

Szkoła Główna Handlowa w Warszawie
Warsaw School of Economics
Kolegium Ekonomiczno-Społeczne
College of Economic and Social Sciences

mgr Anna Rękawek

**The Nowa Szkoła (New School) programme in the context of solutions for
the educational policy in Poland during the transition period**

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Doctoral Thesis Supervisor: prof. dr. hab. Ewa
Chmielecka

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Abstract

This doctoral thesis discusses the educational policy that has steered the development of the education system in Poland. The thesis analyses the New School programme, one of several implemented between 1990 and 2007 with focus on professional development of education staff.

The political transition in Poland brought about changes in numerous areas of economic and social life, and in education, it gave rise to a radical reform of the education system, approved in 1998 and implemented in 1999, that required rethinking of a range of complementary instruments and solutions with a view to re-envisioning the paradigm of the system. Preparations for the reform had been underway since the early 1990s. The starting point for the professional development of education staff was the establishment of the Professional Development Centre that implemented European programmes oriented towards training of education administration and managers while providing trainees with new knowledge and competences. The Centre also organised, in cooperation with a number of foreign institutions, internships and study visits for teachers to offer them an opportunity to familiarise themselves with lessons learnt from education systems in other countries. The New School programme was developed by participants of these forms of professional development, who also were creative teachers, with the aim of disseminating new thinking about education and new competences within the system. The cascade structure and training materials enabled the programme to achieve nationwide coverage. Accordingly, the programme was conceived as a solution to support the reform because its content largely corresponded to the objectives and content of the reforms while preceding its implementation by preparing education staff and providing them with tools that would enable introducing the change.

The thesis posits that the potential of the New School programme was underutilized in terms of improving the education system and this postulate has been demonstrated in the research process.

The reasons for this underutilisation are also identified, as are the conditions that would enable achieving the intended outcomes of the programme and lay a foundation for the formation of a public policy in the field of education.

Given that 25 years have passed since the reform, it is possible to analyse the effects delayed in time, the multifaceted nature of the change and the relationship between the instruments chosen and the solutions adopted.

The thesis analyses the content, tools and methods as well as the intended and achieved effects of the New School programme in the context of the goals of the national policy during the transition period and in reference to specific models and instruments of the public policy.

The New School programme provided participants of the training programme with competences required of educators, new working methods, and helped them improve their communication and teamwork skills. As a result, the participants were capable of conducting group workshops in their communities to design a school and a learning process suited to the needs and capabilities at the school and community level. The activation methods so acquired came into practical use in schools and today they are considered an obvious component. The trainees were also provided with up-to-date information on the reform and a wide variety of educational materials to use in their practice. They established contacts with teachers across Poland and began to create networks to share experiences also outside their own community, which contributed to the dissemination of good practice examples and resulted in the formation of the Association of Educators. The participation in the programme prepared them for the new professional roles that emerged in the system as a result of the reform, e.g. in-school professional development system leader or inclusive education leader. Initiators of the programme planned that regional teacher training centres would include an organisational unit tasked to monitor the effects of educators' work, investigate the needs of local communities and develop a relevant range of in-service training options.

This led to the conclusion that the New School programme had characteristics corresponding to catalytic instruments of public policy and could be considered as a sign of the formation of a public policy. It is therefore legitimate to search for the origins of the public policy in the field of education during the transition period of 1990-2007.

The thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter one – an introduction, outlines the research objectives and states the research hypothesis concerning the reasons for the abandonment of the New School programme. The reasoning behind the hypothesis is demonstrated based on the responses given to the research questions. The chapter also includes an explanation of the choice of research methods. The questionnaire survey, semi-structured individual interviews and a focus group interview are complemented by a review of literature and source materials, which included unpublished documents.

Chapter two contains theoretical considerations of the research problem, including the presentation, analysis and selected models, known from the literature, of such social phenomena as ‘transition’, ‘public policy’ and ‘public management’, which subsequently provide a context for and an explanation of the functioning of the New School programme in the Polish education system undergoing reforms. The analysis uses the long time horizon perspective.

Chapter three includes a comprehensive description of the transformation of the education system in Poland. The reconstructed time line begins in the early 1970s and the transformation is assumed to have reached its apogee between 1999 and 2007. This chapter discusses the assumptions underlying the reform, its hard and catalytic instruments, with a particular focus on the preparation of education staff for the intended change.

Chapter four describes the New School programme: its objectives, goals, structure and implementation tools, as well as the competences to be imparted to the programme participants and the pre-defined solutions promoting the consolidation of outcomes and the creation of a learning education system. Finally, features of the contemporary public policy are identified, which provides the basis for comparing with other solutions used in the educational policy of the transition period, enabling the identification of commonalities and differences between programmes oriented towards professional development of education staff participating in the implementation of the reform.

Chapter five analyses the results of empirical research, allowing a deeper insight into the onset of an education-oriented public policy in Poland and setting out reasons for its discontinuation. Based on the resulting conclusions, the research hypothesis formulated in the introduction is demonstrated to be correct.

The streaming model of public policy offers the possibility of characterising the ‘window of opportunity’ that opened up for education reformers in the 1990s, who used it to create instruments such as the New School programme. When the window of opportunity closed, however, the importance of the programme was marginalised and the programme was terminated.

The dissemination of the content, methods and educational materials of the New School programme meant that, despite the lack of support and the discontinuation of the programme, a number of schools and education establishments used and continue using the standards learnt during the training period. Years later, the trainees believe that the programme had

shaped them for the rest of their professional life, opened their minds to a new understanding of the role of school in the educational process and methods for organising this process. Notwithstanding, this produced the effect of an 'island-like' rather than systemic development: learning people, learning schools, but not a learning education system. This is because a long-term strategy for the implementation of an education-oriented public policy requires that strategic objectives and interim priorities are clearly defined, and that adequate tools and solutions are chosen at the different stages of the implementation process. The solutions adopted should derive from an evidence-based policy and produce sustainable effects which, when evaluated, could provide the basis for further actions – continuation or modification of plans. When lessons learned are not used in the system, such a process does not occur. The lack of a long-term strategy for the implementation of a public policy is replaced by ad hoc measures, leading to short-term goals that vary according to the political situation. The successive government teams create their education policy by re-building the education development strategy ab initio. The variability of strategic objectives and the failure to draw on the experience of decision-makers and the system hinders the process of building a public policy with the strategic objective of providing the society with appropriate conditions for receiving education of the highest level that meet the expectations and aspirations of individuals as well as social and economic needs.

The conclusions point to the need to prepare not only organizers and providers of education, but also the society who should be involved in debates on the goals and strategies for the development of education. To do this, it is essential to develop deliberative forms that would encourage a social debate on the overall vision of the education system and allow wide public consultations. There is some evidence of efforts focused on creating conditions conducive to the development of such forms in the New School programme in that it defined standards for a discussion and teamwork towards a common vision and mission, to be followed by a school programme, which could be translated into fostering the development of a political culture in the society, characterised by adherence to the principles and values of public co-governance, such as subjectivity, integrity (an evidence-based approach), trust, sharing knowledge, and concern for a common good.

The thesis concludes by outlining possible directions for future research into other solutions with characteristics corresponding to a public policy that had emerged throughout the different periods of the transition process.