

## Students and Graduates of Gdynia Primary Schools in the first Post-war Decade (1945–1956)<sup>1</sup>

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### Aims and research methods

The aim of this article is to answer the following research question: what did the process of education of school youth look like in the first post-war decade, and what was the influence of wartime experiences on school youth? The text presents a group of pupils from Gdynia primary schools in the years 1945–1956, which is a representative group for the research on the process of education of schoolchildren in urban schools in the period of the People's Republic of Poland. However, the article also emphasizes the influence of the region on the formation of the group of children from Gdynia's schools. Moreover, the article presented problems and challenges related to the reconstruction of education in the post-war period, which both students and teachers had to face.

To reconstruct past processes and events, as well as to explain and interpret facts related to the subject of the study, the methodology of historical research was applied. In writing this text, mainly written sources were used, the vast majority of which is new, previously unpublished material. This was followed by an external and internal critique of the sources. The basic methods for establishing historical facts, which were used in the compilation of the material for this article, are induction and deduction: the method of direct and indirect fact-finding. In addition, the comparative method was also applied. This method allowed for the identification of similarities and differences in the attitudes and processes studied. Apart from the qualitative methods presented above, a quantitative method, i.e., a statistical method, was also used in the research, which allowed us to characterize a group of pupils from public schools in the Tricity.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a master's thesis written under the scientific supervision of Prof. Arnold Kłoczyński, at the Institute of History, University of Gdańsk.

This article aims to characterise the group of pupils in Gdynia's primary schools in the first post-war decade. It is, however, only an introduction to an extensive research topic, which is the history of the student community in the period of the People's Republic of Poland. This topic requires extensive research on the borderline of socio-political history and sociology.

## Introduction

In 1945, the authorities of Gdynia, as well as other Polish towns and cities, had to face the problem of rebuilding cities destroyed after the war. One of the most important tasks was the organization of education, especially elementary education. The reconstruction of post-war education was important for the authorities of People's Republic of Poland because it was supposed to be the basis of the planned social revolution.

In Gdynia, less than a month after the liberation – on 15 April 1945 – the first post-war school year began. It was the shortest school year in history, lasting less than three months: from mid-April to 14 July<sup>2</sup>. This was possible thanks to the relatively small damage suffered by Gdynia during the war. This did not mean that the opening of schools was not accompanied by any difficulties. A considerable part of the school buildings had to be renovated. Some of them had been destroyed during the war, and others were devastated by their utilitarian functions: such as hospitals and military garrisons<sup>3</sup>. Often, before any renovation work could begin, mines and grenades, that were lying in the school yards, had to be removed. Sometimes this task was undertaken by school directors together with janitors and workers<sup>4</sup>. In addition, in most buildings there were no roof tiles, windows or doors<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Chronicle of Primary School No. 10 in Gdynia, part 1, p. 2; in Polish translation: Kronika Szkoły Podstawowej nr 10 w Gdyni, część 1, s. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Pedagogical Regional Library in Gdańsk (PBW), Reconstruction of Polish education in 1945-1948. School No. 1 at 10 February Street in Gdynia, sign. R 450, p. 2-3; in Polish translation: Pedagogiczna Biblioteka Wojewódzka w Gdańsku (PBW), Odbudowa szkolnictwa polskiego w latach 1945-1948. Szkoła nr 1 przy ul. 10 lutego w Gdyni, sygn. R 450, s. 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> Museum of the City of Gdynia (MMG), School Chronicle 17 IV 1945 - 21 III 1950 of Public Primary School No. 9 Cisowa, sign. 1/17/1, np.; in Polish translation: Muzeum Miasta Gdyni [dalej: MMG], Kronika szkolna 17 IV 1945 - 21 III 1950 Publicznej Szkoły Powszechnej nr 9 Cisowa, sygn. 1/17/1, bp.

<sup>5</sup> PWB, Primary School No. 8 in Gdynia-Orłowo 1945-1948, sign. R 447, p. 1; MMG, School Chronicle 17 IV 1945 - 21 III 1950 of Public Primary School No. 9 Cisowa, sign. 1/17/1, np.; Polish Teacher's Union Branch in Gdynia (ZNPOwG), Original and first prints of teachers' memoirs, Memoirs of Maria Ładońska, teacher of primary school No. 12 in Gdynia Witomino, sign. 1/27a, np.; in Polish translation: PWB, Szkoła podstawowa nr 8 w Gdyni-Orłowie w latach 1945-1948, sygn. R 447, s. 1; MMG, Kronika szkolna 17 IV 1945 - 21 III 1950 Publicznej Szkoły Powszechnej nr 9 Cisowa, sygn. 1/17/1, bp.; Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego Oddział w Gdyni (ZNPOwG), Oryginały i pierwodruki wspomnień nauczycieli, Wspomnienia Marii Ładońskiej, nauczycielki szkoły powszechnej nr 12 na Witominie, sygn. 1/27a, bp.

Modernisation of buildings in the first months of 1945 was not an easy task, as there was a lack of professionals and construction materials.

Such realities of the rebirth of Polish education after World War II meant that young people of that time found themselves in a very difficult situation, on the one hand there was a lack of material and financial resources, often there was also a shortage of properly educated teaching staff, and on the other hand, they were put under large-scale political indoctrination by the communist authorities.

### **Pupils and graduates in statistical terms**

Before the start of the first school year after the war, the educational staff proceeded to carry out a register of school-age children and preliminary regionalization. In a letter to the Curator of the Gdańsk School District, dated 18 April 1945, the Gdynia school authorities state that sixty-six teachers and one thousand and fifty school-age children were registered in the city<sup>6</sup>. The number of pupils given above seems to have been greatly lowered, or, more probably, one of the digits was omitted during the typing, the insertion of which would have increased the number of children to several thousand. The order of magnitude of a few thousand pupils attending primary schools in Gdynia in the school year 1944/1945 seems probable, because the available sources indicate that on average several hundred pupils applied to a school resuming its activities at that time. For example, on 23 April 1945, there were six hundred and thirty-seven pupils enrolled in Primary School No. 9 in Gdynia Cisowa<sup>7</sup>.

As was mentioned above, there are no precise data concerning the number of pupils who started their education in Gdynia in the first post-war school year -but based on the preserved reports from a few primary schools operating at that time, it is possible to reconstruct the growth of pupils starting from April 1945. For example, in the spring of 1945, two hundred and eighty-five children attended Primary School No. 12, including one hundred and forty-seven girls and one hundred and thirty-eight boys, while in the following school year, two hundred and ninety-one pupils started their education in Primary School No. 12<sup>8</sup>. The seventh class was

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<sup>6</sup> PBW, Letter to the Delegate of the Ministry of Education Dr Jan Szwarc Superintendent of the School District of Gdańsk of 18 April 1945, sign. R 540/2; in Polish translation: PBW, Pismo do Delegata Ministerstwa Oświaty dra Jana Szwarca Kuratora Okręgu Szkolnego Gdańskiego z 18 IV 1945 roku, sygn. R 540/2.

<sup>7</sup> MMG, School Chronicle 17 IV 1945 - 21 III 1950 of the Public Primary School No. 9 Cisowa, sign. 1/17/1, np.; in Polish translation: MMG, Kronika szkolna 17 IV 1945 - 21 III 1950 Publicznej Szkoły Powszechnej nr 9 Cisowa, sygn. 1/17/1, bp.

<sup>8</sup> State Archive in Gdańsk, Gdynia Branch (APGoG), School Inspectorate in Gdynia, Primary Public School No. 12 in Gdynia Witomino - protocols of school meetings, reports, visits, correspondence, sign. 745/10, p. 40; in Polish translation: Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku oddział w Gdyni (APGoG), Inspektorat Szkolny w Gdyni, Publiczna Szkoła Powszechna nr 12 w Gdyni Witominie - protokoły zebrań szkolnych, sprawozdania, wizytacje, korespondencja, sygn. 745/10, k. 40.

the least numerous, with only five girls. The sixth class was also the smallest by the standards of the time. This situation could have been caused by the fact that in April 1945, youth from older years (especially boys) were still involved in war activities, e.g., through activity in partisan groups, which made it impossible for them to start school. Moreover, it can be assumed that, for various reasons, teenagers decided to take up gainful employment rather than resume their school education.

**Table 1. Number of pupils in Gdynia's primary schools**

| Status as on date   | Number of pupils |
|---------------------|------------------|
| 1 VIII 1945         | 8 520            |
| 30 IV 1946          | 10 089           |
| 1 VII 1946          | 10 840           |
| 30 IX 1946          | 12 685           |
| 7 XI 1946           | 12 702           |
| 31 XII 1946         | 12 770           |
| 31 III 1947         | 12 655           |
| 30 IX 1948          | 13 177           |
| 1 X 1949            | 11 505           |
| school year 1950/51 | 11 165           |
| school year 1952/53 | 10 115*          |
| school year 1953/54 | 11 049           |
| school year 1954/55 | 13 626           |

\*The number does not include pupils from Primary Schools No. 1 and No. 20, as there are no records of the number of pupils at these schools for the 1952/1953 school year.

Source: APG, School board of Gdańsk district, Statistics 1945–1946, sign. 1178/85; APG, School board of Gdańsk district, Statistics 1946–1947, sign. 1178/90, APG, School board of Gdańsk district, List of primary schools as of 1 October 1949 in Gdańsk district. 1949–1950, sign. 1178/311, p. 4; APGoG, Presidium of the Municipal National Council in Gdynia, Reports on the results of teaching, sign. 22/1317, np; APGoG, Presidium of the Municipal National Council in Gdynia, Summaries of the results of the audit of universal teaching, sign. 22/1419, np.

In Polish translation: APG, Kuratorium Okręgu Szkolnego Gdańskiego, Statystyka 1945–1946, sygn. 1178/85; APG, Kuratorium Okręgu Szkolnego Gdańskiego, Statystyka 1946–1947, sygn. 1178/90, APG, Kuratorium Okręgu Szkolnego Gdańskiego, Zestawienia szkół podstawowych w/g stanu z dnia 1 X 1949 okręgu gdańskiego. 1949–1950, sygn. 1178/311, k. 4; APGoG, Prezydium Miejskiej Rady Narodowej w Gdyni, Sprawozdania z wyników nauczania, sygn. 22/1317, bp, APGoG, Prezydium Miejskiej Rady Narodowej w Gdyni, Zestawienia z wyników kontroli powszechnego nauczania, sygn. 22/1419, bp.

As can be seen from the data presented in the table above, until 1948, the number of pupils in Gdynia's primary schools was constantly increasing. The highest increase in the number of pupils occurred in the first two post-war years. Between 1 August 1945 and 1 July 1946, it amounted to 27., 23%. The increase in the number of children in Gdynia's schools in the first three post-war years was the result of an influx of people to the city – both its former inhabitants and new arrivals, which resulted in a significant increase in the population of Gdynia (including school-age children). On the other hand, from 1949, the number of schoolchildren significantly decreased, which was caused mainly by the start of education by small numbers of children from the demographic gap from the time of the war. A certain impact on the decrease in the number of children in schools after 1949 was also caused by the fact that most of the pupils compensating for the shortage of education during the war had already finished their education by that time. On the other hand, the increase in the number of pupils from the beginning of the 1950s was a result of children from the so-called post-war baby boom reaching school age.

### Pupils – characteristics of the group

Pupils of primary schools during the years 1945-1956 constituted a specific group of young people, as a considerable number of them resumed education after a break caused by the occupation. Different wartime fates meant that the level of knowledge of children who started education in the first post-war years was very uneven. Some pupils were educated in German schools during the war. These included, for example, Michał Sikora, who in 1940, as a six-year-old boy, began his education in school no. 17 in Gdynia Cisowa<sup>9</sup>.

The break in education and the obligation to attend a German school meant that the level of knowledge of the Polish language (especially spelling and writing) in some school-age children was low. In 1946 the headmaster of primary school No. 7 – Tadeusz Twardowski – *stated that children's language difficulties impeded the normal course of lessons*<sup>10</sup>. However, in the fourth school in Gdynia Oksywie, pupils were instructed to keep two notebooks for the Polish language, so that they could

<sup>9</sup> M. Sikora, *Wojenna Gdynia*, [in:] *Moje wojenne dzieciństwo: wspomnienia nadesłane na konkurs*, v. 10, Warszawa 2002, p. 88-99.

<sup>10</sup> APGoG, School Inspectorate in Gdynia, Primary School No. 7 in Grabówek - protocols of school meetings, reports, visits, correspondence, sign. 745/4, p. 50. in Polish translation: APGoG, Inspektorat Szkolny w Gdyni, Publiczna Szkoła Powszechna nr 7 w Gdyni Grabówku - protokoły zebrań szkolnych, sprawozdania, wizytacje, korespondencja, sygn. 745/4, k. 50.

take one notebook in turns to do their homework at home and leave the other one for the teacher to check<sup>11</sup>.

In addition, a significant number of children enrolling in educational institutions in the first post-war year did not have school certificates, which meant that to assign a pupil to a given class, teachers had to conduct preliminary examinations, that allowed them to assess the child's level of knowledge. Particularly gifted children – who quickly managed to learn the basics of the curriculum – were moved to higher classes during the school year<sup>12</sup>.

Teachers' relations show that young people attending public schools in Gdynia were eager to learn and disciplined. One of the teachers recalled that she used to leave her school diary in the classrooms during breaks, because *none of the children would dare to approach it*<sup>13</sup>. It should be remembered that these are relations written or told after many years, which may have caused their authors to idealize the past – looking at past situations more sentimentally than objectively. Moreover, some of the collected teachers' memories were written in the 1960s and 1970s, so the social realities of the time meant that teachers tried to portray their students' happiness and gratitude for the opportunity to benefit from the achievements of People's Poland<sup>14</sup>. Although young people were probably happy to have the opportunity to study after the war, this did not mean that there were no acts of hooliganism in schools, which are mentioned in current school reports.

The education of young people with gaps in their education took place in so-called sequences, which were designed to allow students to make up the material of two classes in one school year. For those who could not read or write properly, literacy courses were organized. These forms of education were usually entrusted to teachers with many years of experience. At the beginning of the educational system's organisation, most of these teachers did not receive any material remuneration for

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<sup>11</sup> APGoG, School Inspectorate in Gdynia, Primary School No. 4 in Gdyni Oksywie - protocols of school meetings, reports, visits, correspondence, sign. 745/1, p. 10; in Polish translation: APGoG, Inspektorat Szkolny w Gdyni, *Publiczna Szkoła Powszechna nr 4 w Gdyni Oksywiu - protokoły z zebrań szkolnych, sprawozdania, wizytacje, korespondencja*, sygn. 745/1, k. 10.

<sup>12</sup> ZNPowG, Original and first prints of teachers' memoirs, Memoirs of Maria Ładońska, teacher of primary school No. 12 in Gdynia Witomino, sign. 1/27a, np.; in Polish translation: ZNPoG, *Oryginały i pierwodruki wspomnień nauczycieli, Wspomnienia Marii Ładońskiej, nauczycielki szkoły powszechnej nr 12 na Witominie*, sygn. 1/27a, bp.

<sup>13</sup> ZNPowG, Original and first prints of teachers' memoirs, Memoirs of Maria Ładońska, teacher of primary school No. 12 in Gdynia Witomino, sign. 1/27a, np.; in Polish translation: ZNPoG, *Oryginały i pierwodruki wspomnień nauczycieli, Wspomnienia Marii Ładońskiej, nauczycielki szkoły powszechnej nr 12 na Witominie*, sygn. 1/27a, bp.

<sup>14</sup> ZNPowG, Original and first prints of teachers' memoirs, Memoirs of Maria Ładońska, teacher of primary school No. 12 in Gdynia Witomino, sign. 1/27a, np.; in Polish translation: ZNPoG, *Oryginały i pierwodruki wspomnień nauczycieli, Wspomnienia Marii Ładońskiej, nauczycielki szkoły powszechnej nr 12 na Witominie*, sygn. 1/27a, bp.

their additional engagement in education; their only payment was the satisfaction of their pupils' achievements<sup>15</sup>.

In addition to traditional forms of education, teachers also organised activities for their pupils outside school. These were mainly trips and excursions. For example, pupils from School No. 12 took part in one-day trips, during which they visited nearby cities such as Hel or Gdańsk, while pupils from Primary School No. 10 in Chylonia went on a several-day trip to Wieliczka in 1951. These trips were financed mainly from funds collected by parental committees<sup>16</sup>. In addition, pupils participated in forest-cleaning actions.



Pic1 – Pupils and teachers of Primary School No. 12 on a trip to Wieliczka, May 1951  
Source: Chronicle of Primary School No. 10 in Gdynia, part 1.

<sup>15</sup> PWB, Primary School No. 8 in Gdynia Orłowo in 1945-1948, sign. R 447, np.; PWB, Reconstruction of Polish education in 1945-1948 in Gdynia on the example of several schools cited below, sign. R 199, p. 2; in Polish translation: PWB, Szkoła podstawowa nr 8 w Gdyni Orłowie w latach 1945-1948, sygn. R 447, bp.; PWB, Odbudowa szkolnictwa polskiego w latach 1945-1948 w Gdyni na przykładzie kilku niżej przytoczonych szkół, sygn. R 199, s. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Chronicle of Primary School No. 10 in Gdynia, part 1; ZNPowG, Original and first prints of teachers' memoirs, Memoirs of Maria Ładońska, teacher of primary school No. 12 in Gdynia Witomino, sign. 1/27a, np.; in Polish translation: Kronika Szkoły Podstawowej nr 10 w Gdyni, cz. 1; ZNPoG, Oryginały i pierwodruki wspomnień nauczycieli, Wspomnienia Marii Ładońskiej, nauczycielki szkoły powszechnej nr 12 na Witominie, sygn. 1/27a, bp

## Classification and promotion of pupils

The main task of teachers in primary schools was to improve the results of teaching, which was to result in the reduction of second-rate education among pupils. The prerequisite for promotion to a higher class was obtaining positive grades in all subjects provided for in the basic curriculum, or one aggregate grade provided for pupils in the first class. However, due to the lack of education caused by the war, many pupils had problems with learning the curriculum. This is evidenced by the fact that in the school year 1947/1948, there were seventy-eight pupils in School No. 4 who were studying in the same class for the second or third year<sup>17</sup>.

**Table 2: Comparison of numbers of pupils in Gdynia's primary schools classified and promoted in the years 1951-1952<sup>18</sup>**

| Unclassified | Classified | Graduated           | Ungraduated         | Repetition rate |
|--------------|------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| 1,40%*       | 98,60%*    | 88,37%*<br>89,62%** | 10,23%*<br>10,38%** | 11,63%*         |

\*The number of all pupils is taken as 100% in the calculation.

\*\*The number of classified pupils is taken as 100%.

Source: own calculations based on documentation from the Department of Education of the Presidium of the Municipal National Council in Gdynia; APGoG, Presidium of the Municipal National Council in Gdynia, Primary School No. 5 /reports, minutes, lists/, sygn. 22/1299, bp; APGoG, Presidium of the Municipal National Council in Gdynia, Primary School No. 6 /protocols, lists/, sign. 22/1303, np; APGoG, Presidium of the Municipal National Council in Gdynia, Primary School No. 7 /reports, protocols, lists/, sygn. 22/1306, np; APGoG, Presidium of the Municipal National Council in Gdynia, Primary School No. 8 /reports, lists/, sign. 22/1312, np; APGoG, Presidium of the Municipal National Council in Gdynia, Primary School No. 9 /educational plan of the school director/, sign. 22/1317, np; APGoG, Presidium of the Municipal National Council in Gdynia, Primary School No. 11 /reports, minutes, lists/, sign. 22/1320, np; APGoG, Presidium of the Municipal National Council in Gdynia, Primary School No. 14 /reports, lists/, sign. 22/1330, np; APGoG, Presidium of the Municipal National Council in Gdynia, Primary School No. 15 /reports, lists/, sign. 22/1331, np; APGoG, Presidium of the Municipal National Council in Gdynia, Primary School No. 16

<sup>17</sup> APGoG, School Inspectorate in Gdyni, Primary School No. 4 in Gdynia Oksywie - protocols of school meetings, reports, visits, correspondence, sign. 745/1, p. 32; in Polish translation: APGoG, Inspektorat Szkolny w Gdyni, Publiczna Szkoła Powszechna nr 4 w Gdyni Oksywiu - protokoły zebrań szkolnych, sprawozdania, wizytacje, korespondencja, sygn. 745/1, k. 32.

<sup>18</sup> Data from thirteen comprehensive schools in Gdynia, from which archival materials containing data on pupils' classification and promotion are available, were taken into consideration in the compilation.

/reports, minutes/, sygn. 22/1332, np; APGoG, Presidium of the Municipal National Council in Gdynia, Primary School No. 17 /reports, minutes, statements/, sign. 22/1333, np.

In Polish translation: APGoG, Prezydium Miejskiej Rady Narodowej w Gdyni, Szkoła podstawowa nr 5 /protokoły, sprawozdania, zestawienia/, sygn. 22/1299, bp; APGoG, Prezydium Miejskiej Rady Narodowej w Gdyni, Szkoła podstawowa nr 6 /protokoły, zestawienia/, sygn. 22/1303, bp; APGoG, Prezydium Miejskiej Rady Narodowej w Gdyni, Szkoła podstawowa nr 7 /sprawozdania, protokoły, zestawienia/, sygn. 22/1306, bp; APGoG, Prezydium Miejskiej Rady Narodowej w Gdyni, Szkoła podstawowa nr 8 /sprawozdania, zestawienia/, sygn. 22/1312, bp; APGoG, Prezydium Miejskiej Rady Narodowej w Gdyni, Szkoła podstawowa nr 9 /plan wychowawczy kierownika szkoły/, sygn. 22/1317, bp; APGoG, Prezydium Miejskiej Rady Narodowej w Gdyni, Szkoła podstawowa nr 11 /sprawozdania, protokoły, zestawienia/, sygn. 22/1320, bp; APGoG, Prezydium Miejskiej Rady Narodowej w Gdyni, Szkoła podstawowa nr 14 /sprawozdania, zestawienia/, sygn. 22/1330, bp; APGoG, Prezydium Miejskiej Rady Narodowej w Gdyni, Szkoła podstawowa nr 15 /sprawozdania, zestawienia/, sygn. 22/1331, bp; APGoG, Prezydium Miejskiej Rady Narodowej w Gdyni, Szkoła podstawowa nr 16 /sprawozdania, protokoły/, sygn. 22/1332, bp; APGoG, Prezydium Miejskiej Rady Narodowej w Gdyni, Szkoła podstawowa nr 17 /sprawozdania, protokoły, zestawienia/, sygn. 22/1333, bp.

As the data presented in the table above show, in the years 1951-1952, the percentage of second-year pupils in Gdynia's primary schools amounted to 11.63% and was higher than the average for the country – which in the school year 1952/1953 amounted to 7.4%<sup>19</sup>. The highest percentage of students with unsatisfactory grades was in classes V-VII. Nationwide data on pupil promotion shows that in the first half of 1950, the number of pupils with negative grades in the higher classes was nine percentage points higher<sup>20</sup>. The most difficult subjects for pupils to learn were science, especially mathematics, as well as Polish language and history. For example, in the first semester of the school year 1950/1951 in Primary School No. 13 20% of pupils failed in mathematics, 13% failed in physics, 11% failed in Polish language and 6% failed in history, while the percentage of failures in other subjects did not exceed 5%<sup>21</sup>.

In the school year 1952/1953, promotion exams were initiated in primary schools. At the beginning only pupils of the sixth grade were included, and then also those of the fourth grade. The exams were to include material from Polish

<sup>19</sup> B. Potyrała, *Szkoła podstawowa w Polsce 1944-1984: uwarunkowania społeczno-polityczne*, Warszawa 1987, p. 54.

<sup>20</sup> B. Wagner, *Strategia wychowawcza w PRL*, Warszawa 2019, p. 23-24.

<sup>21</sup> APGoG, Presidium of the Municipal National Council in Gdynia, Primary School No. 13 /protocols, statements/, sign. 22/1325, np.; Transcript in Polish: APGoG, Prezydium Miejskiej Rady Narodowej w Gdyni, Szkoła podstawowa nr 13 /protokoły, zestawienia/, sygn. 22/1325, bp.

language, mathematics, and biology. They were held after the end of the school year, for pupils who had been classified. In the first year, the exams were held on 8 June<sup>22</sup>. Despite the introduction of the tests, the percentage of pupils not obtaining promotion to a higher class has been decreasing since the beginning of the 1950s. This was probably the result of a certain stabilisation of the school system, and thus an improvement in educational conditions or increased availability of teaching aids.

On the other hand, pupils in the seventh class were obliged to take final examinations. For example, in the school year 1955/1956, they included an oral and written part in Polish language and mathematics, as well as a speech on history<sup>23</sup>. In 1952, a sample set of questions in the Polish language was as follows:

1. *Szymon Szymonowicz*<sup>24</sup> as an idyllic writer depicting the misery of a serf-owning farmer – based on *Żeńcy*<sup>25</sup>
2. *Dzierżyński*<sup>26</sup> – a revolutionary fighter
3. A grammatical dissection of the sentence: *My mother was a strong and tall woman*<sup>27</sup>.

After graduating from seventh grade, the graduates of primary schools faced the choice of continuing their education in a higher school or starting a job. A significant number of young people decided to take up vocational studies in technical or vocational schools of various profiles.

The percentage of second-year graduates in Gdynia's schools was influenced by various factors and depended both on the commitment and qualifications of teachers, the predispositions of students, and the technical standard of schools. In the first post-war years, the number of students failing to graduate was affected by insufficient space in special schools and often a lack of professional diagnosis, which

<sup>22</sup> Ordinance of the Minister of Education of 8 January 1953 on Promotional Examinations at Primary Schools for the School Year 1952/53; in Polish translation: *Zarządzenie Ministra Oświaty z dnia 8 stycznia 1953 roku w sprawie egzaminów promocyjnych w szkołach ogólnokształcących w roku szkolnym 1952/53* (Dz. U. MO 1953 nr 1 poz. 6).

<sup>23</sup> Ordinance of the Minister of Education of 25 February 1955 on the organisation of examinations in primary schools for the school year 1955/56; Transcript in Polish: *Zarządzenie Ministra Oświaty z dnia 25 lutego 1955 w sprawie organizacji egzaminów w szkołach ogólnokształcących w roku szkolnym 1955/56* (Dz. U. MO 1956 nr 3 poz. 16).

<sup>24</sup> Szymon Szymonowicz was a Polish Renaissance poet. He was known as "the Polish Pindar".

<sup>25</sup> *Żeńcy* (The Beggars) - a literary work by Szymon Szymonowicz, published in the collection *Sielanki* (Idylls) in 1614, but not included in the title category.

<sup>26</sup> Feliks Dzierżyński - was a Bolshevik revolutionary and official. Born into Polish nobility, from 1917 until his death in 1926 Dzerzhinsky led the first two Soviet state-security organizations, the Cheka and the OGPU, establishing a secret police for the post-revolutionary Soviet regime. He was one of the architects of the Red Terror and decossackization.

<sup>27</sup> During the communist period the image of the "working woman" was promoted in Poland; APGoG, Presidium of the Municipal National Council in Gdynia, *Szkolnictwo ogólnokształcące / register, compilations, reports/, sign. 22/1384, np.*; in Polish translation: APGoG, Prezydium Miejskiej Rady Narodowej w Gdyni, *Szkolnictwo ogólnokształcące / wykazy, zestawienia, sprawozdania/, sygn. 22/1384, bp.*

meant that some children with various disabilities were forced to attend to ordinary schools that were unable to provide them with appropriate educational conditions. Teachers also had a significant impact on educational results. The teachers in Gdynia's primary schools were from diverse social backgrounds, coming to the city from different parts of Poland and beyond, which may have resulted in the fact that, in the early years of their work, they did not form a coherent group, which in turn may have had an impact on the quality of teaching in schools. Moreover, some of the teachers, especially at the beginning of the 1950s, were not fully qualified for their profession. In addition, the level of teaching in schools was also affected by the individual commitment and dedication of each teacher.

## Summary

Students are an indispensable part of the functioning of schools. The character of a given educational institution depends largely on the socio-political reality in which it has to function, but also on the disposition of its pupils. In the first post-war decade, pupils in Gdynia's primary schools constituted a specific group of young people, who had experienced a time of war and occupation. Young people attending Gdynia's primary schools, especially in the first post-war years, constituted a group of pupils with diversified skills and level of knowledge. Some of the children required specialist care, which was to be provided by two special schools operating in the city from 1948. However, the professional preparation of the teachers employed in those institutions was in most cases not adequate.

The aim of the schools' activities in the period discussed in this article was firstly to eliminate illiteracy and make up for educational gaps resulting from the war-time interruption of schooling, and secondly to prepare graduates for employment or higher education. Most graduates of Gdynia's primary schools in the years 1945-1956 decided to take up employment or study at a vocational school. A common problem in schools in the period 1945-1956 was second-rate education caused by delays in learning as a result of the war and the unpreparedness of both institutions and teachers for work in such specific conditions, especially in the first years of school rebuilding.

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