. 173-174).

The school's activity was interrupted by the outbreak of World War II. A lot of pedagogical innovations (individual programs of teaching, students' research work, reduced number of subjects) were continued in the authorial Danuta Nakoneczna school in Warsaw.

The innovative movement of teachers developed dynamically in the period of real socialism. The lubelskie voivodeship was it center. The central, voivodeship as well as political and educational district authorities made the decision to establish schools which would cooperate with workplaces and which would be the centers of cultural life. That was the first stage of innovative activities. The second one was establishing the leading and experimental schools, called the **Lublin experiment.**

The major task in the first stage of creating innovative schools (1959) was the cooperation of schools with workplaces. The form and content of this connection were set up by the Voivodeship Council of Managements (Cf. Machocki and Zachajkiewicz 1967, p. 9).

The statute of the council read as follows: "The Voivodeship Council of Managements in cooperation with workplaces is – in accordance with the established guidelines – an advisory collective to the Educational Authorities of the Lublin School District in matters concerning the network and specializations of schools and it mobilizes employing establishments to train juvenile employees and staff members in the field of primary school education" (Ibid., p. 9).

Each school got a councilor appointed by the council of Managements in a given institution. Their tasks included the following:

- dealing with matters connected with the school's material needs;
- participating in the sittings of the pedagogical council;
- organizing talks included within the plan and – in case of need – beyond the plan, on professional issues;

- providing help in learning the teaching program, especially in vocational schools;
- providing help in the organization of events, trips, camps as well as the material equipment of schools (Cf. ibid., p. 10).
- A structural network was formed: the employing institution – a network of schools.

The main effects comprised experience in the field of professional training and methods of polytechnical education.

The second direction was transforming schools into the centers of cultural life. In the Lublin voivodeship in 1960, 50 such schools were called the leading ones, while in 1967 – 427. The leading motto was: school as the center of education and culture in the environment. The following fundamental assumption was adopted in the establishment of the centers: "the life of school and the environment should create one whole. To achieve this, the authority of school and teachers should be strengthened. The mutual interaction between those two educational circles should, at the same time, proceed according to plan." (Ibid., p. 12)

The main burden rested on teachers, who performed the function of initiators and animators of the environmental activity. Cooperation with the environment brought material effects in the form of school audio-visual equipment. The second educational and didactic effect was the creation of different forms of artistic work.

In 1967, 1580 artistic groups were set up in the leading schools of the Lublin voivodeship. There were also photography, chess and handicraft groups.

The next effect of the work was that teachers promoted the history of the region, research work in addition to collecting exhibits for museums and promoting folk art.

Schools undertook educational activity for the benefit of the local social environment. Courses of agricultural training and foreign languages were organized and individual readership was made more dynamic. (Cf. ibid., pp. 12-17).

In 1964 the educational authorities made a summary of the efforts of pedagogical innovation and continued to design its development through joining theory with practice and pedagogical research. Leading and experimental schools were established. The function of leading schools was performed by the best schools and educational institutions. Their task was to spread good educational and social-pedagogical experiences in the environment.

Schools which actively and creatively realized the new curricula and achieved high effects in teaching and education, which in educational activity worked out a socialist style of cooperation between the youth, parents, employing institutions and social organizations competed for this name. (Cf. ibid., pp. 20-21).

The major task of a leading school was to achieve a model organization of the process of teaching and education. Particular tasks included the following:

- rhythmical and complete realization of the curricula;
- high efficiency of teaching and upbringing through the use of modern, activating methods;
- organizing the care of children and youth both at school and outside it;
- designing and organizing workshops and classrooms;
- increasing the teachers' qualifications;
- spreading the experiences in the teachers' environment.

In the school year of 1964/1965 innovative work was carried out by 188 schools and institutions of various types.

The work of schools became an inspiration for the "Lublin experiment" (1964-1969). The experiment included Schools Nos. 6, 9, 29 and 35 in Lublin, Schools Nos. 1, 3, 5 and 6 in Puławy and School No. 1 in Radzyń Podlaski. The basis of the theoretical experiment was Wincenty Okoń's theory of all-round activation of students and Konstanty Lech's theory of developing thinking and acting.

A lot of scientific workers were involved in the experiment: Wincenty Okoń, Konstanty Lech, Bogdan Suchodolski and many other educators from the Departament of Pedagogy of the Maria Curie Skłodowska University, the Institute of Pedagogy in Warsaw, the Warsaw University, the Lublin University, Higher Agricultural School in Lublin. (Cf. Marczuk 1971, p. 12) The experimental work in schools was focused on modernizing the educational-didactic process built on the abovementioned theories. The following assumptions were adopted:

- the most important pedagogical task is to develop the students' cognitive activity, especially thinking;
- the most important rule of teaching indicating the directions of the reform is combining theory with practice;
- "combining knowledge and concrete, practical thinking having the character of pictures with abstract, theoretical thinking having the character of concepts;

- uniting the studied knowledge into structures and using them in practice, especially in the process of students independently acquiring further knowledge;
- combining the rules of science with the rules of technology;
- combining cognition with activity, the use of tools and mechanisms, with establishing habits and motor skills" (Machocki and Zachajkiewicz 1967, p. 43)

The fundamental method of teaching which was applied was the search and problem based method. Textbooks served as the initial source of knowledge, later specified in problem situations or as a test of knowledge acquired by students on their own. (Cf. ibid., p. 43)

An important independent variable in the Lublin experiment was organizing a student's independent work or team work in small groups, or collective work in the whole class group. To aid teachers in organizing the didactic process, lesson models were prepared.

Considerable didactic effects of the experiment need to be emphasized. For example, on 29 January 1966 studies were conducted in this field by the City Methodological Center in Lublin in the experimental School No. 6 in Lublin and 10 very good schools in the Lublin voivodeship. The selected data are included in table No. 1.

A comparison of teaching effects (Wójcik 1967, p. 85)

	Grade V					**Grade II**		**Grade III**		**Grade IV**	
	Polish	history	biology	maths	chemistry	Polish	maths	Polish	maths	Polish	maths
Means from 10 schools	3.2	4	3.5	2.3	3.2	3.9	3.6	3.8	3.5	3.8	3.3
Means from (experimental) school No. 6	4.1	4.7	4.6	3.2	3.6	4.2	3.7	4.6	4.1	4.7	4.1

The achieved didactic effects in the form of methodological solutions in particular models of lessons became binding in all schools of the Lublin voivodeship, which limited the possibilities of teachers' creative work.

Particular experiments introduced in selected schools were the following:

- the experiment concerning the teaching of mathematics conducted by Maria Cackowska – its aim was to develop a system of teaching in preliminary education which would make it possible

to shape higher forms of thinking in students and general ways of mental work useful in a possibly wide range of cognitive content; (Cf. Cackowska 1969, p. 14)

- the experiment concerning the teaching of reading skills conducted by Helena Meterowa – it referred to learning the sound substance of the language before learning the letters; learning "the world of sounds", separating words from them, finding out the differences and classifying in accordance with the properties of the language; (Cf. Meterowa 1969, p. 40)
- the experiment concerning the German language conducted by Jerzy Brzeziński – structural teaching was introduced: a language club and contents with foreign youth, the application of visual and audio aids, introducing program teaching; (Cf. Brzeziński 1969, pp. 49-64)
- the experiment concerning history conducted by Gustaw Hyczko – a paper was introduced as a form of students' independent work; (Cf. Hyczko 1969, p. 84)
- the experiment concerning the teaching of geography conducted by Maria Tarłowska – the purpose of combining theory with practice was served by the construction of a meteorological station; (Cf. Tarłowska 1969, pp. 91-113)
- the experiment concerning technical education conducted by Zofia Rybicka – correlation of practical technical classes with mathematics, physics or biology. (Cf. Rybicka 1969, pp. 173-178)

At the beginning of the 1980's, when the social and political transformations started in Poland aimed at the building of a democratic state, an authorial high school of Danuta Nakoneczna was set up – **LX in Warsaw** – after a few years of the existence of **W. Górski High School.**

The basic pedagogical ideas on which the system of innovations was built were the following:

- the rule of individualized education;
- the rule of students' activation in the system of education;
- the rule of enriching the system of education with cooperation with a broadly understood social and cultural environment.

The basic innovations implemented include the following:

- integration of the content of teaching the humanities, mathematical and natural sciences and artistic subjects. Modern, integrated curricula were developed and implemented in an attempt to reject unnecessary erudition for the benefit of searching for the sources of knowledge and program solutions based on concepts.

- Individual curricula and individual courses for gifted students from high school as well as from primary schools and from different parts of the country whose parents were interested in this form of work.

An individual course of education is a system and scope of content meant for an individual student. An individual course of education included the possibilities of realizing the content of a given subject, group of subjects or scope of material in a given class at a faster rate.

- a lot of concepts of authorial classes were developed and implemented which followed from a teacher's individuality and their pedagogical interests;
- so-called two-week winter and summer schools which combined studying with recreation were introduced;
- the break between the lessons was lengthened to 40 minutes for relaxation and a warm meal
- pedagogical care was intensified by doubling the duties, now performed by a woman and a man or by an experienced teacher and a beginning one;
- descriptive certificates were introduced which made it possible to show acknowledgement for a student being hardworking and friendly, but also to describe negative attitudes;
- the School Social Council was appointed with the aim to strengthen cooperation with parents and the closest social environment.

School became the center of interest to the workers of the education sector and the headmasters and teachers from different parts of the country who expressed willingness to cooperate and spread innovations in schools. In this way a bottom-up innovative movement was created.

This spontaneous bottom-up cooperation was undertaken by those high schools in Poland which placed the process of continuous improvement of the permanent "inner reform" at the top of the priorities in building the school culture.

The first schools cooperating in the improvement of the process of upbringing and teaching included Bartłomiej Nowodworowski High School No.1, King Jan Sobieski High School No.2 in Cracow, Jan Kochanowski High School No.6 in Radom, Hanka Sawicka High School No.6 in Kielce, Silesian Insurgents High School No.1 in Rybnik, Stanisław Staszic High School No.6 in Sosnowiec, Belgian Polonia High School No.14 in Wrocław, High School No.16 in Łódź, High School No.1 in Leszno, Tadeusz Kościuszko High School No.1 in Łomża, Henryk Sienkiewicz High School No.1 in Płońsk, Stanisław Konarski High School No.1 in Rzeszów, and Duke Adam Czartoryski High School No.1 in Puławy.

In December 1989 this group of schools was registered by the District Court in Warsaw in the register of associations with legal personality under the name of **the Society of Creative Schools (SCS).** In the course of time the Society included 25 high schools and as many cooperating primary schools, both urban and rural ones. (The founder and scientific advisor of the Society was Danuta Nakoneczna, while the scientific advisor of primary schools was Krystyna Chałas, the author of the present paper).

The leading task of the group was to design, implement and spread educational innovations with the aim to transform the unified school systems into modern, individualized, versatile schools which would promote integral education.

The leading idea of the group was to change good, renowned high schools cooperating with the closes university and with urban and rural primary schools into the Centers of School Innovations to be used by everybody seeking support with the aim of finding creative solutions to the complex problems of education and upbringing.

The foundation in establishing a creative school developing students' and teachers' talents and abilities was designing pedagogical innovations comprising the content, methods, forms and conditions of education.

The starting point for the design and implementation work was the analysis of the lacks and imperfections in the existing school reality.

Those imperfections included:

- shortage of authentic mental life.

As claimed by D. Nakoneczna (founder of LX High School and the Society of Creative Schools), "Too little effort is made towards reducing the inconveniences of collective education so that a gifted student who is especially interested in a given subject will not have to work at the rate and within the scope of a less gifted and less hardworking student". (Nakoneczna 1998, p. 33)

Attention was drawn to the lack of those areas in schools where students could learn cooperation and common responsibility as well as involvement in common matters and undertaking different, not only cognitive tasks, and to the lack of authentic educational and moral atmosphere. The tasks adopted referred to kindness to others, tolerance, disinterestedness, sensible solidarity, honesty, civil courage and an inclination to daring undertakings and big achievements. These features of character are shaped above all in practical activities like cooperation between students and teachers in creating the desired

process of education and in various pro-social activities for the benefit of local environments (Cf. ibid., pp. 32-34). The priority were the innovations directed at discovering and developing the students' abilities and promoting them in broad educational circles.

The following implemented school innovations served the realization of this superior goal:

- authorial classes – educational-didactic systems designed and implemented by over-average teachers who courageously searched for the educational-didactic systems adjusted to the student "tailored to contemporary times" and "to parents' expectations", "friendly to the child", the systems stimulating the development of abilities, "creating a chance for creative activity" and developing theatrical, journalist and managerial interests". (Ibid., p. 34).

The second direction of innovative activities was building a didactic-educational system based on the principle of individualized education and students' activation in the process of education.

Organizational-program-methodological activities undertaken by schools in the adopted strategies were as follows:

A. Differentiated activity during the lessons meant to support gifted students included:

- learning in authorial classes, grouping students with precise interests and abilities;
- relaxing the class and lesson system through individual curricula and an individual course of learning;
- differentiated requirements during the lesson in accordance with the student's possibilities;
- didactic classes organized on the basis of group work; groups which were uniform in respect of the abilities and groups which were intellectually differentiated;
- students' involvement in the process of education through the function of assistants.

B. Differentiated extracurricular activity to support gifted students included the following:

- students' work in interest groups also including primary school pupils;
- teachers' individual help within their duty hours in preparing for competitions;
- enabling students – prizewinners in competitions and specialized contents – to combine studying in high schools with a school of higher learning (university, academy, polytechnical school), according to an individual course of study;
- enabling primary school pupils, prizewinners in competitions to continue learning in high school within an individual course of study;
- enabling gifted students to do research studies at universities and scientific institutes;

•strengthening the students' sense of self-esteem and the usefulness of the knowledge possessed by enabling them to conduct didactic classes: lesson, after-lesson classes and seminars and workshops during inter-school meetings.

To give an example, XIV High School in Wrocław established cooperation with the Wrocław Polytechnical University. In the school year 1988/1989, the Talent Center was set up at the department of Fundamental Problems of Technology. In the first year of its activity, the Center accepted 20 outstanding high school students from grades three and four and in 1995/1996 – 70 students. After receiving the maturity certificate, those students became full students of the Wrocław Polytechnical University, having received credits from the subjects and classes from the first and second years of studies. (Cf. ibid., p. 51)

C. Different kinds of interschool activity for the support of gifted students included the following:

•appointment of Promotion Clubs at each high school which grouped pupils from primary schools;

•organization of Interschool scientific camps;

•organization of interschool competitions, contests and festivals;

•organization of an interschool system of teacher training – seminars, conferences, workshops;

•establishment of an interschool fund of rewards for students who achieved high scores in contests as well as for their teachers. (Cf. ibid., pp. 40-42)

The teacher's individual development, their interests and pedagogical skills were also in the center of the innovative activity of schools. Authorial classes served this goal.
The educational and didactic concept of authorial classes followed from the individuality of the teacher and the head teacher with their abilities to see and solve the complex problems of education and teaching.

Two categories of class groups were introduced: those which were didactically oriented (IT classes, science, history, literature classes, etc.) and educationally oriented ones (theatre, management, folklore, community work, etc.)

The program of the classes was "open" and there was a possibility for parents or the head teacher to enrich and modify it.
They grouped students with precise interests and a definite level of specialized abilities.

So called “0” classes attracted attention and interest. They were established in high schools and gathered gifted pupils from primary schools who had achieved the educational level characteristic of the last class of primary school taking advantage of an individual course of learning. Those were often the students who attended the Clubs of Talent Promotion and who followed an individual course of education in particular subjects realized in high school.

Thanks to the system of educating gifted students those schools achieved very high results in competitions from particular subjects.

For example, in the years 1983-2013 the students of SCS high schools constituted nearly 40% of Polish prizewinners in international contest from particular subjects. In the years 1995-2003 SCS high school students constituted 50% of all prizewinners from Poland in the European Union Contest for Young Scientists (materials from the Ministry of National Education and SCS).

The innovations developed by the Society of Creative Schools were spread by the following:

- opening schools for those interested in pedagogical innovations, who wanted to observe a lesson or extra-curricular classes, who wished to discuss problems with the school headmaster, teachers, head teachers or with the chairperson of the School Social Council, Student Self-Government, etc.
- providing those interested with methodological papers, curricula of authorial classes, curricula of individual education of gifted students, educational concepts, school regulations, books and methodological materials published by SCS;
- organizing national, voivodeship and school methodological conferences, seminars, discussion meetings for teachers, students and parents;
- acquainting those interested with the innovative activity of Creative Schools through radio and television educational programs, central and local newspapers;
- establishing permanent cooperation between the schools of a given region in the field of teachers’ professional training and care of exceptionally talented students. (Cf. ibid., pp. 7-8)

The activity of the Society of Creative Schools became an inspiring factor for the innovative activity in junior high schools in villages and small towns with the population up to 30,000 inhabitants. The experiences that SCS gained in the sphere of innovative activity of primary schools (the author of the present paper took care in SCS of primary schools) and the 1999 structural reforms of education in Poland which introduced junior high schools as a new link were a commitment for further innovative activity. To realize this aim, a new society of schools was called into being, namely **the Society of Resourceful Junior High Schools from Small Towns and Villages (SRJHS)**, which was registered on 31 August, 2000. It associated 20 junior high schools from different parts of Poland.

The leading goal of SRJHS was to search for the optimum conditions creating educational chances for the students of junior high schools from villages and small towns.

The following were adopted as the theoretical basis of the developed and implemented projects of educational and didactic activities:

- the theory of personalistic pedagogy exposing the essence of the human person and the values "describing" it, namely dignity, sagacity – wisdom, freedom, responsibility, ability to love, creation and transcendence;
- the theory of educational environment, with special regard to the values of the local environment, mainly including those of rural values – due to the environmental placement of most junior high schools;
- theoretical premises of the project method – educational projects.

It should be emphasized at the very beginning that the axiological perspective lay at the basis of the search. The abovementioned goal was realized through designing, implementing, evaluating and spreading school innovations in the aspect of axiological foundations of the local environment with special regard to the rural values "describing" the human person.

The basis of educational work was formed by the following strategies:

- integration of the curriculum content with the problems of the local environment with its values exposed;
- enrichment of the educational process of school with a broadly understood supralocal environment;
- axiological education and education for values.

The goals and strategies of activity formulated in this way implied detailed tasks concerning educational chances. They were as follows:

- Introducing students into the world of values and supporting them in realizing those values.

Realization of this goal took place mainly through axiological education and education for values:

- implementing the method of projects on axiological subjects;
- organizing school axiological contests;
- organizing popular scientific sessions concerning axiological issues;
- organizing various artistic forms: school theatre, choirs, music bands, paining groups, etc.
- Introducing students into the world of scientific knowledge and developing their interests.

Realization of the above goal took place mainly through the following:

- scientific and research activity conducted by students in the field of nature;
- organization of scientific camps;
- organization of popular science sessions;
- organization of science festivals;
- introducing the method of projects;
- organization of interest groups;
- organization of contests within the school.
- Formation of social skills took place mainly through the following:
- the introduction of the method of projects on social issues;
- the creation of clubs, youth groups, school voluntary organization, the purpose of which is pro-social activity;
- the introduction of individual and class programs of social service.

The adoption of the theoretical basis and the axiological perspective conditioned the adoption of an outline of the structure of the implemented program and its general directions which were filled with detailed tasks. Their kind, content and ways of realization were determined by the headmasters and teachers in a pedagogical discourse inside the school, while the improvement of activities, their enrichment and modification took place as a result of a discourse of headmasters and teachers on the forum of the Society of Resourceful Junior High Schools – during team meetings.

The structure of the developed and implemented project of innovative activities was as follows:

- education and upbringing for rural (local) values;
- education and upbringing for "descriptive" values describing the human person;
- implementation of the project method.

The educational and didactic work in the field of education and upbringing for rural values was focused on the following values: the dignity of a farmer, rural family, land, work in the field,

household, folk culture, nature. The values from the area of a small town included the family, folk culture, household. As emphasized earlier, most schools worked in the rural area and hence in the program of our activities we concentrated on rural values. The educational situation is the carrier of values. Its structural elements include the nature, culture and transcendence. (Cf. Nowak 1999, pp. 531-534).

The country child – a pupil of a junior high school lives, develops and works in direct contacts with nature. Nature – the world of plants and animals, land, natural resources, forms of landscape, natural phenomena, climate conditions, seasons of the year – has a significant effect on their upbringing. Philosophical and religious reflections have a special influence on a young person's feelings, motifs of activity, expectations, awakening of physical and spiritual strength and building of lifestyle.

The condition of nature's effect on humans are the relations human being – nature and their decisions, attitudes and activities. Taking into consideration the educational effect of nature, tasks were undertaken which came down to:

- getting to know nature through observation and experimental and research work.

To this aim a competition was organized by SRJHS for an experimental research work in the field of nature. In the first years scientific camps were organized. Besides, a task was set within which each student was to prepare a research paper. The most interesting research papers were published in the series "Research work by junior high school students." Fifteen books were published which were reviewed by scientists.

- respecting the nature through caring work, pro-ecological activities, creating conditions for development, protection;

This goal was realized according to the idea of the school entities.

- Discovering the nature's beauty and drawing spiritual strength from it; artistic preservation of the nature's beauty. (Cf. Chałas 2007, pp. 9-25)

Each school searched for its own educational and didactic solutions. An art contest – the beauty of my neighbourhood – was organized by the Society.

The second factor of the educational situation is culture as an objective form in which the human spirit distinguishes itself and which has its subjective and objective aspects. From the educational point of view, special attention should be directed to the effect of folk culture on a child from the country and

from a little town. This culture is understood as the whole of rural culture created in interpersonal contacts and in a definite interhuman space, with its roots in traditional culture (Cf. Dyczewski 1994).

The educational task was to support students in getting to know the folk culture, its rational valuation, active involvement in its creation and spread. Through their participation in building the folk culture in the family and the rural community, students had an opportunity to join the civil community in a natural way and make their contribution to it by involvement in different kinds of pro-social activity. A chance for transcendence was also created – for transcending oneself in educational tasks and transcending oneself in relations with others and with God.

The rural family – the first social environments which for a young person created the basis of integration of nature, culture and transcendence, constitutes the level of transcendence. It is the source to find out the essence of a farmer's dignity, the value of the land and world, the farm and the household.

Pedagogical activities were focused around:

- integration of the problems of rural values with the problems of the curricula;
- organization of a literary contest by SRJHS entitled "The world of rural values as the source of my growth". The most interesting works were published in a series of books under the same title.

In this way a chance was created to get to know the essence of rural values, understand the function they play in man's integral development; a chance to accept them and made them the signposts in building one's own life now and in the future.

The fundamental goal in undertaking axiological education and education for values "describing" the human person, namely dignity, sagacity – wisdom, freedom, responsibility, ability for love, creation, transcendence – was to support students in finding the answer to the questions of who I am, who I want to be, where I am going and who I can become. What we wanted to do was awaken the self-reflection over the existence of a young person and release the moral strengths and qualitative consciousness in building one's future.

The foremost task was to get to know the phenomenon of particular values, their function in human life and motivation to realize them as well as animate others to give answer with their own life to the basic existential question: who am I?

In the content of so understood objective, the following tasks were undertaken:

- integration of knowledge on values with the problems of particular school subjects;
- organization of popular-scientific sessions on the essence of particular values, their function in human life and ways of realizing them. The sessions were held within the school and in the environment. Each of them had two stages whose subjects were students, teachers, parents, representatives of educational and church authorities, and people professionally concerned with axiology;
- organization of festivals of axiological creation – literary, poetic, theatrical, etc.

In the aspect of educational opportunities, the use of the project method deserved special attention. The following projects were used:

- those directed to cognitive activity which concerned:
- learning the history and culture of the locality where the school functions;
- learning natural and ecological issues with an attempt to solve problems;
- deepening the knowledge from the sphere of humanities and mathematical and natural sciences;
- those stimulating the social and cultural activity – their effect was the formation of a variety of aid groups, voluntary organizations, artistic groups, theatrical groups, recital groups, etc.

The innovative activity determined the didactic effects of schools. For example, the results of final junior high school exams from selected schools are provided in the table below.

Name of school	**Subject**	**Średnia krajowa**	**Średnia szkoły**
Junior high school in Sochocin	Polish, history and social studies	65	68.6
		61	52.8
Junior high school in Wróbliniec	mathematics	47	47.8
	natural sciences	53	53.3
Junior high school in Zdzieszowice	mathematics	65	68.5
	English	46	49.3
Junior high school in Mników	Polish	65	72
	history and social studies	61	63
	natural world	50	52
	English	63	64

Table 1. Results from 2012 final junior high school exams over the national average (Chałas 2012, p. 195)

It should be emphasized that results of final junior high school exams in the majority of schools were higher than the average in the voivodeship where a given school functioned. A very high assessment

of the schools was given by former students in their free opinions. The activity of the Society ceased together with the reform of education, when junior high schools stopped to exist.

A significant place among the many innovative schools within the Polish pedagogical thought is occupied by **the School – Laboratory – junior high school and high school**, founded in 1989 by Aleksander Nalaskowski, a well-known professor of the University of Toruń. It existed until 2004. Its theoretical basis of practical educational and didactic work was the pedagogy of sources.

According to A. Nalaskowski, school was treated as "an inviolable, classic source of cognition, surrounded by a very thick jacket of nearly everything which is possible for cognition beyond it. Hence, the numerous outings, escapades, out-of-school activities, which do not, however, replace school. The out-of-school knowledge is not a substitution. Therefore, it cannot replace reading, classical learning by heart or other purely school methods of «exercising the brain muscles». Such knowledge is above all an attempt to understand what is impossible to call with words, what evades the teacher's mediation. The assumption is important here that each lesson has its limitations and cannot teach beauty, creation or ethical behaviours. The lesson enables to establish their place, create a field for them but it is not able to generate them." (Nalaskowski 2017, p. 202)

The author ascribed the role of an instrument to school in developing possibilities and gaining experiences. As written by A. Nalaskowski, "The youth was (…) to be shown the world existing only in direct experience, in touching what can be touched, in recognizing it in other people, although those would be the experiences impossible to verbalize. Thus, I aimed to establish a clear epistemological community, a community towards the goal which was to construct a good world. School, therefore, was not to be fun or a funfair giving variety to life, but a training preparing the students for the competitions awaiting them in whole life. We did not want to speak about nature, but we showed it. We did not want to speak about heroism, but we invited heroes to meetings. We did not want to speak about beauty, but we held exhibitions. Such a community could function only when it was well harmonized. We clearly saw the difference between those teaching and those being taught. At the same time, we did not give up showing the world which is multi-dimensional, multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-ideological." (Ibid., p. 185).

The pedagogy of sources was reflected in:

- the lesson process – meetings with guests, extra lectures;
- the process beyond the lesson – a developed program of trips, horse and bike rides, walk/runs, participation in film and theatre meetings arranged by school. The students were thoroughly prepared for all those forms.

- each student building their own ethnography placed in a few circles of culture: the circle of Christian values and the circle of the Thomist order of the world, the circles of the local and national cultures and the circles of the European and world cultures. (Cf. ibid., p. 186).

The idea which lit pedagogical work was building a simple world which comes into being in the process of unmediated source-based cognition. The author writes: "The lesson proceeding in a simple world is a meeting without any supports, without any unnecessary props or stage design arranged from didactic knock-knacks. In an overwhelming majority of lessons (in almost all school subjects) a perfectly prepared lecture referring to the students' imagination and sometimes supported with chalk and blackboard is enough." (Ibid., p. 187)

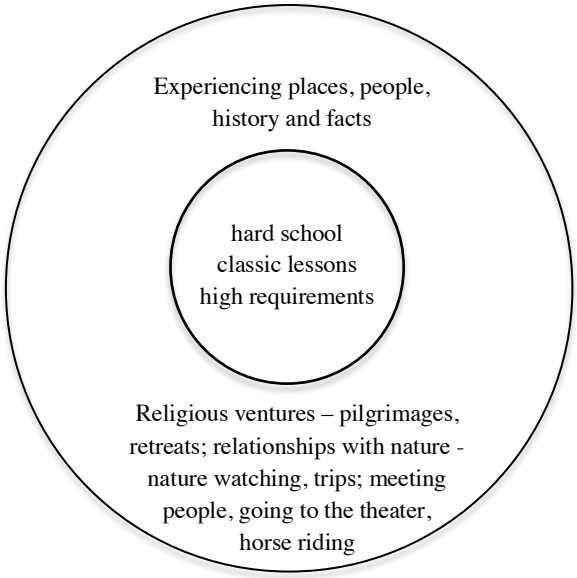
According to the teaching staff, a return to the tradition of school rich in teachers' wisdom was an instrument to fight against the use of bad Polish, ignorance, superficial thinking, emotional instability and thinking chaos of young people. (Cf. ibid., p. 188)

The role of a teacher was defined as that of a manager of the time they were given with simultaneous high requirements concerning students' reliability and discipline. Experiencing the complex reality was in the center of educational and didactic work.

In the above context the school's task was permanently to provide students with the sphere of experiences, introduce them to the world of touching, watching, listening, experiencing what teachers were not able to tell. (Cf. ibid., p. 193)

"Free assessment" was introduced – students' knowledge was assessed in the scope it was necessary. No deadlines were imposed. Final grades from the previous semester could be improved almost till the end of the school year. This privilege could be enjoyed by hardworking and not lazy students.

Pedagogical activities of the school can be shown in the following scheme:



One of the goals was "to get to know the world also outside the school as long as it is possible and where it is possible" (Ibid., p. 196).

Considering the didactic aspects, school didactics was bound by permanent features of its creation:

- a uniform ideology was binding; emphasis was laid on creating a community of teachers and unchangeability of their roles;
- the rule of a kind teacher – a combination of Herbart's vision of the teacher and the educator from empathic pedagogies;
- the objective of both groups (students and teachers) was students' thorough knowledge and attempts to understand the world, patriotism;
- the rule of cooperation of all entities of the school;
- no result obtained at school is the end of learning but it is the point of departure;
- knowledge is the source of creation – the material;
- parents can undertake different roles, they cannot influence the concept of the institution's functioning. (Cf. ibid., pp. 196-203)

Certain elements determining the identity of school were included in the school statute. The following are its selected articles:

"Art. 1. The aim of **the Junior High School and High School - Laboratory in Toruń** (…) is to educate an enlightened person and Christian prepared for life in the contemporary world.

Art. 2. The school is an independent educational institution.

Art. 4. The school pursues its activity based on connections with social and cultural institutions and associations and centers of intellectual life, with the Mikołaj Kopernik University at the top.
Art. 7. Students and their parents as well as teachers create a school community taking care of the school's good reputation and interests.
Art. 8. Students:
a) constitute the most important part of the school community;
b) have the right and duty to protect their dignity and the right for their dignity to be respected regardless of the achieved results;
c) must have the sense of security and the possibility to influence the life of the School;
d) have the right to have individual learning in classes and teams guaranteeing a high level of education and educational activity. The student's homework and their out-of-school achievements constitute the good protected and fully appreciated by the School.
Art. 9. Students can determine the rules of self-governing activity and appoint a peer tribunal.
Art. 12. The teacher is the person to make decisions on education.
Art. 13. The happiness and good of each student are the superior values for the School's teacher." (Ibid., pp. 249-250)

The above are the more important pedagogical ideas and ways to realized them. Their complete characterization can be found in the school's monograph: Aleksander Nalaskowski, Szkoła Laboratorium. Od działań autorskich do pedagogii źródeł. Kraków – Warszawa 2016.

On the initiative of the circles connected with the Mikołaj Kopernik University in Toruń, the educational circles of Toruń in cooperation with the government and local administration, **the Complex of Schools of Mikołaj Kopernik University – Junior High School and High School** was established in 1998.

The major task of this school was to shape the talented youth from all Poland and educate them in the feeling of responsibility for the abilities which they received. The school continues educational traditions of the Second Republic of Poland, referring to the heritage of the Jan and Jędrzej Śniadecki State High School in Vilnius. This is a boarding school. The supervising body is Mikołaj Kopernik University in Toruń. It is a state-owned school working in accordance with the binding legal order within the system of Polish education. The University provides scientific and didactic care through the program Council.

The school works on the following basis:

- The agreement between the Minister of National Education and the Voivode of Toruń on running the Complex of High Schools "Academic High School" in Toruń from 10 December 1998;
- The founding act of the state-owned school from 21 January 1998;
- The agreement between the Minister of National Education and the Rector of the Mikołaj Kopernik University in Toruń concerning the takeover of running the Complex of High Schools "Academic High School" in Toruń by the Mikołaj Kopernik University from 20 January 1999. (Cf. Statute, p. 5)

The statutory activity of the School is supported by the Foundation of Academic Junior High School and High School and the Association of Graduates and supporters of the School Complex of the Mikołaj Kopernik University, Academic Junior High School and High School in Toruń.

The statute of the school describes the graduate's profile. The Graduate of the Academic Junior High School and the graduate of the Academic High School:

- are aware of their own value, responsible for their own versatile development and involved in systematic work on themselves;
- are open to other people's problems, can communicate with them, cooperate as well as help them;
- present a high level of personal culture;
- are prepared for life in the family, society and in the world;
- are tolerant to different cultures, races, religions and views. (Cf. ibid., pp. 5-6)

As has been indicated above, "the major aim of the School, in cooperation with the Mikołaj Kopernik University, is to conduct students' education on a high level and to create conditions for their studies and development of abilities." (Ibid., p. 6)

Detailed tasks of the school arise in this context. They include the following:

- in the sphere of didactic work;
- "securing conditions of versatile development for the students;
- making it possible for the students to preserve and deepen the sense of national, linguistic and religious identity;
- preparing the students to undertake the challenges of contemporary civilization, also in the sphere of creative and social-ethical requirements;

- preparing the students for the conscious choice of the professional career path;
- organizing extra educational activities, including extra-curricular ones;
- making it possible for the students to participate in educational projects;
- preparing the students to participate in competitions and/or contests;
- organizing trips, scientific camps, recreational, sport and integration camps;
- creating the possibilities to participate in University classes according to the students' abilities and predispositions;
- systematic verification and improvement of teaching programs and methods of education." (Ibid., pp. 6-7)
- in the sphere of caring and educational work:
- "establishing interpersonal relations according to the educational program and the program of prevention;
- creating patriotic and civil attitudes;
- ensuring individual development for the students and their right to their own assessment of reality;
- establishing respect for work through the performance of tasks for the School and the environment;
- supporting the family in the educational process;
- taking care of the students;
- care of the students' health and physical development;
- organizing cultural and sport events." (Ibid., p. 7)

The basic forms of didactic, educational and caring activity of the School include:

- compulsory educational classes;
- extra educational classes;
- educational classes conducted by the University workers;
- additional classes conducted by students who – due to the causes related to development, family or misfortune – need help and support;
- school trips and events.

Programs of education were developed by teachers in accordance with the core curriculum and adjusted to the students' developmental needs.

The student can realize an individual program of learning or a course of study within one, a few or all compulsory educational classes included in the school curriculum for a given grade, according to the program adjusted to their abilities, interests and educational possibilities.

The superior rule of teaching in the School is the intensity and quality adequate to individual predispositions, developmental needs and interests of the student.

The rule individualization of teaching towards particular students and small student groups is realized in a possibly wide range. (Cf. ibid., p. 15)

Individualization of the educational process takes place by means of didactic classes on different levels of advancement, individual program or course of study and organized self-education.

Students take part in classes conducted at the University and in classes offered by the Mikołaj Kopernik university workers.

An example of University classes of interest to the School students is as follows:

- Theory of probability.
- Quantum physics.
- Fundamentals of electronics.
- Knowledge of literature.
- Economics of the public sector.
- Graph theory in algorithmic approach.
- Sources for the 20th century history.
- Microeconomy.
- Fundamentals of quantum chemistry. (Cf. Materials sent by the school management)

The School achieves remarkable results of education which are reflected in competitions from different subjects on the central and international levels.

For example, below are the students' achievements in national and international competitions in the years 2012-2017:

- Astronomy Contest – 7 prize winners and finalists;
- Mathematics Contest – 2 prize winners and finalists;
- IT Contest – 12 prize winners and finalists;

- Technical Knowledge Contest – 14 prize winners and finalists;
- Mathematical Linguistics Contest – 20 prize winners and finalists;
- Chemistry Contest – 27 prize winners and finalists;
- Physics Contest – 13 prize winners and finalists;
- Biology Contest – 10 prize winners and finalists;
- Food and Nutrition Contest – 4 prize winners and finalists;
- History Contest – 18 prize winners and finalists;
- Literature and the Polish Language Contest – 11 prize winners and finalists;
- Entrepreneurship Contest – 2 prize winners;
- Economic Knowledge Contest – 4 prize winners and finalists;
- Geography Contest – 2 finalists;
- Catholic Theology Contest – 1 finalist;
- Contest for the Diamond Index Book of AGH University of Science and Technology – 5 prize winners;
- Latin Language Contest – 1 finalist;
- Knowledge of Security and Defensive Capability Contest – 1 finalist;
- Mathematics Contest for Juniors – 1 prize winner
- History Contest for Junior Secondary School Students – 3 prize winners and finalists;
- International Olympiad on Astronomy and Astrophysics – 1 silver medal, 1 brown medal;
- International Mathematics Contest – 1 silver medal, 2 brown medals;
- International Mathematical Linguistics Contest -1 solver medal;
- International Biology Contest – 1 brown medal. (Cf. ibid)

Conclusions

This presentation of innovative schools in Poland does not exhaust the experiences concerning this issue.

An outline of innovative activity of those schools or school complexes has been presented which are the subject of practical and theoretical studies or which have an inspiring function in broad educational circles.

Finally, the circumstances in which those schools were created as well as the main causes of innovative activity deserve attention. These are the following:

- during the period between the World Wars – a need to build schools which would educate intellectual and moral elites capable of building a new Poland;
- in the period of so-called real socialism the basic cause was to strengthen the ideological and political assumptions;
- in the period of building the democratic state the main cause was to take the opportunity to build authorial schools fit for the challenges and tasks of contemporary times.

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