



Teachers as social workers: a real challenge in the process of the integration of local communities from 1945 to 1956 as exemplified by towns and villages in Lower Silesia

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Teachers of all levels of the schooling system constituted one of the most numerous professional groups that were a part of the waves of settlers arriving in Lower Silesia. In the times when the “new” social, political, and cultural reality was being constructed in the Lower Silesia region the teachers would take care of basically everything, starting with preparing proper places for lessons to be ran, admissions of students into the particular classes, to preparing curricula according to the educational policy of the state and the requirements of the population of a given region, which was frequently a source of moral and ethical dilemmas.

Key words: teacher; social workers; integration; local communities; Lower Silesia; the period from 1945 to 1956

Changes in the boundaries of Poland that took place after World War II resulted in extensive migration. Migration to these lands was mostly related to motivations of an economic nature. That was because in central Poland the urban infrastructure and industry were destroyed, and towns and villages were overpopulated. As a result, more and more people would arrive in the western and northern regions.

In 1945, the schooling system in Lower Silesia was faced with a challenge of great importance. It was necessary to initiate educational and cultural activity along with the settlements and organisation of the regained lands. “Following farmers, workers, and craftsmen, who took into their hands the land and the industry, there came teachers, to bring lessons in the Polish language, to bring education and culture. Schools were consolidating and integrating the people in their combined effort to

develop these lands, to create normal conditions of life and work. Every day the schools contributed to reinforcing the Polish character of the region. Polish schools had to be built from scratch. The major problem included a lack of communication and constant migration”¹. Nevertheless, the school was one of the first established institutions.

A crucial moment in defining the aims of schooling, especially state schooling, and the requirements and responsibilities of school inspectors and teachers in relation to the creation of the new schooling system was the 1st Meeting of School Inspectors of the entire Lower Silesia, held on the 5th and the 6th of October 1945 in Wrocław. In his address Jan Dębski, the Superintendent of the Wrocław School District, emphasised that the primary responsibility of teachers is working in schools and for schools. The idea was supported with the rule: teachers for students, inspectors for teachers, superintendents for teachers and inspectors, and everyone for the youth².

The aims of the schools were defined as follows: “... the young generation ought to be taught and educated in such a way as to make the contemporary life of the Nation deeply meaningful, to allow Polish democracy to stand in the first row of free, democratic nations and to be equal to them in the cultural, social, political, and economic aspects. The teachers-educators must remember that democracy is not chaos, ignorance, and loose conduct, but that it requires great civic values, responsibility for the life of the community, work, and once again work for the good of the society. We must teach and educate, so that these goals are achieved. (...) We are responsible for making the best use of the meagre means at hand, so that Polish children may acquire solid knowledge and reliable education”³.

What is more, during the meeting the specific problems of Lower Silesia were discussed. The problems were to be taken into consideration by teachers in the process of the planning of didactic and educational work. “(...) Schools in Lower Silesia have a special purpose. Young people should not be left ignorant of the history, the natural resources, and the handicraft of the Polish nation of this Land that was subject to a Germanic invasion. I strongly advise my Colleagues to include the

¹ Dereń, E. (2010): *Edukacja nauczycieli szkół podstawowych na Dolnym Śląsku w latach 1945–1970* [Education of Primary School Teachers in Lower Silesia], Wrocław, Wydawnictwo Naukowe DSW, p. 40.

² The same, pp. 40–41.

³ Dębski, J. (1945): Organizacja szkolnictwa powszechnego na Dolnym Śląsku [Organisation of state schooling in Lower Silesia]. In *Dziennik Urzędowy Kuratorium Okręgu Szkolnego Wrocławskiego 1945 r.*, Issue 1, pos. 295, pp. 34–36.

regionalism understood in this way in the curricula of all school subjects. The youth need to become a part of this Land, to become its sons and daughters, to love it, and to decide to spend their lives here. That is why the organisation of the 1945/1946 school year was governed by the slogan: 'Every school age child in a Polish school'"⁴.

Teachers as social workers – selected examples

"Teachers as organisers of schooling could work on behalf of school authorities, and initiate or co-initiate establishing new schools, according to the planned network of schools. The official course of the organisation of schools and school administration can be summarised as follows: superintendent – inspector – school headmaster – teacher. Immediately after the war it was not a rule"⁵. It was often that teachers arriving with a group of settlers organised schools by themselves, often in cooperation with the local population, long before school administration of a poviats town was established. Frequently the newly arrived teachers knew nothing about the government in the region and about the region itself; they were unable to use the local means transport, etc. It was only after a while, when schools were established, that the teachers would contact the school inspectors. One of the inhabitants of Pasiecznik recalls the pioneering period of the school system: "Starting the school was not a government decision. It was the initiative of Mr. Drozdowski, which was supported by the local population and the local priest"⁶. Stanisław P., a settler soldier, adds: "Without the teacher the village would have been lifeless. It was the only glimmer of hope for a better future"⁷.

The effort that teachers made to involve others in setting up schools led to a bond of mutual understanding. Attention and awareness of the public were drawn to the realisation of a common goal, that is, the establishment of a school, which, in turn, increased the activity of the entire population, regardless of what region they originally came from, and this initiated public life. The role of the teacher usually consisted in

⁴ The same.

⁵ Kwilecki, A. (1960): *Rola społeczna nauczyciela na Ziemiach Zachodnich w świetle pamiętników nauczycieli osadników* [The Social Role of Teachers in the Western Lands in Light of the Diaries of Resettled Teachers]. Poznań, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Zachodniego, p. 41.

⁶ *Kronika Szkoły w Pasieczniku, lata 1945–1946*. [Chronicle of the School in Pasiecznik, 1945–1946].

⁷ The same.

organising and planning the combined effort. That is how setting up the school became a business of the entire town or village, it became a focus point of interest, and it constituted an essential factor in the process of the forming of the coexistence of people who had previously hardly known each other.

The local communities' interest in schools became manifest in mass participation in various school celebrations. The development of schools required constant cooperation of the community. That is why the effort of the school headmaster/teacher was directed towards organising parents' committees that were often the first official social organisations in a given area⁸. It was the teacher who used to inspire the work of the committee, and who used to emphasise the importance of cooperating with the entire population, especially parents.

Parents' committees were typically formed in state schools, and their work would be focused on school buildings and equipment. Furthermore, the parents felt responsible for the safety of their children in school as well as the proper functioning of the school itself. Parents would intervene if, for example, they were not satisfied with the hygiene in the school. A concerned parents' letter to the President of Jelenia Góra, which includes a request to conduct a sanitary inspection of State School No. 1, can serve as an example:

"To Mr. City President,

We kindly request you to send a sanitary inspection to school No. 1. Because in school No. 1 the lavatory is so dirty that our children cannot relieve themselves during the whole school day, and when they come home they are in pain, which has an influence on their health. Isn't the school Headmaster supposed to be responsible for sanitation in school? What are the duties of the school nurse, who obviously never visits the lavatory. We hope that Mr. President will issue a directive to solve these problems.

Concerned parents⁹"

Parents' committees would also support teachers in their implementation of schooling responsibilities pertaining to care for

⁸ Cf. Fudali, R. (2004): *Przemiany roli społecznej nauczycieli na Dolnym Śląsku w latach 1945–1975* [Changes in the Social Roles of Teachers in Lower Silesia from 1945 to 1975], Zielona Góra, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego, p. 196.

⁹ *Parents' letter to the President of Jelenia Góra requesting sanitary inspection in Primary School No.1 – original record*, Korespondencja różna w sprawach szkolnictwa 1945–1948 [Various correspondence pertaining to schools 1945–1948], Zespół akt Zarządu Miejskiego 1945–1950, sign. 415, Archiwum Państwowe w Jeleniej Górze [State Archives in Jelenia Góra] (hereafter: AP JG).

children. Special help was provided for poor students. It included free course books, meals, and summer camps. The funds came from various sources, however, the biggest subsidy was provided by the city.

Eugenia Skrzyszewska, head of the Department of Education at the Office of the delegate of the Government of Poland in Jelenia Góra, wrote thus of the action of sponsoring meals for children:

"(...) In the action of sponsoring meals for youth the citizens can be aided by the Social Services Department or by the Schooling Department which has certain funds for this end, apart from this, the responsibility to sponsor meals for children lies with the Parents' Committee.

In order to receive a subsidy to sponsor meals for children, a list of the young ones in real need of such meals ought to be submitted to the Schooling Department. The list should include a child's date of birth, father's occupation, and the sum that the Parents' Committee has for this end. (...)"¹⁰

The parents' committee in the Primary School in Pasiiecznik may serve as another example. Its work was, first and foremost, of the following character:

- 1) utilitarian (practical) – organising school events, games, plays, field trips;
- 2) cultural – organising games for children, sleigh rides, Christmas games,
- 3) help and support – technical and material help and support with, e.g., renovations in school (fixing the fence, the school field)¹¹.

Culture was yet another area in which the teachers of Lower Silesia were active. In the first years after the liberation, the schools were the centres of cultural life in the cities and towns. When the teachers organised various artistic events they made sure that they were not only attractive to the parents, but to the children, as well.

Inspiring the settlers' interest in culture was difficult at first, because originally in this community there were some strong ties within the groups that had come from the same regions. That is why these people would at first prefer to spend time among those of their own circle. The situation

¹⁰ Letter of the head of the Department of Education of June 11, 1946 to the headmaster of the Public State School No. 1 on the subject of subsidies for sponsoring meals for children from the poorest families, Zespól akt Zarządu Miejskiego 1945–1950, sign. 395, AP JG.

¹¹ Jasińska, K. (1997): *Rola szkoły w integracji społeczności lokalnej w latach 1945–60 na podstawie szkoły w Pasiieczniku* [The role of the school in the integration of the local community from 1945 to 1960 as exemplified by the school in Pasiiecznik], unpublished – Master's thesis supervised by prof. dr Mirosława Chamcówna, Wrocław, p. 52.

was certain to be improved because of the development of the network of schools, which would inspire people's social activity, regardless of their ancestry.

For example, in Jelenia Góra, an essential role in the development of cultural life was played by Władysław Kurbiel, the first head of the City Department of Education, who was at the same time an enthusiast of theatre. In cooperation with Farmers' Self-Help he started the People's Theatre in Jelenia Góra, which would soon stage a people's opera of three acts titled "Peasants' Blood" in the Lower Silesian Theatre. The premiere took place on July 20, 1946, and the opera was subsequently staged 57 times. In 1947 Władysław Kurbiel was appointed head of the Trade Unions' Community Centre, and in 1950: the Inspector of Education¹².

Yet another teacher who used to combine pedagogical work with social service and culture, etc. was Władysław Mróz. From 1946 to 1948 he ran the "Echo" choir, which would often perform on the Polish Radio¹³. Thanks to the great efforts of such teachers the number of amateur music bands, associations, and sport clubs in the vicinity of Jelenia Góra was rapidly increasing.

In the village of Biskupie "the teacher Stanisława Augustyn organised various artistic events in cooperation with youth. They performed for the inhabitants of the village, but not exclusively – they would often give ticketed shows in other villages and towns. The collected money was used to buy desks and a curtain for the day room, which was renovated in 1947"¹⁴.

The teacher Maria Zaborska took care of the artistic club of the Primary School in Laskowice. "On November 11, 1945, the whole village was invited to see the first performance held in the school – a contemporary student recalls. A play was staged, and we sang songs, for example 'How it was at war', and I recited the poem 'I, the child of war'. After my performance – and this is something I will never forget – all the people started singing: 'We won't forsake the land we came from'. People were moved to tears. The following year, the school artists with Mrs. Zaborska even went to perform in Zakopane"¹⁵.

¹² Cf. Koczwała, M. (1985): *Nauczyciele działaczami kultury* [Teachers as cultural activists], *Karkonosze*, Issue 11, p. 27.

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 28.

¹⁴ *Report on the work of the school from 1945 to 1950 written by Jadwiga Krocak* – in the archives of the Primary School in Minkowice

¹⁵ Maria Siębor – an inhabitant of Laskowice – interview conducted in September 1991 by Bożena Pliszczyk for her dissertation supervised by Stefania Walasek, Wrocław 1992.

In Bystrzyca, Michał Wowkonowicz, the headmaster, made the following note in the school chronicle: "Except for the everyday hard work we organised a few events that were supposed to raise the spirit of the people. I will never forget the celebration of the 3rd of May in my school – it was so nice, and it took place on ancient Polish lands. In their high voices, the children recited only Polish poems about Polish schools, the love of the fatherland, working for the country. The beautiful celebrations that raised the Polish spirit included also Saint Nicholas Day, Polish Science Day, Nativity plays, the anniversary of T. Kościuszko, Forest Day, and the Day of Strenuous Work for Poland"¹⁶. The artistic efforts of the children were supervised by Maria Wowkonowicz and Maria Małowa.

In the case of the population of Pasiecznik celebrations of important events were the main and the most popular form of cultural life. They included celebrations of public and national holidays, events important for the community, historical anniversaries, etc. The celebrations held in schools played an essential educational role. They were highly emotional and intended to get the children engaged in all the problems of the adult generations. The joyful atmosphere and the feeling of friendship and community among the school children made it possible to uphold national traditions. They also strengthened the bonds between the students, the teachers, and the invited guests.

Jan N. recalls: "Until 1949 the 3rd of May celebrations were recognised by Mr. Drozdowski. They were also held in churches. It was as soon as in 1946 that a general picnic was held outside, and dances were organised for the whole village. All the students were carrying national flags and singing: 'Welcome, the dawn of May...' And on December 6 of the same year the teacher and the priest together with the parents celebrated St. Nicholas Day. There was a little food and dancing to accordion music. In 1947, apart from the traditional 3rd of May, there was a special celebration – the unveiling of the monument of the 2nd anniversary of the victory. It was a religious and patriotic celebration. After the Mass, a procession with an orchestra went to the monument, which was then blessed and unveiled. The raising of the monument was probably a common initiative of all the settlers. It was to be a sign of remembrance and admonition for future generations. The priest and the teacher were enthusiastic organisers of this work"¹⁷.

From the narrative of Maria M. One may learn: "There were always great celebrations of the 1st of May. We would get prepared for them at

¹⁶ *Kronika Szkoły w Bystrzycy z lat 1945–1970* [Chronicle of the School in Bystrzyca from 1945 to 1970], p. 5.

¹⁷ Interview with Jan N. In Jasińska, K.: op. cit. p. 77.

school. Entire families went to the poviata in decorated carts. Nobody was allowed to work in the fields – it was the Labour Day”¹⁸. These words are confirmed by Stanisław P., also an inhabitant of Pasiiecznik: “The entire village went in carts decorated with flags and birch twigs. There was marching around the market square, and a representative of the poviata read out an address”¹⁹. In the 1950s, the celebrations of the public holiday of the Victory Day on May 9 were always solemn. The day was celebrated by the entire population of the village, and especially by the settlers from the military, during an assembly in the school, and then in front of the monument. Maria M. recalls: “May 9 was a great celebration, and watches were held in front of the monument by scouts and by veterans”²⁰. Stanisław P., in turn, describes the celebration as follows: “Everyone was happy with the spark of the Polish spirit in the western regions. The students brought flowers and held a watch. In 1956 flags for the school were bought with GRN²¹ funds. After 1956 the school would take care of the monument, because there weren’t many veterans left”²².

To recapitulate, it was the work of amateur theatres and school choirs that played an important role in integrating school children and local communities. Learning new songs, choosing and preparing the programme, and performing during school celebrations or meetings with the local population constituted a unique opportunity to establish social relations. What is more, the audience appreciated such artistic activity, which is why it was often that the students made trips to other villages and towns to perform. The tickets were not expensive, but they provided some income that could be used to buy, e.g., equipment for the school and the classrooms.

It needs to be noted that after 1949 most celebrations were of a propagandistic character. What is more, from 1949 to 1955 in the entire schooling system efforts were made to include the new political and

¹⁸ Interview with Maria M., *ibid.*, p. 77.

¹⁹ Interview with Stanisław P., *ibid.*, p. 77.

²⁰ Interview with Maria M. In Jasińska, K.: *op.*, *cit.* p. 77.

²¹ Commune National Council (Gromadzka Rada Narodowa – GRN) – organ of the lowest level of the government. A commune consisted of a few villages. Active from September 25, 1954 to December 31, 1972. The institution had the following goals: supporting the development of farming, addressing the housing, social, and cultural needs of the population, ensuring that the population fulfil their duties towards the state, creating economic plans and plans of the development of the commune, maintenance of local roads, the logistic network, the services network, and the social, cultural, and housing infrastructure. ([http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rada_narodowa_\(PRL\)](http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rada_narodowa_(PRL))) (retrieved: 25. 01. 2014).

²² Interview with Stanisław P. In Jasińska, K.: *op. cit.*, p. 77.

ideological ideas based on Leninism in the curriculum²³. Teachers were forced to make difficult choices. On the one hand, the Party strictly enforced a course of social and political work based upon a political course chosen for the schools. On the other, some of the teachers perceived this fact as dangerous to the students. Henryka Chmurzyńska recalls the first years of her work in Jelenia Góra:

“My work in the school wasn’t restricted to giving lessons. It was as soon as 1945 that I organised a team of girl scouts that was based on the pre-war programmes and traditions of the scouting movement. Of course, the entire team would go to church. I had some problems because of this. In 1947 I was accused of spreading religious indoctrination among the students and of forcing the scouts to attend the Holy Mass. That is why I was transferred to School No. 4 in Jelenia Góra. I stopped working with scouts. I only returned to scouting after 1957”²⁴.

It also needs to be mentioned that there was quite a significant group of teachers who used to actively participate in the works of various social organisations of political and economic character. They would actively implement the curriculum developed according to the political ideology of the ruling party during the courses for the illiterate and in classes ran in day rooms in places of work. What is more, they also took part in the decision making process as counsellors. These teachers contributed greatly to the development of the cooperative movement in their regions. The results and the effectiveness of their efforts could be measured by the level of proper implementation of educational goals that were greatly determined by the politics of the state.

²³ Iwanek, M. (1989): Szkolnictwo podstawowe i średnie [Primary and secondary schools]. In Kwaśny, Z. (ed.) *Jelenia Góra. Zarys historii miasta* [Jelenia Góra. Outline of the History of the City]. Wrocław, Wydawnictwo Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, p. 397.

²⁴ Plucińska, E. (ed.) (1998): *Uczyli, walczyli, budowali: wspomnienia nauczycieli tajnego nauczania* [They Taught, They Fought, They Built: Memories of the Teachers in Secret Education]. Jelenia Góra, Wydawnictwo Wojewódzkiego Ośrodka Metodycznego, p. 17.