

1. Tasks and responsibilities of the psychologist in a Polish school

The state provides psychological care for the child in educational institutions, and this care is strictly defined by the Regulation of the Minister of National Education and Sport of 25 July 2019. (Journal of Laws of 2020, see *Dziennik Ustaw*, 2020). According to this regulation, the psychologist's tasks include conducting research and diagnostic activities concerning students, not only in the case of upbringing and learning problems, but also in order to support the student's strengths. The psychologist is also required to diagnose educational situations in terms of their role in the child's development. It is not enough to indicate educational situations which are incorrect. It is also necessary to determine, through analysis, which are correct and whether they promote the pupil's development, as the psychologist's task is to conduct pro-health education and health promotion among pupils, teachers and parents.

A psychologist employed in education (a school, a kindergarten or a pedagogical-psychological counselling centre) is to provide psychological and pedagogical assistance in the form of prevention, mediation and intervention activities addressed to students, parents and teachers. Another area of activity is related to vocational counselling. A school may employ a vocational counsellor, but in the absence of such a specialist, a psychologist is obliged to help the student in choosing a field of education and career. This help should also be provided to parents involved in the process of making vocational decisions by their child. In addition, the psychologist should use their knowledge and skills to support class teachers as well as educational and problem-educational teams in the implementation of the school's educational programme and the prevention programme, referred to in separate regulations. In the light of the law, the psychologist's role should also include minimising the effects of developmental disorders, preventing behavioural disorders and initiating

various forms of educational assistance for students both in the school and outside the school environment. Moreover, the role of the psychologist is to support teachers and parents in activities aimed at providing equal educational opportunities for students. This assistance consists in giving teachers advice on how to adapt the educational requirements resulting from their respective curricula to the individual psychophysical and educational needs of a student who has been diagnosed with developmental disorders, deviations, or specific learning difficulties that make them unable to meet these requirements.

According to the presented regulation, it is up to the psychologist to initiate and conduct – in a variety of forms – activities aimed at broadening the pedagogical skills of parents and teachers. These may include talks, lectures, workshops on educational and social skills, consultations and counselling.

In the school environment, there are sometimes conflict situations between different parties, for example between parents and the headteacher, or parents and teachers, or between groups of teachers. In such a situation, the school psychologist can mediate so as to resolve or alleviate the conflict. In crisis situations, however, they should intervene in order to overcome the crisis and prevent it from escalating and having negative consequences.

The school psychologist's tasks include establishing cooperation with teachers, the headteacher, parents as well as external educational and mental health institutions.

All these tasks are subordinated to the main goal – the child's welfare considered in individual and social dimensions. It should be noted here that participation in psychological research and psychological interactions is voluntary and free of charge. Psychological assistance can be provided at the request of a student, their parents, teachers, a pedagogue, a psychologist, a speech therapist, a vocational counsellor or a psychological-pedagogical counselling centre, including a specialist clinic.

Psychological and pedagogical assistance in the school is organised mainly in the form of didactic and remedial or specialised classes, such as corrective and compensatory, logopaedic, socio-therapeutic or other therapeutic activities and psycho-educational classes for students and parents. In addition, the psychologist can and should organise classes on education and career choices. On the school premises, the psychologist may also provide counselling for students as well as advice and consultation for parents and teachers. Additionally, psychological help includes organisation of remedial and therapeutic classes in accordance with the relevant regulations, but it is up to the headteacher to arrange such help¹.

¹ Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 9 August 2017 on the organisation and provision of psychological and pedagogical assistance in public kindergartens, schools and institutions (see *Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej* (MEN), 2017).

The school psychologist's tasks and responsibilities resulting from the above regulation are broad in scope and nature and are not limited to intervention and addressing educational and upbringing problems. In practice, however, the school psychologist's activities are often restricted to assisting pupils referred by teachers, which involves diagnosing a child's problems and formulating guidelines on how to proceed, such as referring a pupil to remedial classes. This means focusing on the pupil and their problems without taking into account other aspects of the didactic and upbringing process. Besides, the psychologist conducts classes for young people as part of addiction prevention, which the school is obliged to provide for its students. There is not much room for activities promoting the child's development, and even more so for working with parents and teachers in order to optimise upbringing in the school and in the family. These considerations are supported by the surveys² carried out in 2008 and currently in 2020.

To sum up, it may be worrying that there is not enough emphasis on and time for preventive measures, training of teachers and parents, as well as actions aimed at promoting and supporting the development of students, including the gifted ones. School psychologists are perceived as people whose main task is to intervene in the form of support or assistance in difficult, problematic and troublesome situations. They are not independent creators of psychological activities in the school, but the main and sometimes the only specialists in their field. Their task is to respond to the demand of the moment and to the problems of people participating in school life. In other words, the role of a professional psychologist in an educational institution is interventional in nature, primarily aimed at taking care of a child (children) with educational problems or learning difficulties. However, there is no explicit expectation that the psychologist should provide support and direct care for the student's teachers and parents, and not just for the student. In the English literature on the subject, there are studies that relate to cooperation between the psychologist and teachers, which shows that this cooperation is not sufficient (Anderson, Klassen, Georgiou, 2007; Beltman, Mansfield, Harris, 2016; Gilman, Medway, 2007; Gonzalez et al., 2004).

² (Ad 1) The Second Congress of School Pedagogues and Psychologists was held in Warsaw on 7–8 February 2008 and was organised by the Academy of Special Education, Faculty of Psychology, University of Warsaw, IBO and the Fraszka Edukacyjna Publishing House. The study included 144 persons. Kutra, G. (2010). School psychologist in Poland and other countries. In G. Kutra, E. Sokołowska (Eds.) (2010), *Rola i zadania psychologa we współczesnej szkole* [The Role and Tasks of the Psychologist in a Contemporary School]. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Wolters Kluwer. (Ad 2) The survey was conducted among 86 school psychologists by Grażyna Kutra at the turn of June and July 2020 (unpublished report). (Ad 3) *Raport dotyczący usług psychologicznych za rok 2014–2015* (2015).

In many countries, there are associations of school psychologists as well as international organisations of this type³. The International School Psychology Association (ISPA) is a global organisation of school psychologists from all over the world. It is an organisation of practitioners and scientists who deal with education and upbringing in general, as well as that in educational institutions. ISPA conducts training courses on, among other things, crisis intervention. It has been engaged in children's rights for over a dozen years, promoting these issues in many countries outside Western culture. Such organisations in individual countries could and should bring together school psychologists, providing a forum for meetings and exchange of experience. They would organise support groups and training aimed at professional and personal development, while at the same time weakening the feeling of loneliness experienced by school psychologists in the educational system (as shown by the above-mentioned research).

When developing the concept of the school psychologist's role, which is presented in the next chapter, it is worthwhile to take a look at the practice and regulations concerning this profession in other countries. Below, I present examples of training and requirements for psychologists employed in schools or other educational institutions in selected countries of our globe.

Training of educational psychologists in the world – examples

School psychologists are trained differently in particular countries. I will start with some examples taken from European countries and additionally describe the situations in New Zealand and the USA.

The United Kingdom⁴

To become a school psychologist, one must have an MA or PhD degree in school psychology. They also need a teaching qualification and a minimum of 2 years of school practice as a teacher. Once these conditions are met, a candidate for a school psychologist will have a one-year internship under the care of a school psychologist approved by the British Psychological Society (BPS) in regional educational institutions administered by the government. The intern is assigned a supervisor whose role is to develop an internship programme in

³ Poland does not have an association that would bring together school psychologists – or, broadly speaking, educational psychologists working in educational institutions.

⁴ See HCPC (2020), Health and Care Professions Council BPS (The British Psychological Society): Graduate Basis for Chartered Membership; Training to become an educational psychologist in England.

accordance with the BPS criteria and to monitor its progress. After successful completion of the internship, the candidate is entered on the list of BPS school psychologists and gains full rights to practise this profession independently. A school psychologist is usually in charge of several schools and works in educational or mental health institutions of higher levels.

The Netherlands

This country does not have a specialisation in educational psychology. A master's degree in psychology or pedagogy is enough to work in a school. A school psychologist learns the profession in practice. The Dutch assume that general education is the basis for taking up a job in a particular institution and that an individual gains relevant competences and experience in the course of their work. It is worth noting that generally, during the master's studies, students have between 640 and 960 hours of practice. Additionally, universities and colleges offer a variety of further training courses for MA and PhD graduates. Depending on the educational path chosen and the experience gained, it is possible to apply for enrolment in an appropriate list of specialists in child and youth psychology, educational psychology, etc. However, this is not a necessary condition for practising the profession.

Norway

In Norway, a school or educational psychologist has a title of Counsellor in Upbringing Psychology. This function requires an MA or PhD in teaching, psychology or social sciences, followed by a specialisation in counselling in educational or clinical psychology with elements of educational psychology. As part of the master's studies, students have from 150 to 425 hours of practice, depending on the field. The internship after the specialist studies takes 5 years, including 160 hours of supervision in the case of teaching, and 240 hours in the case of preparing for the profession of a psychologist. To become a supervisor of educational psychologists, one must have an appropriate licence and at least two years of experience as an educational psychologist. Generally, educational psychologists are required to have a bachelor's degree in psychology and a specialist's licence in psychology or counselling.

The European Union

The European Union guidelines recommend that higher education be divided into two stages: bachelor's degree (3 years), and master's degree (2 years), however, practising the profession of a psychologist requires completing