

POLAND

KATARZYNA HALL, *Minster of National Education*: In the past few years we've noticed a huge increase in the number of young people interested in completing high school and continuing on to higher education. Educational aspirations of young Poles are very much on the rise.

TITLE: "Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Poland"

MIROSLAW HANDKE, *Former Minister of National Education (1997-2000)*: The old system was established in the 1950's, we had a Communist education system. When Communism collapsed the democratic government's immediate concern regarding the Polish education system was to eliminate the most ideological content from the Polish school curriculum. However the educational structure stayed exactly the same as it was when introduced in Poland in the early 1950's, during extreme Stalinism. I'm very familiar with that period because that is when I started my own education.

SLAWOMIR BRONIARZ, *President, Polish Teachers Union*: So the changes initiated in 1999 were intended to modernize the education system. And at the same time modify the educational structure to better meet the needs and aspirations of our young people, and better prepare them for higher education. You have to remember, at that time only a small percentage of Polish youth were attending university, only a small number of young Poles sought admission to university. This meant that the vast majority would end their education at the high school level.

TEXT SLIDE: In 2000, Poland's average PISA score in reading: 479. In 2009, Poland's average PISA score in reading: 500. An increase of 21 points in 9 years...

MIROSLAW HANDKE: In Poland during the Communist era, only 10 percent of Polish adults had a university degree. It was one of the worst statistics in the world, so our first goal was to raise that statistic. But we could not achieve this goal without changing the entire education system.

ZBIGNIEW MARCINIAK, *Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Science and Higher Education*: It was clear that a reform was needed in order to address these obvious issues. Our 8-year lower secondary education was insufficient. It was trying to cram all the information of our modern world in those 8 years. This was way too ambitious a task for the majority of students. The result was that the majority of young Poles would simply abandon their studies after completing the 8th year of lower secondary school and not continue onward to upper secondary education and beyond. It was called the Grade-Eight Syndrome.

MIROSLAW HANDKE: The goal of Poland's education reform was not just to add an extra year of lower secondary school, but to make education more attractive, by making it more adaptable to meet the unique talents of each child. So the education

system has become accessible to anyone with the interest and talent to pursue their education as far as possible, according to their own ambition and individual abilities.

TEXT SLIDE: Education reform goals in Poland

- improve the quality of education
- ensure equal educational opportunities for all children
- increase the progression from lower secondary education to upper secondary and high education.

TEXT SLIDE: 1999 Education Reform in Poland

- extended lower secondary education by one year for all students
- introduced standardized national examinations
- enhanced school autonomy

TEXT SLIDE: These reforms

- gave Polish children more time to learn the essential skills and opened pathways to further education
- provided clear standards and goals for all students to attain
- stimulated teachers to modernize course content and introduce innovative teaching techniques.

TEXT SLIDE: The experience of the Lower Secondary School No. 103 in Warsaw-Wawer...

TEACHER: *The schematic drawing of the human body made by Leonardo da Vinci, was even sent into space, as sort of a business card of the human race, in case somebody found it. If there are other civilizations in outer space, and if they were to discover Leonardo da Vinci's "Vetruvian Man" they would know what human beings look like. To draw a human body is difficult, but this is what we are going to do today.*

ELZBIETA DALECKA, *Vice Principal and Math Teacher, Lower Secondary School No. 103 in Warsaw-Wawer:* With lower secondary school students now staying in school one year longer than under the previous education structure in Poland, they are more mature. Which also has an influence on the maturity of decisions they make. Because children now study a full range of subjects, they have more opportunity to discover a special talent or explore a particular subject of personal interest, and pursue their passions in upper secondary school. As for the subjects in which they are less strong, we now have the extra time in lower secondary school to better address their academic limitations.

JOANNA BEROWSKA, *Chemistry Teacher, Lower Secondary School No. 103 in Warsaw-Wawer:* Today we pay more attention to student choices in lower secondary school to see what interests them the most. We encourage them to try different subjects so they can explore and choose what interest them the most- the

subject that gives them joy and is the most natural for them, the subject that fulfills them the most.

JOANNA BEROWSKA: *Okay so first pour some water into this glass- maybe a little more. It's just water, pure water here.*

STUDENT, *Lower Secondary School No. 103 in Warsaw-Wawer*: To have an extra year of lower secondary school gives us the opportunity to improve our knowledge before continuing to upper secondary school.

STANISLAW DRZAZDZEWSKI, *General Counselor, Ministry of National Education*: The reason our reform was implemented so rapidly and efficiently is because it gave young people a better chance to discover their full potential in ways which were unavailable to them before. This helped soften the harsh divisions between vocational education and general education, thereby opening pathways to further education. The goal of the reform was to improve student learning so that our tertiary education enrollment would increase to 80%, and we achieved that.

TEXT SLIDE: Standardized national examinations in Poland

- provide uniform standards by which to measure student progress.
- reduce teacher subjectivity
- enhance the ability to monitor strengths and weaknesses of the system overall.

KATARZYNA HALL: I think one of the most important factors that improved results was the general examination system. Now there is a general exam administered to all students at the end of primary school, and another general exam at the end of lower secondary school, so that all teachers are fully aware that they must prepare students for these exams- the results of which will be made public. So the teachers make the effort to prepare their students accordingly. The exams are not evaluated on a pass/fail basis. This means that students are not ejected from the system based on their exam score. They must progress in their study path whatever their score. Therefore, student performance on the general exams should not limit their future. However, the lower secondary school leaving exam is a factor in the recruitment for upper secondary schools.

ELZBIETA DALECKA: *So, did you figure it out?*

STUDENT: *Yes, I did, it might look a bit messy, but I got the right answer.*

ELZBIETA DALECKA: *Where did you make a mistake?*

STUDENT: *Here.*

ELZBIETA DALECKA: *Do you know why?*

STUDENT: *Yeah because I didn't multiply it by "k".*

ELZBIETA DALECKA: *So now you get it, right?*

STUDENT: The lower secondary school leaving exam is very important because if you get a low score you have to lower your expectations of school choice for upper secondary education. But I'm not yet sure whether I want to pursue vocational or general education at the upper secondary level. I'm interested in a lot of different things, and there are so many choices. I haven't decided yet, but the exam results will help me in my decision.

TEXT SLIDE: Greater school autonomy in Poland

- allows schools greater latitude for customization of curricula
- provides teachers with freedom to modernize content and select textbooks
- creates an environment wherein teachers can apply innovative teaching practices.

SLAWOMIR BRONIARZ: Before the reform, the education of 15-year-olds in Poland was focused on an almost encyclopedic memorization of facts. A 15-year-old child had the responsibility to memorize a certain amount of knowledge. Based on that knowledge he was assessed but at the same time that knowledge was rather useless. There was no practical use for that knowledge in the world.

ELZBIETA DALECKA: *Now you'll have these tasks to do- and it all depends on you to decide how you're going to do them. Are you going to work together? Are you going to divide up the tasks and assign them to particular partners? Some of the tasks are easy, some of them are harder. When you're done with your tasks just raise your hand and your group gets a point.*

ELZBIETA DALECKA: Teaching methods have also changed since the reform. Teachers now participate in many in-service training programs in which we emphasize active teaching methods. We depart from the model where teachers stand in front of a board and lecture. We try to engage the students in the lecture. We also try to use problem-solving methods, which is not easy. For instance, we try to show students that math is not about resolving problems using memorized algorithms or equations. We try to teach students to identify the problem, solve it on their own and- perhaps most challenging- have them draw their own conclusions from the exercise. Since the implementation of reforms on lower secondary education, we have seen the gap narrowing between weak and strong students. This tells us that our new way of conducting lower secondary education has allowed weaker students to achieve better results.

MIROSLAW HANDKE: Sometimes when you do something for a long time you fall into a routine. Which is not necessarily a good thing. I think that reform was a good thing in a sense because it knocked the old system out of its stagnancy.

ZBIGNIEW MARCINIAK: Today in Poland there is a widespread belief that higher education is not only for the privileged, but for everyone who aspires to higher education. This has resulted in a five-fold increase in university enrollment. At the end of the 1990's we had about 400,000 university students in Poland, which is about 10 percent of eligible youth. Currently we have almost two million college students. That means every other young person in this age range who is eligible to admission to university is actually enrolled in university. It's a huge success. Many other countries struggle with the same problem: how to encourage greater participation in higher education. We have dealt with this in Poland by giving all young people the chance to realize that they can achieve academic success. They are no longer doomed to a poor-quality education that leads to a dead-end. All doors are open to those who put in the necessary effort. Finishing lower secondary school in Poland today opens many more possibilities for a bright future. Many young people are grabbing this opportunity.