

School Friendly but Demanding: National Curriculum Reform in Poland

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In December 2008 the Polish Parliament approved the introduction of the National Curriculum reform, which was co-financed with European Funds. It aims to increase the quality of education and build the Knowledge-Based Society in Poland. This is a strategic goal of the Council of Europe set in Lisbon for the entire EU in March 2000.

The reform implementation will start in September 2009 and it will take 8 years before the whole system is transformed (Table 1).

Table 1. Implementation Stages of the New National Curriculum in Poland

School Year	New Curriculum				
	Primary	Junior High	High School – different types		
			Comprehensive	Technical	Vocational
2009/2010	I	I			
2010/2011	II	II			
2011/2012	III	III			
2012/2013	IV		I	I	I
2013/2014	V		II	II	II
2014/2015	VI		III	III	III
2015/2016				IV	Complementary I
2016/2017					Complementary II

The foundations of the National Curriculum reform include the following:

- compulsory pre-school education for 5-year-olds introduced,
- pre-school education swiftly followed by school education,
- lowered schooling age (6-year-olds start primary education),
- 6-year post-primary education combined into one system,
- minimum 4 years of post-primary school for a complete general education,
- wide selection of advanced subjects for High School students,

- Junior High School Leaving Exam – continued with the additional foreign language exam,
- compulsory subjects for High School Leaving Exam – Polish, Mathematics (since 2009/2010), one foreign language at the basic level plus the subjects selected by students (at least one at the advanced level).

In terms of Geography, the main changes refer to the compulsory number of teaching hours (i.e. 45-minute lessons) and the contents taught at the education stages III (Junior High) and IV (High School). Table 2 presents both the old and the new system in respect of the teaching time.

Table 2. Teaching Geography in Old and New Curriculum

	The Old Curriculum	The New Curriculum	Changes
Junior High	Classes 1-3 – 120 lessons		No change
High School (ordinary)	Classes 1-2 – 90 lessons	Class 1 – 30 lessons	- 60
	Class 3 – Leaving Exam – minimum 60 lessons	<i>Q: How can these students join Leaving Exam preparation classes after Class 1?</i>	
High School (advanced)	Classes 1-3 – 150 lessons plus 60 lessons for Exam preparation [210]	Classes 1-3 – 270 lessons	+ 60

As presently publishing houses can create their own textbooks, the organization of the contents varies. Table 3 presents the contents of the textbooks published by the Association of Polish Adult Educators according to both the old and the new National Geography Curriculum.

Table 3. Geography Content Organization

Education Level	Class	Possible organization of Geography contents	
		The Old Curriculum	The New Curriculum
Junior High	I	Physical Geography Human Geography World Countries	Physical Geography Europe
	II	Europe	Poland and its Neighbours
	III	Poland	World Countries – Case Studies
High School	I	Physical Geography Human Geography	Changing World
	II	Human Geography Changing World	Exam Preparation
	III	Exam Preparation	

Changes viewed as positive:

1. Less material taught in the same time span (so far the Curriculum has been criticized for being overloaded).
2. Longer Leaving Exam preparation, which should lead to a better exam preparation and better education level among those who select the subject.

Changes viewed as negative:

1. Lower number of compulsory Geography classes, which may result in a lower level of general knowledge of the subject among the society.
2. High School Geography teachers will have to face a possible drop in teaching hours, as this will depend on the number of the students taking the
 Geography Leaving Exam.

Questioned changes:

1. No compulsory revision of the material already done in Junior School.

No doubt the fast development of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has brought great changes in the way we work and live. These innovations

have touched all the spheres of human activity, including education. As human and social capital is an important element of modern societies, the transformation into the new Knowledge-Based Society is a must. However, it remains to be seen whether all this will move Geography into the future or whether it will be a step backwards.

Based on:

Knowledge Society

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/knowledge_society/index_en.htm

Ministry of Education

http://bip.men.gov.pl/akty_prawne/akty_prawne.php#rozp_23122008

Association of Polish Adult Educators – Junior High and High School textbooks