

Mariola Kinal

**PIONEERS
PIONEERS
OF POLISH PRESCHOOL
AND EARLY PRIMARY
EDUCATION
PIONEERS**

Pioneers of Polish Preschool and Early Primary Education

M a r i o l a K i n a l

Stowarzyszenie Naukowe Przestrzeń Społeczna i Środowisko

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Pioneers of Polish Preschool and Early Primary Education

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I n t r o d u c t i o n

The importance of preschool and early primary pedagogy stems from the special role that early childhood plays in human development. It is during this period that the foundations of cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional development are laid, and the skills acquired by the child form the basis for more complex forms of reasoning, action and learning. Early education is therefore not merely about preparing children to master the school curriculum. It creates the conditions in which curiosity, a sense of agency, self-regulation, the ability to cooperate and beliefs about one's own capabilities develop. The quality of these experiences is important both for the child's future learning and for their well-being (Andrzejewska & Lewandowska, 2021; Brzezińska et al., 2024; OECD, 2021).

A child learns both in situations deliberately planned by the teacher and through everyday participation in social life. Observation and imitation of people in their environment are key mechanisms for acquiring behaviours, ways of communicating and responding (Bandura, 1977; Brzezińska et al., 2024). Therefore, it is not only the content of lessons that is of pedagogical significance, but also the way in which adults relate to children, resolve conflicts, respond to mistakes, organise time and space, set rules and allow children to have a say in decisions. The day-to-day culture of the group is an integral part of the process of upbringing and learning, including aspects not covered by the formal curriculum.

The role of a teacher in preschool and early primary education should not be limited to simply reproducing content from teaching guides, following ready-made lesson plans or carrying out a series of exercises and worksheets. It requires observing the child, interpreting their behaviour and ways of reasoning, planning, flexibly adapting activities, documenting their development and critically evaluating the outcomes of one's own work. Reflectiveness does not mean arbitrariness, but rather the integration of academic knowledge, an understanding of a specific situation, and responsibility for the pedagogical decisions made. Studies on teacher professionalism and the quality of early years education indicate that critical reflection on practice, the quality of everyday interactions, and the ability to adapt activities to children's needs and interests help to create conditions that match their capabilities and learning strategies (Andrzejewska & Lewandowska, 2021; Bałachowicz & Adamek, 2017; Klus-Stańska, 2018; OECD, 2021).

An integral aspect of a teacher's work is the holistic organisation of the process: the daily routine, the balance between activity and rest, the physical environment, peer relationships, cooperation with families, safety, and the emotional atmosphere of the group. The quality of early years education is shaped by a child's daily interactions with the teacher, other children, materials and the environment, and its outcomes encompass not only learning but also development and well-being. Such work requires the teacher to possess diagnostic, teaching, educational and organisational skills, as well as a commitment to continuous professional development. Neither a positive attitude towards children nor parental experience can replace professional training for teaching (Andrzejewska & Lewandowska, 2021; Grochowalska, 2025; OECD, 2021).

Fostering motivation to learn is also of particular importance. During the early years of education, a child largely forms their beliefs about whether exploring the world is a source of curiosity or, above all, a duty subject to external control, and whether effort leads the child to understanding and a sense of competence. Conditions that support autonomy, competence and social relationships foster intrinsic motivation and more autonomous forms of extrinsic motivation, whilst excessive control can undermine learners' engagement and well-being. The way in which educational experiences are organised in nursery and the early years of primary school can therefore either strengthen or limit a child's willingness to make cognitive effort (Głoskowska-Sołdatow, 2022; Michalak, 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

The complexity of these tasks explains why the development of pedagogy and scholarly reflection within preschool and early primary education has remained closely linked to the professionalisation of the teaching profession. This was not a one-sided process. Advances in our understanding of children raised the standards expected of those undertaking educational work, whilst the development of courses, seminars, textbooks, journals and systematic forms of teacher training made it possible to organise, verify and disseminate pedagogical knowledge. Professionalisation was therefore both a consequence of and one of the prerequisites for the development of theories, methodologies and original concepts for working with children (Andrzejewska & Lewandowska, 2021; Bałachowicz & Adamek, 2017; Jakubiak, 2015; Leżańska, 1998). The history of this field also shows that many contemporary proposals – concerning children's activity, learning through action, individualisation, the integration of content and children's agency – have earlier counterparts. Contemporary approaches often develop or reinterpret ideas already present in pedagogical thought, relating them to current knowledge and changed social and institutional conditions.

The development of Polish preschool and early primary pedagogy was a long-term process, shaped by social changes, transformations in family and working life, advances in our understanding of children, and the needs of educational practice. In the 19th century, nursery schools played a significant role. These institutions, established mainly by charitable organisations, social organisations, religious communities and private individuals, gradually expanded their care functions to include upbringing and educational tasks. Their development was accompanied by the emergence of reflection on the aims, content, methods and conditions of working with young children (Bołdyrew, 2016; Jakubiak, 2015; Karbowniczek, 2011).

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, interest in child development, children's needs and learning processes intensified. Advances in psychology, pedology and experimental research influenced the way in which child-rearing was approached. At the same time, teaching methodologies for individual subjects were taking shape, textbooks, journals and collections of games were being produced, and forms of vocational training for nursery nurses, childminders and teachers were being developed. Following the restoration of independence, these achievements were incorporated into the process of organising the Polish education system. During the interwar period, the ideas of 'New Education' were promoted, foreign concepts were adapted to Polish conditions, research into children was developed, and new methodological and organisational solutions were sought (Jamrożek, 2020; Jakubiak, 2015).

After the Second World War, the priority was to rebuild educational institutions and the teaching workforce, followed by the development of curricula and operating principles for preschool and the early years of primary education. The development of education took place within a centrally managed education system, which encouraged the standardisation of approaches but, at the same time, limited their diversity. During this period, theories of upbringing and teaching, specific methodologies, diagnostic approaches and the academic training of teachers were developed. Preschool and early primary pedagogy thus consolidated their position as fields of scholarly reflection on the child and their education (Bobrowska-Nowak, 1983; Leżańska, 1998).

The political changes following 1989 were accompanied by a pluralisation of theoretical positions and practical approaches. Discussions on alternative concepts were revived; constructivist, emancipatory and critical approaches were developed; and the child was increasingly viewed as an active participant in the learning process and a co-creator of their own experiences. Contemporary preschool and early primary education does not adhere to a single theoretical or methodological model. It is characterised by a multitude of research perspectives and original concepts, as well as by a constant re-examination of the aims, conditions and quality of early years education (Andrzejewska & Lewandowska, 2021; Bałachowicz & Zbróg, 2021).

The album 'Pioneers of Polish Preschool and Early Primary Education' [Twórcy polskiej pedagogiki przedszkolnej i wczesnoszkolnej] was produced as part of a project carried out by the 'Social Space and Environment' Scientific Association, funded under the Ministry of Science and Higher Education's 'Social Responsibility of Science II' programme. The aim of the publication is to introduce a wide audience to the achievements of those who have contributed to Polish thinking on the upbringing and education of young children, including through the organisation of institutions, the development of curricula and methods, conducting research, training teachers, producing textbooks and journals, and social activism.

The concept of biographical entries adopted in this album moves away from a presentation of figures based primarily on factual data, such as dates and places of birth, educational background or positions held. This information has been included to the extent necessary to situate the achievements of individual figures within their historical and institutional context. The primary focus of the descriptions is on the issues they addressed, the ideas they developed, and the ways in which these were realised through their research, teaching, organisational and social activities. The aim was not to provide a complete account of the lives of the figures presented, but rather to offer a concise overview of the distinctive nature of their work and its significance for the development of preschool and early primary education. The chosen format necessitated the selection of facts, publications and concepts; consequently, the biographies included do not exhaust the body of work of the figures presented. The selection of content is the author's own and has been tailored to the substantive objectives of the publication. The biographies thus serve as a starting point for further, independent exploration of the work of the individuals presented. The concept for the selection and organisation of the figures was developed by Dr hab. Anna Królikowska, Associate Professor at UIK, and reviewed by Professor Roman Leppert.

The material has been organised into five sections, corresponding to the successive stages in the development of Polish thought on preschool and early primary pedagogy. This division is both thematic and chronological in nature and does not constitute a strict periodisation. As the work of many individuals spanned more than one period, their placement in the album was determined primarily by the predominant nature of their body of work and the significance of their activities for the development of pedagogical theory or practice.

The first part, 'The roots of Polish early-childhood education', outlines the beginnings of reflection on the upbringing of young children and the establishment of the first institutional forms of care and education. Stanisław Jachowicz, Bronisław Trentowski, August Cieszkowski, Edmund Bojanowski, Adam Goltz, Ewaryst Estkowski, Teresa Pruszek-Mleczkowska and Stanisław Karpowicz represent both the development of pedagogical thought and practical initiatives relating to nurseries, primary education, children's literature, the promotion of education and the training of those working with children.

The section 'Getting to know the child and shaping educational practice' illustrates the gradual integration of pedagogical practice with knowledge of child development. Jan Władysław Dawid, Józefa Joteyko and Aniela Szyćówna advanced research in psychology and pedagogy, whilst Maria Weryho-Radziwiłłowiczowa, Jadwiga Chrzęszczewska, Maria Kretkowska, Justyna Strzemeska, Maria Sariusz-Jaworska and Aleksandra Gustowiczówna contributed to the development of working methodologies and the professional training of nursery teachers. The work of Maria Germanówna, Klementyna Stattlerówna and Barbara Żulińska broadens this perspective to include physical education, organisational activities and religious education.

The section 'New concepts, methods, and means of education' presents figures whose work was concentrated primarily in the first half of the 20th century. Stefania Marciszewska-Posadzowa, Zofia Żukiewiczowa and Helena Czerwińska helped to lay the curricular, organisational and methodological foundations of preschool education. Natalia Cicimirska, Zofia Maria Bogdanowicz, Marian Falski, Maria Dzierzbicka and Ida Maria Schätzel developed and promoted methods, textbooks, games, teaching aids and new media used in education. Janusz Korczak and Ida Merżan, on the other hand, represent the approach to education based on the child's agency and their participation in community life.

The section 'Development of early education theories and methodologies' covers the post-war period of systematising pedagogical knowledge and developing working methodologies. Maria Fiedler, Zofia Topińska, Maria Kwiatowska, Irena Dudzińska and Antonina Sawicka dealt with various areas of preschool education; Barbara Wilgocka-Okon focused on the issues of maturity and school readiness; whilst Jadwiga Walczyna, Maria Cackowska and Ryszard Więckowski addressed the organisation of early primary education, the integration of education and individualisation. Wiesława Śliwerska complements this picture with the practical implementation of the concept of education in freedom.

The final section, 'Original concepts and new perspectives', highlights the diversity of contemporary pedagogy. Władysław Puślecki and Ryszard Łukaszewicz developed alternative models of education, whilst Edyta Gruszczyk-Kolczyńska, Bronisław Ročławski, Marta Bogdanowicz and Krystyna Duraj-Nowakowa devised recognisable concepts and methodological approaches. The work of Józefa Bařachowicz, Ewa Filipiak, Dorota Klus-Stańska and Jolanta Zwiernik represents contemporary trends in research on children, learning, school culture and childhood. Sabina Guz and Barbara Surma are developing Polish thinking on Montessori pedagogy, whilst Barbara Wlaźnik focuses on preschool methodology, peer relationships and children's creative activity.

Given the album format of this publication, the decision was taken not to include extensive footnotes directly alongside the biographical entries. The bibliography relating to individual figures is compiled at the end of the album; a list of sources for quotations has also been included. This approach serves to maintain clarity of structure, whilst also enabling the verification of information and allowing readers to explore selected topics in greater depth on their own. This list is not exhaustive and does not cover the full body of work of the figures presented.

The visual aspect of the album is interpretative in nature. The images were created using generative artificial intelligence tools, based on available photographs and iconographic material. They do not constitute a documentary reconstruction of the figures' appearance, nor are they a substitute for historical sources. Their purpose is to help the contemporary audience connect with the individuals presented and to highlight the ongoing relevance of the issues concerning children, teachers and the organisation of education, as addressed in their work.

This publication is intended as a concise, thematically organised guide to the work of selected authors and does not aim to present a comprehensive history of Polish preschool and early primary pedagogy. It is aimed at a wide audience – including both those with a professional or academic background in pedagogy and readers without specialist training in this field. For this reason, the concepts and theories are presented in an accessible manner, whilst retaining their essence and ensuring factual accuracy. The aim of the publication is to popularise historical and pedagogical knowledge and to suggest possible avenues for further reading and analysis of sources. This album can serve as a starting point for a deeper exploration of the concepts, practices and figures that have contributed to the development of Polish pedagogy, as well as preschool and early primary pedagogy.

Mariola Kinal

The roots of Polish early-childhood education

to 1918

1796-1857

The roots of Polish early-childhood education

JACHOWICZ

Stanisław



‘Just remember this today, my dear child! That once moments have passed,
they will never return.’

– Stanisław Jachowicz

He was a poet, educator, and pioneer of children's literature and education in Poland. He was one of the first Polish educators to recognise the immense importance of early childhood in shaping moral, social, and patriotic attitudes. He was born in 1796 in Dzików near Tarnobrzeg. He studied at the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Lviv. He devoted his life to working with children and to pedagogical and literary writing.

Jachowicz is considered a pioneer of Polish children's literature, but also one of the first practitioners of preschool and early primary pedagogy. While working as a teacher in Warsaw, he initiated numerous educational initiatives aimed at the youngest children – primarily from poor families. He organised nurseries, gave lessons, distributed books, and supported orphans and children after the November Uprising. He also established a scholarship fund and worked to popularise affordable, accessible educational literature. He initiated the first model nursery in 1839. Thanks to his inspiration, regulations and pedagogical postulates were developed and implemented in the nurseries. Educators were required to complete a pedagogical course, and punishments were not used, nor was coercion or fear used as a form of control. Instead, play was used as the primary educational method, utilising song, dance, poetry, and literature.

His pedagogical work was based on the belief that moral and patriotic education should begin at an early age. He believed that raising children meant not only imparting knowledge but, above all, shaping character, empathy, and love for one's homeland. Jachowicz emphasised tenderness, gentleness, and understanding in contact with children, making him one of the pioneers of a modern, humanistic approach to education.

In his works, he combined didactic and moralising elements with an attractive, rhythmic literary form, which made children eager to read his fairy tales, poems, and stories. Not punishment, but understanding, example, and love – these, according to Jachowicz, were the fundamental tools of education.

He was interested in methodological issues, paying attention to the way learners organise concepts and shape their imaginations. He developed fairy tales and books used by teachers as teaching aids, adapted to children's development: ‘Mother's Conversations with Józia’ [Rozmowy mamy z Józią], ‘Józia's Readings’ [Czytania Józi], ‘A Book for Stefcio’ [Książeczka dla Stefcia], ‘A Souvenir for Eryczek’ [Pamiątka dla Eryczka] and ‘A Souvenir for the Children’ [Dzieciom na pamiątkę]. He also introduced song as an educational method, implementing the principle of combining learning with play. Jachowicz also edited ‘Dziennik dla Dzieci’ [Children's Daily], Poland's first daily periodical for children, which served as both a form of entertainment and education, containing literary texts, fairy tales, mathematical problems, interesting natural facts, and moral advice. In doing so, he contributed to shaping early primary and preschool education models in Poland.

He left behind a rich literary and pedagogical legacy and a lasting mark on the history of raising children in Poland. His ideals – an education based on love, respect, and adaptation to the child's needs – remain relevant to this day and are part of the humanistic pedagogy movement.

The roots of Polish early-childhood education

1808 – 1869

TRENTOWSKI

Bronisław



‘A child should be a child whilst they remain a child.’

– Bronisław Trentowski

He was a Polish philosopher, educator, and publicist, known primarily as the creator of an original philosophical and pedagogical system. He studied at the University of Warsaw and then at German universities, including Freiburg, where he earned his doctorate and habilitation. His thought was mainly influenced by German idealism, the philosophy of Hegel, and reflection on national spirituality.

In pedagogy, Trentowski accentuated the crucial importance of national and civic education, and was particularly interested in early education (preschool and early primary). He believed that education should begin during the prenatal period, with attention paid to the mother's health and hygiene. After a child's birth, he emphasised their comprehensive development, both physical and mental, through appropriate play and learning conditions. He underscored the importance of early moral education, the development of independent thinking, and decision-making skills, including through children's participation in student governments. Trentowski opposed mechanical rote learning, especially in the field of reading, and developed his own, so-called 'philosophical method' of learning to read, an alternative to syllable formation and phonics.

Trentowski advocated a universal, uniform elementary school for all children regardless of social background, in both rural and urban areas. According to him, teachers were expected not only to impart knowledge but also to play a role in upbringing, instilling in children truthfulness, independence, and respect for their elders. He strongly emphasised the need for professional training for teachers, their ongoing education, and appropriate remuneration.

His most important pedagogical work, 'Chowanna, or the system of national pedagogy' (1842), remains an important point of reference for educational thought in Poland to this day.

The roots of Polish early-childhood education

1814-1894

CIESZKOWSKI

August



**‘This institution is designed to care for and provide a natural education for children,
with almost no formal teaching.’**

– August Cieszkowski

He was a Polish philosopher, political thinker, and social activist, considered one of the most prominent representatives of Romantic philosophy in Poland. He studied in Berlin and Heidelberg, where he encountered German idealism, particularly the philosophy of Hegel. However, he soon developed his own historiosophical concept, the basic tenets of which he presented in his work ‘Prolegomena zur Historiosophie’ (1838). In this, he developed the idea of a ‘philosophy of action’, according to which action is the highest form of spirituality and the key to transforming the world.

Cieszkowski viewed education as the basis for social renewal. He emphasised the importance of the earliest stages of life in shaping morality, responsibility, and civic attitudes. In his view, education should not be limited to imparting knowledge but rather be a process of total human development, encompassing body, soul, and conscience. Cieszkowski spoke of the need for a state-run, universal educational system that also encompassed the youngest children as early as the 19th century. This was innovative for his time, when formal education typically began much later. According to Cieszkowski, the family played a primary educational role as the ‘first school of love and duty’, where a child acquires basic experiences of social relationships and moral principles. The early-learning process should stimulate both the child’s intellect and will through active participation, cooperation, and the development of responsibility.

His practical educational work deserves particular attention, focusing both on shaping future intellectual elites and educating children and adolescents from lower social classes. Cieszkowski was a staunch advocate for universal access to education, particularly in rural areas. He popularised the idea of rural nurseries – care and educational institutions for peasant children – and criticised so-called ‘folk schools’, which he considered devoid of national spirit and incapable of shaping cultural identity.

In his view, elementary school should not only teach basic skills but, above all, develop students’ aesthetic sensitivity. This required influencing children’s imagination and emotions, awakening a need for contact with art and beauty, and fostering creative expression in various artistic forms. In this way, education was intended to raise students’ cultural levels and prepare them for conscious, active participation in social life.

This was the foundation upon which intellectual-practical learning was to develop, focused on learning about the world and preparing for work in contemporaneous society. Cieszkowski emphasised that a child who was animated with an interest in their surroundings would, in the future, demonstrate ongoing activity in acquiring knowledge and developing their own skills.

1814-1871

The roots of Polish early-childhood education

BOJANOWSKI

Edmund



‘At nursery school, children should learn how to live before they learn to read and write.’

– Edmund Bojanowski

He was a Polish social activist, practising educator, and founder of ‘nurseries’ – the prototype of the modern rural kindergarten. He studied literature, philosophy, and psychology in Berlin and Wrocław. Despite his lack of formal pedagogical training, he developed an original and innovative concept for educating young children. He believed that national freedom could only be achieved through the development of a younger generation, which would, in the future, decide on affairs of state.

In 1850, in Podrzecze near Gostyń, he opened his first nursery – an innovative rural educational and care facility, initially run by lay girls (‘ochroniarki’). Shortly thereafter, Bojanowski, concerned about the sustainability of the nurseries and the formation of those caring for the children, founded the Congregation of the Sisters Servants of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The nursery was intended to be more than a care facility – it was to become a second home for the children. It offered a family atmosphere, with children learning through play, spiritual care, and opportunities to develop their interests. Each day combined prayer, work, study, and free time in harmony with the liturgical year and nature.

Bojanowski promoted integral education, encompassing religious development (each day of the week had a different spiritual focus: for example, Monday – love of God, Tuesday – devotion to the Guardian Angels, Wednesday – prayer for the deceased, Thursday – Eucharist, Friday – commemoration of the Passion of the Lord, Saturday – a day dedicated to the Virgin Mary), moral, patriotic (learning about folk customs), physical (appropriate, healthy nutrition and loose-fitting clothing), and aesthetic development. The daily programme in the nurseries combined play, learning, work (e.g., splitting peas, weeding vegetable patches), and prayer, harmoniously adapted to the rhythm of the day, the liturgical year, and the natural surroundings. Importantly, Bojanowski placed particular emphasis on education tailored to the individual needs and pace of a child’s development. He recognised their agency, dignity, and right to activity – both physical and intellectual. He opposed the use of corporal punishment. He promoted simplicity, independence, and daily exercise, seeing them as a natural way to support the development of the youngest.

A key role in his concept of education was played by the child’s immediate environment. Therefore, the day care centres were run by trained carers – ‘guardians’ – who were aware of their role. Bojanowski emphasised that an educator should be calm, dedicated to serving the child, willing to make sacrifices, and above all, capable of carefully accompanying the child in their development. In addition to theoretical knowledge, diagnostic skills – the ability to recognise the needs of the children and plan appropriate educational activities – were also valued.

In his view, spiritual and religious life was an integral part of education. Bojanowski viewed it not as a separate sphere, but as the foundation of daily growth. It was through in-depth religious formation – rooted in the rhythm of the day, week, and liturgical year – that a child would discover the inner strength to lead a dignified and worthwhile life. He believed that the best way to protect a child was to expose them to the goodness and beauty of the world, so that they could develop their personality harmoniously.

1817-1888

The roots of Polish early-childhood education

GOLTZ

Adam



‘As we have said many times, a nursery should be characterised by motherly care; therefore, gentleness and particular patience in dealing with children are its essential characteristics.’

– Adam Goltz

He was a Polish social activist, journalist, and politician who played a significant role in shaping modern education in the 19th-century Kingdom of Poland. He was born in Sieniawa in 1817. He studied philosophy in Berlin and Paris. He was a co-founder and journalist of the ‘Roczniki Gospodarstwa Krajowego’ [Annals of the National Economy] and actively participated in the gatherings in Klemensów. From 1862 to 1867, he served as a member of the Public Education Council in the Government Commission for Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment, where he was involved in educational reforms.

In 1860, he published his work ‘On Rural Nurseries’ [O wiejskich ochronkach], in which he put forward the concept of the nursery as an educational institution for rural children. He emphasised the importance of preschool education as the foundation for further education and social development. His ideas were similar to those of Edmund Bojanowski, but Goltz distinguished himself by placing a particular emphasis on the organisation and administration of educational institutions, creating a model that was repeatable and practically functional. He paid particular attention to: 1) the regulation of daily life in the nursery: he emphasised the need to establish a daily schedule that combined play, learning, and responsibilities, similar to modern kindergartens, but in an administratively well-thought-out manner; 2) the selection and training of carers: he emphasised that those running the nurseries should be prepared for educational work, familiar with their responsibilities, and have clear guidelines. This was an innovative idea, as many early nurseries operated spontaneously, without planning or supervision; 3) material conditions and infrastructure: he described the need for appropriate premises, hygiene, lighting, furniture, and equipment for learning and play. His thinking could be described as a practical approach to institutions that went beyond mere pedagogy; 4) documentation and supervision: he suggested keeping records of children and the work of the day care centre, which constituted a form of systematisation and quality control of educational work.

His approach to education combined care, teaching, and educational aspects with the organisation of the facility to ensure its effective and safe operation. Goltz provided practical guidance on how to run a preschool – from staff management and scheduling to ensuring appropriate conditions and systematic monitoring. His approach can be considered a prototype for modern preschool management.

Adam Goltz left a lasting imprint on the Polish educational system. His work and activities contributed to the development of preschool and early primary education, especially in rural areas. By combining innovative educational methods with practical organisational solutions, he created a model of preschool that functioned effectively and could be replicated elsewhere. His concepts are considered one of the foundations of modern preschool education in 19th-century Poland.

The roots of Polish early-childhood education

1820 – 1856

ESTKOWSKI

Ewaryst



‘Just as water into a sponge, so do all examples, words and conversations soak into a child’s soul.’

– Ewaryst Estkowski

He was a teacher, publicist, reformer of elementary education, and pioneer of national pedagogy. Born in 1820 in Pakość, near Inowrocław, he was one of the most important Polish educators of the first half of the 19th century, particularly distinguished in the field of elementary and national education. Although he did not establish preschool institutions in the modern sense (nurseries), his work and pedagogical thought had a significant impact on shaping the foundations of the pedagogy of early primary education in Poland. He devoted particular attention to the child, and their moral, intellectual, and national development, from the earliest years of life.

Estkowski was a teacher by training and a reformer by vocation. In 1840, he graduated from a teachers’ seminary in Poznań. Soon after, he became involved in the educational movement in Greater Poland, and in 1848, he founded the journal ‘Szkoła Polska’ [Polish School], which became one of the most important institutions of Polish pedagogy in the 19th century, providing a forum for discussion on pedagogy but also a collection of practical methodological materials for teachers. In ‘Katechizm pedagogiczny dla nauczycieli wiejskich’ [Catechism of Pedagogy for Rural Teachers], published in 1850, he set out instructions for the effective teaching of children – this was Estkowski’s most important work.

His work focused on transforming elementary school into an institution of national and moral education for children. In his view, preschool and early primary education was to be not only a preparation for life, but also a foundation for building a Polish identity, especially under the conditions of the Partitions. Estkowski recognised the importance of a child’s first years of life and called for the professional preparation of teachers to work with the youngest. He believed that teachers should understand children’s psychology, their needs, and developmental potential in order to provide effective yet gentle education. His views on methods of working with children were particularly innovative. He criticised rigid rote learning and demanded student involvement, learning through action and experience. He advocated integrated learning, connected to the world around the child – in a spirit similar to that developed much later by Maria Montessori. He created a collection of reading books ‘Czytanka dla dzieci wiejskich’ [Reading for Country Children], combining reading instruction with patriotic and moral education, tailored to the children’s developmental abilities and also connected to their everyday lives.

One of Estkowski’s significant contributions was his concept of teacher education and formation, especially for those working in rural areas. He argued that elementary teachers must be moral and patriotic role models, but also possess teaching competence. He was particularly focused on the educational function of schools – he believed that teachers not only teach but also educate children.

Estkowski placed great importance on teaching Polish, history, and religion in elementary schools, which were intended to shape children’s national identity. He was also one of the first Polish educators to speak openly about educational equality for peasant children and the need for access to education from an early age, regardless of social status. He called for the creation of rural schools and the education of girls – a progressive stance for his time. He left behind a legacy that became the foundation of modern pedagogical thought in Poland.

PRUSZAK- MLECZKOWSKA

Teresa



‘She was committed to the physical and mental development of children and to fostering a sense of national identity in them.’

– Maria Loyola Opiela about Teresa Pruszek-Mleczkowska

She was a student of Stanisław Jachowicz. Encouraged by Adam Wiślicki, she opened a private kindergarten in 1870. The kindergarten, founded by Pruszek-Mleczkowska, was housed in a spacious building with access to a large garden, where outdoor activities and games could be conducted. To ensure the institution's high standard, she employed a well-trained staff of educators, including Wanda Skłodowska, a gymnastics teacher, and a doctor. Due to the relatively high fees introduced at the first Froebel Garden in the Kingdom, only children from wealthy families attended. Pruszek-Mleczkowska also provided training for educators, who, by observing children's activities, acquired practical skills. After the kindergarten closed in 1872 due to financial difficulties, she continued to offer Froebel courses for educators.

In 1874, Pruszek-Mleczkowska reopened the kindergarten, but in more modest conditions, and ran it until her death in 1885. Children from ages 4 to 10 attended; the older group (from age 6) followed an elementary school curriculum. To ensure that the partitioning powers did not interfere with the institution's operation, she renamed it the 'Children's Gymnastics Facility' and introduced classes in gymnastics, horse riding, swimming, dancing, and cycling.

She contributed to the promotion of the Froebel system in the Kingdom of Poland. Following the example of Pruszek-Mleczkowska's institution and her experiences, similar Froebel gardens were established in other cities across the Kingdom of Poland, although many of them operated only for short periods. The excessive focus on didactic activities and rote learning led to much criticism from many educators.

Pruszek-Mleczkowska contributed significantly to the development of Froebel pedagogy. She sought to modernise work methods in preschools, drawing inspiration from the ideas of Maria Pape-Carpantier—especially the importance of observing children and introducing creative, engaging methods, learning through play and experimentation. In her institution, Pruszek-Mleczkowska fostered the social and patriotic development of children.

The roots of Polish early-childhood education

1864 – 1921

KARPOWICZ

Stanisław



‘Today’s teaching methods not only fail to develop intellectual abilities, but stifle and distort them, replacing freedom and the natural workings of the mind with artificial rote learning, without understanding the subject matter, and without purpose or structure. This is how people teach when they have no need for people who think for themselves, but only for those who are capable of fulfilling the roles assigned to them’.

– Stanisław Karpowicz

He was a pioneer of Polish pedagogy, which he shaped without an academic degree, through self-education and as a passionate practitioner. He had already worked in Vilnius as a teacher in private homes, before later moving to Warsaw, where he conducted extensive publishing and social-educational activities.

In 1903, Karpowicz initiated the formation of the clandestine Pedagogical Society – a centre for debate and educational reform, which he led until its dissolution in 1905. As a result, he developed, among other things, a curriculum for an eight-year general secondary school and a primary school. During the school strike, Stanisław Karpowicz became actively involved in educational activities. Together with Helena Willman-Grabowska and other activists from the Pedagogical Society, he established clandestine pedagogical courses for teachers, with a particular emphasis on future preschool teachers. A key element of the courses was clandestine teaching, which included lectures and discussions on modern ideas in pedagogy: the individualisation of education, moral education, and the importance of the Polish language.

In 1911, he founded the ‘Dom Dzieci’ [Children’s Home] in Warsaw – a private educational facility for children aged 5–9 (approximately 30 pupils). This was a facility where Karpowicz tested his methods, focusing on the development of individuality, independence, creative work, and social and moral life, rather than rote learning. Unfortunately, the Home operated only until the outbreak of the First World War (1914). Karpowicz belonged to the positivist movement, which was expressed in the in-depth use of natural sciences in education. He emphasised that classes be prepared so as not to overwhelm students with unnecessary facts, but rather to present selected principles of natural science in a thoughtful manner. He criticised education as a collection of encyclopaedic content, advocating the development of honesty, a passion for research, and a moral sense of knowledge. His pedagogy was rooted in biology and sociology, aiming to prepare young people for social life and critiquing the bourgeois educational system.

Karpowicz viewed the education of his time as a form that led to the deterioration of social relations. At the heart of his educational ethos were solidarity, justice, altruism, and empathy. He also advocated for the suppression of selfishness and the fostering of civic and altruistic feelings as early as preschool.

He wrote: ‘Today’s teaching methods not only fail to develop intellectual abilities, but stifle and distort them, replacing freedom and the natural workings of the mind with artificial rote learning, without understanding the subject matter, and without purpose or structure. This is how people teach when they have no need for people who think for themselves, but only for those capable of fulfilling the roles assigned to them.’ (Karpowicz, 1929, p. 8).



Getting to know the child and shaping educational practice

turn of the 20th century

CHRZĄSZCZEWSKA

Jadwiga



‘The aim and purpose of this talk is not to teach, but to develop.’

– Jadwiga Chrząszczewska

She was a Polish educator, editor, and author of children’s literature, one of the pioneers of Polish preschool and early primary pedagogy. Born in Kowal in 1853, she died in Warsaw in 1935. Within her era, she stands out for her practical integration of three fields: (1) institutional work – she ran a school and a ‘freblówka’ (Froebel kindergarten) in Warsaw on Nowy Świat Street, implementing the principles of child-centred education. Chrząszczewska’s Warsaw ‘freblówka’ is considered a significant point on the map of new educational institutions, implementing work in small play circles, manual activities, singing, and observational outings, which corresponded with the elementary curriculum in the school’s early years; (2) early primary teaching methodology – published in the textbook ‘Pogadanki z dziećmi i wskazówki metodyczne’ [Chats with Children and Methodological Tips]; (3) influencing children’s culture through editing and co-creating magazines for the youngest (including ‘Przyjaciel Dzieci’ [The Children’s Friend]). This combination of preschool practice, systematic methodological reflection and editorial supervision of content for children makes her work distinctive on the map of Polish elementary education at the turn of the 20th century.

In her methodological approach, Chrząszczewska drew on Froebelian principles but adapted them to the realities of Polish elementary school. In ‘Pogadanki...’ she emphasised guided conversation and exercises based on the child’s experience, observation, and manual tasks; she recommended gradation of difficulty, multi-sensory learning, and the correlation of linguistic, natural, and mathematical content. The teacher was expected to keep systematic notes on the student’s progress and plan the rhythm of learning so that knowledge was operational, i.e., usable in everyday life. This understanding of methodology anticipated the later emphasis on integrated education and pedagogical diagnosis in early primary education. Her literary output (tales, stories, and short stories) was consciously aligned with educational goals, shaping sensitivity, language, imagination, and elementary concepts of nature. Research on children’s press and books indicates that Chrząszczewska combined plot with an educational function, and her editorial involvement in ‘Przyjaciel Dzieci’ [The Children’s Friend] embeds these principles in a wide readership. She created numerous educational publications for children, mothers, and teachers. In ‘Pogadanki z dziećmi i wskazówki metodyczne’ [Chats with Children and Methodological Tips], she discussed conversation with children as a teaching method, presenting specific examples of conversations with children, including about objects children use every day, mathematical concepts, and interpersonal relationships. She emphasised the importance of directly observing the things being discussed, and, starting from children’s experiences and observations, she strove to encourage them to create generalisations about the world. Together with Janina Porazińska, she also created ‘Mój elementarz’ [My Primer], which was one of thirty primers published in Poland before World War II.

Her educational philosophy emphasised aesthetics and the learning environment. She paid attention to illustrations, colours, and the organisation of the child’s environment, which we now see as an early postulate for educational classroom architecture and activity corners. Chrząszczewska strongly opposed educational methods based on fear and corporal punishment. She believed that adults too often deprived children of the right to independent thought and expression, treating any manifestation of independence as disobedience or rebellion that should be punished. In her view, such behaviour led to an upbringing based on fear, stifling a child’s natural curiosity and activity. Chrząszczewska advocated for an upbringing based on trust and respect, in which children had the right to voice their opinions and express their feelings.

1859-1914 Getting to know the child and shaping educational practice

DAWID

Jan Władysław



‘That is why, in no other profession does a person play such a vital role
as in the teaching profession.’

– Jan Władysław Dawid

He was one of the most outstanding Polish educators of the turn of the 20th century, the founder of educational psychology and a pioneer of the scientific approach to the education of early primary-age children. His work focused on reforming elementary education, moving away from verbalism in schools, and introducing developmental psychology as a foundation for teachers' didactic and formative work.

Dawid placed particular importance on the early years of schooling, considering them crucial for a child's further intellectual and moral development. He criticised the dominant teaching model in elementary schools, based on rote memorisation and the mechanical practice of skills. He argued that early primary education should primarily develop in children the ability to perceive, think, speak, and act independently, not merely the technical skills of reading and writing.

Dawid's most important practical contribution to early primary education methodology was the concept of 'the science of things', developed in his work 'Nauka o rzeczach' [The Science of Things]. He postulated that the teaching process in early primary classrooms should be based on direct contact between children and objects and phenomena. Learning should proceed from the specific to the general—from observation and manipulation of objects, through conversation and description, to concepts and names. This method was intended to integrate the child's linguistic, cognitive, and manual development, while simultaneously laying the groundwork for later subject-specific learning.

Dawid emphasised that a primary school teacher should be a careful observer of a child's development. He advocated systematic pedagogical observation, taking into account individual developmental differences, and adapting the pace and content of teaching to the students' actual abilities. In this sense, he was one of the first Polish educators to consistently advocate for individualised teaching in early primary education. Another important element of his thought was his critique of excessive discipline and academic pressure. Dawid pointed out that anxiety, rushing, and being overloaded with tasks weaken a child's cognitive activity and lead to discouragement. In early primary education, he recommended a calm pace of work, frequent changes in activities, and combining learning with movement and practical activities. He saw this as a prerequisite for preserving a child's natural cognitive curiosity.

In his work 'O duszy nauczycielstwa' [On the Soul of Teaching], he formulated the concept of the teacher-creator, particularly relevant for teachers of the youngest children. He believed that early primary teachers should not merely implement a curriculum but should independently shape the teaching process, responding to students' needs and interests. He emphasised the importance of empathy, pedagogical warmth, and the teacher's moral responsibility for the child's development.

Dawid's work had a lasting impact on Polish early primary education. His ideas became a reference point for later educational reforms, the 'new education' movement, and the development of educational psychology. His model of early primary education, based on observation, action, and child involvement, formed the foundation of modern thinking about early primary education in Poland.

WERYHO- RADZIWIŁŁOWICZOWA

Maria



‘A subject that captures one’s attention will naturally give rise to questions. The answers to these questions lead to interesting conversations. The questions asked by a child reveal both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of their perception.’

– Maria Weryho-Radziwiłłowiczowa

She took part in Higher Pedagogical Courses for Women (St. Petersburg), Froebel courses, and gymnastics courses. After returning to Poland, she was active in overt and clandestine educational and social organisations committed to advancing the education of children and women during the Partition period. She collaborated with progressive circles in Warsaw, promoting modern educational ideas.

She was the editor of the popular magazine ‘Ogródki Dziecięce’ [Children’s Gardens], dedicated to preschool education. She published methodological articles, lesson plans, advice for educators, and texts promoting a modern approach to children as active participants in the educational process (learning to ask questions and develop thinking skills). She also wrote for ‘Przegląd Pedagogiczny’ [Pedagogical Review], presenting the methodology for working with Froebel gardens in schools and at home.

In 1887, she opened her own kindergarten at 12 Chmielna Street in Warsaw. This institution, run according to the principles of Froebel’s pedagogy, became a model for subsequent initiatives of this type. In addition to teaching, it offered gymnastics, active play, nature observation, and hands-on activities. The kindergarten also provided practical training for future educators, as well as being a place for training for mothers and holding gymnastics classes for women and children.

In her pedagogical thinking, Maria Weryho-Radziwiłłowiczowa emphasised that the child should be at the centre of the educational process. She believed in learning through action, play, observation, and experience, rejecting mechanical rote learning and teacher-led talks. She promoted education through work, observation, and contact with nature. She emphasised the importance of children’s initiative in organising games and activities, placing great importance on the child’s physical development – daily gymnastics, outdoor activity, and games and play were, in her opinion, an integral part of education. She wrote about her pedagogical views in such publications as ‘Wychowanie przedszkolne’ [Preschool Education] – devoted to the Froebel system, ‘Jak zająć dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym’ [How to Engage Preschool Children], and ‘Metoda wychowania przedszkolnego. Podręcznik dla wychowawców’ [The Method of Preschool Education: A Manual for Educators].

Professionalising the preschool teacher profession was of particular importance to her. She led courses for teachers, combining theory with practice – participants not only acquired pedagogical knowledge but also observed work with children and learned through experience. Weryho emphasised that not only should preschool teachers possess substantive training, but also communicative and social skills, enabling them to collaborate with their surroundings and parents. Her work had a significant impact on the development of preschool education in Poland and the shaping of standards for preschool teacher education. After Poland regained independence, Weryho was involved in establishing preschools, organising seminars for teachers, standardising preschool programmes, and promoting modern teaching methods. Her textbooks and methodological materials became an important reference point for many institutions across Poland.

1863-1947 Getting to know the child and shaping educational practice

KRETKOWSKA

Maria



‘The upbringing of a person is a highly complex process; it requires great love and patience.’

– Maria Kretkowska

She was a teacher, journalist, and social activist associated with the United Circle of Landowning Women. She organised the care and education of rural children and trained women for educational work. She ran clandestine classes, summer camps, and co-financed the School of Household Management for Women in Mirostawice, whose programme she described in the magazine ‘Świat Kobiety’ [Women’s World]. She also published articles on women’s education and social work, and in 1909 published the book ‘O ochronkach wiejskich’ [On Rural Nurseries]—one of the first Polish studies on the organisation and methods of work in rural nurseries. In this work, Kretkowska presented a comprehensive model of the nursery as an environment for moral, physical, and social education. She defined upbringing as the primary goal of the nursery, while treating formal teaching as subsidiary – it was intended to ‘shape all human faculties’. The nursery was intended to educate through example, conversation, work, and play, in the spirit of simplicity and love of neighbour.

Kretkowska described three types of nurseries—from well-equipped ones to the most modest, rural houses—and provided practical tips for furnishing the rooms: the size of the desks, lighting, cleanliness, gardens, and even the colour scheme of the interior. She placed great importance on hygiene and order, considering them the first step in social education. One of the most innovative elements of her concept was the introduction of systematic pedagogical documentation. The teacher was to keep a diary with a daily schedule, topics for talks, types of play, and notes on children’s progress. Such records served as a platform for reflection and individualisation of work, a novelty in preschool practice at the time. As Kretkowska herself noted, this would be ‘inconvenient for teachers, but highly desirable’.

In the methodological section, Kretkowska defined the basic forms of work: talks, games, crafts, singing, gymnastics, and excursions. She understood a talk as a consciously conducted conversation between the carer and the children, developing thinking and language. She viewed play as a natural path to learning and character development, which should always follow a talk, while singing and movement were seen as means of moral and physical education. Crafts were intended to develop dexterity, aesthetics, and a sense of order, while excursions fostered observation and a love of nature.

The figure of the nursery teacher occupies a central place in her approach. She is a woman with a well-prepared professional background, cheerful, patient, pious, and sensitive to children. Kretkowska emphasised the need for theoretical preparation and knowledge of child psychology. She also emphasised the need for a teacher to have a passion for the profession. She recommended reading contemporary textbooks (e.g., those by J. Chrzyszczewska and M. Weryho), highlighting the need to combine practice with pedagogical reflection.

In her concept of discipline, she rejected corporal punishment and authoritarianism. Children were expected to understand the meaning of rules, not succumb to fear. The nursery, she believed, was to be a place of safety, order, and trust. Describing the programme of the School of Household Management for Women in Mirostawice, she emphasised that teachers and their students would live on equal terms, without special privileges, to foster a warm, familial atmosphere. Kretkowska urged women from the landed gentry to establish nurseries and bring the light of education to the countryside, recognising that raising children was a patriotic and national duty. She placed particular importance on women’s practical education.

JOTEYKO

Józefa



**‘Every individual should therefore have access to knowledge and attain the level
and type of education that is most suitable for them.’**

– Józefa Joteyko

She was a physician, psychologist, educator, co-founder of Polish pedology, and one of the most prominent reformers of early primary education at the beginning of the 20th century. After studying natural sciences in Geneva and medicine in Brussels and Paris (obtaining her doctorate in 1896), she joined the Solvay Physiological Institute and the University of Brussels, where she conducted psychophysiological research and, from 1908, edited the ‘Revue Psychologique’. In 1911, she organised the First International Pedological Congress in Brussels, and a year later, the International Pedological Faculty. In 1916, she took up a chair at the Collège de France, and after returning to Poland (1919), she was employed at the State Pedagogical Institute in Warsaw in the Department of Pedagogical Psychology.

Her contribution to preschool and early primary education was twofold. First, Joteyko introduced the tools of experimental psychology into educational practice; second, she designed an elementary school system based on child developmental psychology. She believed that reform should begin with primary school, with the curriculum and methods adapted to children’s abilities. She demanded universal, free, and compulsory seven-year primary school as a common stage for all children up to approximately 14 years of age; she considered earlier differentiation of paths to be contrary to developmental psychology and the public interest.

She understood pedology as the study of the child, combining methodical observation and experimentation to understand physical development, sensory excitability, memory and imagination, attention, work capacity and fatigue, type and level of intelligence, and character traits—all in order to effectively organise teaching and upbringing. According to Joteyko, a teacher should recognise students’ individual characteristics, be empathetic, and foster an atmosphere of cooperation with students and parents. She believed that teachers should receive not only theoretical education but also knowledge of sociology and economics. She placed great importance on the teacher’s creative personality.

She placed particular importance on children with special needs. She advocated for separate facilities and methods for students with disabilities (hearing impaired, visually impaired, intellectually disabled, and ‘difficult children’) to protect the well-being of the classroom community and provide these students with adequate developmental conditions. In elementary education, she emphasised activating methods, children’s independent work, and comprehensible and emotionally meaningful content; she proposed replacing school grades with standardised tests that supported diagnosis and counselling. She emphasised the appropriate selection of teaching methods, particularly at the primary level, when they should be individualised depending on the child’s cognitive abilities. She demanded that every school employ a school psychologist whose role would be to provide psychological care for students and support teachers in planning individualisation. She believed that schools can be effective by establishing collaboration with a variety of specialists and parents. Joteyko’s achievements entrenched the idea in Poland that a young child’s education should be based on reliable knowledge of their development, not on tradition or social privileges.

SZYCÓWNA

Aniela



‘Above all, sensible parents try to get to know the person to whom they are
to entrust their children.’

– Aniela Szycówna

Her scholarly and social work formed a link between the theory of developmental psychology and the practice of preschool and early primary education. She was born in 1869 in Warsaw, into a family of the intelligentsia, at a time when women's education was in its formative stage. She studied at Helena Budzińska's boarding school, then prepared for the teacher's exam under the supervision of Sokołowska, which she passed in 1886. She continued her intellectual development in clandestine pedagogical courses and at the 'Flying University', participating in the community of women teachers involved in educational work. Szycówna became involved early in the Warsaw pedagogical movement, collaborating with the Society of Elementary School Teachers. She organised lectures and courses for educators and edited children's and pedagogical magazines, including 'Moje Pisemko' [My Writings] and 'Nowe Tory' [New Tracks]. In 1910, she became head of the Mickiewicz Psychological Workshop at the Warsaw Charitable Society, where she observed children and developed guidelines for elementary school teachers.

At the centre of her pedagogical reflection was the child—a being who learns about the world through action, experience, and contact with others. Szycówna emphasised that the educational process should be based on a thorough understanding of the student's individuality. Before teaching, a teacher should assess the child's abilities, interests, and dispositions. To this end, she recommended keeping student journals, which were intended to provide a systematic record of students' behaviour, progress, and difficulties. This practice preceded contemporary methods of pedagogical diagnosis.

Szycówna advocated for a modern, operational approach to teaching, one in which knowledge would not be disconnected from life but would instead develop children's independence and resourcefulness. Learning was to be conducted within a six-day weekly schedule, with Saturdays reserved for revision and consolidation of material. The planned pace of work was intended to foster a sense of order, discipline, and systematicity. At the same time, she opposed overloading students – free time and play were essential elements of the educational process. Her concept of elementary education clearly defined the division of learning stages. The first, for children aged 7-9, focused on the study of objects, the native language, arithmetic, religious stories, singing, and handicrafts. The second (ages 10-14) expanded the curriculum to include biology, hygiene, physics, mathematics, history, and foreign languages. The third stage, from age 15, deepened these areas, introducing practical and vocational content. Patriotic and social education were present at every level of education – students were expected to grow in a spirit of responsibility, solidarity, and love for their homeland.

According to Szycówna, a teacher was not only a conveyor of knowledge but, above all, a spiritual guide. They should influence students through example, calmness, and kindness, not through harsh commands. She advocated for continuous professional and moral development, as raising children required not only competence but also a vocation. Szycówna also believed that teachers and parents lacked sufficient knowledge of how to work with children, which resulted in overloading children with verbal knowledge and the use of punitive educational methods. A significant element of her achievements was the popularisation of Froebel's ideas—working with children through play, activity, and contact with nature. Her psychological approach was combined with a profound humanism: every child, regardless of background, deserves respect and individualised care. Her concepts, such as individualised teaching, planned organisation of work, child observation, and learning through experience, remain relevant points of reference in pedagogy to this day.

STATTLERÓWNA

Klementyna



‘The aim of school is to educate creative and active individuals, to draw out their maximum potential in line with their personal interests and abilities, and to guide them freely, through skilful selection, regardless of their background or financial circumstances, towards suitable career paths.’

– Klementyna Stattlerówna

She was a Polish teacher, poet, activist for independence and educational matters, and came from a family with strong artistic traditions. During the Second Polish Republic, she became involved with the Polish Teachers' Union, rising to the position of vice-president of the organisation and playing a significant role in shaping educational policy and the professional teaching movement, including preschool teachers.

In the 1930s, Stattlerówna co-founded a group that demanded the inclusion of kindergartens in a unified state education system and the raising of the professional status of educators. In this context, her article, 'Sekcja Wychowawczyń Przedszkoli Z.N.P. - jej zadania i cele' [The Polish Teachers' Union (ZNP) Preschool Educators' Section – Its Tasks and Goals], published in the inaugural issue of the magazine 'Przedszkole' [Preschool], is particularly significant. In this article, she presented the programmatic manifesto of the newly formed section, defining its place within the ZNP structure and its scope of responsibility towards kindergartens and educators. In the article, she clearly outlined the Section's three main tasks. First, the Section was to strive to improve the quality of work in preschools – supporting the development of methodology, exchanging experiences, organising training courses and teaching observations, and co-creating criteria for the professional qualifications of educators. Second, it was to launch and organise social campaigns to establish and maintain preschools. She emphasised that, despite legislative progress, there were still no clear regulations regarding the financing and maintenance of preschools. The goal was both to mobilise local communities (local governments, associations, parents) and to build the belief that preschool is not a luxury but a social need. Third, the Section was to raise awareness across broad segments of society of the need for preschool as an institution where financial outlays pay off in the health, development, and socialisation of children: it sought social recognition for the educator's profession. Stattlerówna argued that preschool work requires high levels of qualification, yet it remained undervalued by society. The task of the section was to build the prestige of the profession, strive to equalise the status of nursery educators with primary school teachers, and fight for their employment rights.

In this way, Stattlerówna consistently moved away from viewing kindergarten as a primarily caring and charitable institution. In her view, kindergarten is a component of the education system, linked to state policy and the trade union movement, and the kindergarten teacher is a teacher with full professional rights, co-responsible for shaping citizens. The Kindergarten Educators Section, which Stattlerówna co-organised and co-represented, was intended to serve as both a professional representative body and a centre for pedagogical thought, with its own journal, network of local branches, and programme of work.

At the same time, Stattlerówna remained involved in independence and educational activities – she participated in the Piłsudski resistance movement, and during the interwar period, she combined trade union activity with teaching and served as vice-president of the Polish Teachers' Union. After World War II, she was remembered as an outstanding teacher and cultural and educational activist.

ŻULIŃSKA

Sister Barbara



‘A teacher is God’s partner in the creation of humankind.’

– Sister Barbara Żulińska

She was a pedagogue, educator, and theoretician of religious education, one of the most prominent figures in Catholic preschool and early primary pedagogy during the interwar period. She was born in 1881 in Lviv to a family of intellectuals. After graduating from high school and completing pedagogical studies, she began working in the kindergarten at the Lviv Teachers’ Seminary, where she quickly gained a reputation as a talented teacher and methodologist. In 1913, she joined the Congregation of the Sisters of the Resurrection of Our Lord, combining her religious vocation with her educational and pedagogical work.

From 1917, she directed the State Nursery Seminary in Lviv, educating a new generation of kindergarten and elementary school teachers. She was a proponent of an education based on love, trust, and respect for children, and also a proponent of incorporating religious and moral reflection into daily teaching practice. She emphasised the professional training of teachers, who should combine psychological and methodological knowledge with a deep spiritual culture.

She authored numerous publications for educators, parents, and children. She created religious works for children, emphasising that the content of the book should not only interest the child but also stimulate them to think and experience the stories presented. She was one of the first to introduce religious books into nurseries that were adapted to the developmental abilities of children. Her first articles for parents and educators began appearing in ‘Słowo Polskie’ [Polish Word] in 1906. Żulińska presented her vision for educating the younger generation in the books ‘Nauka moralności narodowej. Obowiązki Polki’ [Teaching National Morality. A Polish Woman’s Duties] and ‘Matka-Obywatelka – pogadanki o wychowaniu dzieci’ [Mother-Citizen – Talks on Raising Children]. She was also interested in implementing the pedagogy of the New Education (Froebel, Montessori), which she included in ‘Kilka uwag w sprawie ogródków dziecięcych, podług sprawozdania z podróży naukowej’ [Some Remarks on Kindergartens, Based on a Report from a Research Trip]. She believed that religiosity should not be a subject in the classroom, but the essence of all educational work. She wrote that a child learns goodness not through commandment, but by example and the daily experience of love, truth, and justice.

In her works, Żulińska emphasised that raising a child in preschool and the early years of schooling primarily involves shaping their moral and religious attitudes in everyday situations. The overarching educational goal is striving for the Resurrection. The educator’s task is not only to teach, but also to constantly and carefully develop the child’s conscience (teaching that also shapes character), thus teaching truthfulness, a sense of duty, a willingness to help others, and self-control. Żulińska emphasised that children acquire these attitudes through adult example and through constant, calm educational contact, not through mere external discipline or fear of punishment. She treated religious education, understood as living in truth and responsibility, as a principle that organises all preschool and school education, not as a separate subject.

Her work represents a unique blend of Christian spirituality and scholarly pedagogical reflection. Unlike secular theorists of the era, Żulińska saw preschool education not as preparation for school, but as a process of shaping the whole person—intellectually, morally, and spiritually.

GERMANÓWNA

Maria



‘All physical activities, especially games and play, provide teachers with the best opportunity to get to know the children’s character and disposition.’

– Maria Germanówna

She was a physical culture activist and author of methodological studies of games, activities, and movement exercises, which found widespread use in preschool and primary school education in the first decades of the 20th century. Connected with the Lviv community, she was active in the Lviv Movement Play Society, participating in the dissemination of modern education through movement. At the beginning of the 20th century, she was delegated to Great Britain, from where she brought and disseminated the rules of women’s basketball to Poland, treating it as an educational tool rather than a competitive sport.

Germanówna’s most important contribution to preschool and early primary education was the publication ‘Gry, zabawy oraz ćwiczenia na boisku w szkole powszechnej. Podręcznik dla nauczyciela’ [Playground Games, Activities and Exercises at a State School. A Teacher’s Handbook], developed as a practical guide for teachers and educators. In the book’s introduction, the author clearly emphasised the superiority of outdoor games and activities, which, in her opinion, best serve to strengthen a child’s body and spirit. She viewed outdoor activity as an essential element of school hygiene and a means of counteracting the mental fatigue resulting from prolonged intellectual exertion. Germanówna emphasised that games and play provide health benefits and also play a crucial role in a child’s moral and social development. Through games, children learn to follow rules, persevere, exercise self-control and cooperate within a group. She saw particular educational value in the natural rotation of roles; children learn both to lead others and to obey commands, which stems from the rules of the game, not from an imposed hierarchy. This avoids subservient or domineering attitudes, and relationships between children develop in a more natural and balanced way. A key element of her concept was the belief that play reveals a child’s true character. Germanówna emphasised that children behave freely and spontaneously during play, allowing teachers to better understand their dispositions, temperaments, and inclinations. Observing play was an important pedagogical tool for her, enabling subsequent individualisation of educational work.

Germanówna clearly distinguished two stages of the teacher’s role: first, they should thoroughly teach the children the rules of the game, and then allow them as much freedom as possible. According to Germanówna, children have the best fun when they are familiar with the game and can engage in it without constant adult interference. The teacher’s role is to ensure safety, prevent conflict and aggression, and at the same time allow the children to express themselves naturally.

Germanówna also provided specific methodological guidelines for organising physical activity sessions. She recommended that approximately two-thirds of the time be devoted to games and play, and one-third to exercises. Short exercises should appear between games, and more strenuous exercises should be interspersed with lighter ones. Each lesson should begin with games that engage the whole body and end with a procession, which helps children calm down and relax. She also emphasised the importance of free-flowing physical activity during breaks between mental activities. The book also included tips on organising the school playground, appropriate clothing for children (overprotecting them from the cold was not recommended), and equipping the school with basic gymnastic equipment. It highlighted exercises with equipment (including balls, hoops, and swings), games and activities with chants, running games, jumping games, grappling games, and games that could be played in the classroom.

Getting to know the child and shaping educational practice

GUSTOWICZÓWNA

Aleksandra



‘The principle of freedom, a belief in the fertility of the imagination, simplicity of teaching methods and simplicity in their application, respect for the child’s individuality, and a deep conviction that not only is it possible to grant a child freedom of action without harming them, but that this is absolutely essential for their development.’

– Aleksandra Gustowiczówna

She belonged to the first generation of Polish exponents of Maria Montessori’s system and pioneers of modern preschool education. She was active in the teaching community of Galicia, which was subordinate to the National School Council. At the request of this institution, Gustowiczówna was sent to Rome in 1914 to complete a teaching internship at Maria Montessori’s Children’s Home (Casa dei Bambini). Her task was to familiarise herself with the new educational system and prepare its adaptation to the realities of Polish preschools.

After returning to Galicia, she published the article ‘System wychowawczy Dr Maryi Montessori’ [Dr. Maria Montessori’s Educational System] in ‘Czasopismo Pedagogiczne’ [Pedagogical Journal] in 1918 – the first comprehensive study of this method in Polish, based on direct observations at Casa dei Bambini. In the text, Gustowiczówna painted a picture of a kindergarten different from the nurseries of that time. She described a simple and clean space filled with light, in which everything was adapted to the children’s height and needs: light tables and chairs, low shelves, orderly arrangement of teaching aids, a garden, and space for movement. The teacher did not direct the children with words of command, but accompanied them in their work, observing and assisting only when necessary. The children moved freely, but without chaos. Gustowiczówna wrote that order and concentration reigned everywhere, and she considered this evidence of the children’s internal discipline, not external coercion.

Describing the daily routine of the Casa dei Bambini, she emphasised the children’s natural behaviour. She was surprised to see that even very young children maintained order around them, put materials away, and helped each other without rushing or coercion. She saw this as a manifestation of ‘internal discipline’, stemming from a sense of duty and satisfaction with one’s work. She wrote that in Montessori education, discipline is not imposed but grows from the experience of freedom and order. A child becomes obedient because they find meaning in their work, not because they fear punishment. This observation was one of the most important conclusions for her from her stay in Rome.

Gustowiczówna also analysed the social environment in which the first Casa dei Bambini was established – the impoverished district of San Lorenzo. She noted that the method, created for the children of workers and the unemployed, proved effective not because of its extensive equipment, but because of the educator’s approach. She saw this as a particular value of the method, its potential for transfer to Polish conditions, including rural and urban disadvantaged communities. Her article was no mere dry report, but an attempt at practical adaptation. Gustowiczówna pointed out that elements of the Montessori system could be gradually introduced by changing the attitude of educators, avoiding punishment, organising space, and encouraging children to become independent in simple everyday activities. She also described the basic principles of the method and presented specific types of exercises. She saw this as a direction for the development of all preschool education—a shift away from verbalism and external discipline towards education through action and work.

SARIUSZ- JAWORSKA

Maria



‘Under skilful guidance, a child develops and learns intellectually, absorbs new concepts and learns to express their thoughts logically.’

– Maria Sariusz-Jaworska

She was a pedagogue associated with the Lviv-based Polish Pedagogical Society. She co-created the concept of educating preschool staff during the reconstruction of the Polish state after 1918. Her work focused on professionalising the nursery teaching profession and transforming nurseries from day-care facilities into modern educational institutions.

Sariusz-Jaworska collaborated on the development of the ‘Podręcznik dla ochroniarek’ [Handbook for Nursery Teachers] (Lviv 1920), published by the Preschool Education Section of the Polish Pedagogical Society. This publication is considered the first attempt in Poland to systematically describe the professional qualifications of a preschool teacher. It emphasised the need for appropriate pedagogical preparation, personal culture, health care, and occupational hygiene, as well as the ability to plan activities, observe children, and cooperate with families. It also emphasised the need for professional development and the development of a teacher’s moral and social attitudes.

The most important among her achievements was the design of a two-year nursery teacher training programme, established in Lviv in 1920. The programme aimed to prepare nursery and kindergarten managers and provided both general education and specialised training for working with young children. It encompassed four primary goals: shaping candidates to be healthy and upright individuals, equipping them with management skills and independence, ensuring thorough professional preparation, and developing social competences.

The plan assumed that theoretical instruction would be accompanied by regular teaching practice in a model nursery, while the boarding school was intended to foster a professional ethos, discipline, and a culture of coexistence. Particular attention was paid to the health of future educators through contact with nature, so it was proposed to locate the training institutions in rural areas, near larger cities. This allowed for both community work in rural settings and the opportunity to benefit from the cultural and educational offerings of urban centres.

The teacher training project also included organisational proposals for the preschool system: separating childcare centres from schools, entrusting facilities exclusively to qualified professionals, establishing a fund to support the development of childcare centres, and establishing methodological publications. Mandatory preschool education for children aged 3-7 and equalising the professional status of childcare workers with primary school teachers were also propounded.

Sariusz-Jaworska’s work stood out in the context of her era for its institutional approach to preschool and its consistent emphasis on the role of qualified staff. Her concepts were in accordance with the transition from the ad hoc care for the youngest children to systemic preschool education, based on curriculum, pedagogical practices, child observation, and a professional ethos.

Getting to know the child and shaping educational practice

STRZEMESKA

Justyna



She was a teacher, author of methodological texts, and one of the first Polish co-creators of a coherent concept of preschool education. She was active in the late 19th century in the pedagogical community associated with the Froebel movement, and her name appears alongside Maria Weryho as one of the initiators of the systematic training of preschool educators. The most important result of this collaboration was the textbook ‘Metoda wychowania przedszkolnego. Podręcznik dla wychowawców’ [The Method of Preschool Education. A Manual for Educators], considered one of the first Polish attempts to comprehensively describe work in a Froebel preschool (nursery, or Froebel garden) in Polish.

Strzemeska clearly defined preschool education as being not merely childcare or care, but a consciously guided process of a young child’s moral, social, mental, and physical development. The teacher’s role is not to supervise a group of children or occupy their time, but to organise the educational environment. In this sense, preschool has its own educational purpose, not simply to prepare for primary school. Strzemeska and Weryho write about preschool education as an independent stage, not a lower, ancillary level of elementary school. In Strzemeska’s textbook, she strongly emphasises the role of the educator. The educator should know each child individually, observe them throughout the day, and guide them without coercion, patiently directing their attention, accustoming them to order and cooperative activities using a calm tone. The educator should not act in an ad hoc manner or impulsively; they should have a daily schedule and a work plan, and be able to assess when the child needs support and when they should be allowed to act independently. Discipline, in this approach, is not about obedience enforced by threats, but about developing habits of order, punctuality, shared rhythm, and concern for the well-being of the group. Strzemeska views play as the primary educational tool for preschoolers. Play is not a respite from education; play is education. Through guided play and shared games involving movement, children learn to control their bodies, focus attention, follow the rules of the game, cooperate with others, and complete activities. The manual describes circle work, group singing, movement games, rhythmic exercises, and handicrafts. Strzemeska views the latter (folding, arranging, tying, modelling, and simple work with materials) as training hands and attention, fostering patience, precision, and a sense of order. For her, handicrafts are also a path to developing thinking (perception of shape, size, relationships) and character (perseverance, sense of duty).

According to Strzemeska, educators should constantly communicate with children, not in the form of one-sided moralising, but rather in the form of short conversations about what children are doing, seeing, and feeling. Children’s speech should develop through interaction with activities, not simply through the repetition of pre-defined formulas. In this sense, Strzemeska presents preschool as an environment where children’s language and actions are intertwined. The manual also emphasises the need for daily routines and a consistent schedule of activities. Preschool children feel safe when they know what’s coming: a prayer or greeting, a group circle, active play, table time, a meal, rest, crafts, and farewell. This rhythm has educational value in itself, and the teacher is responsible for maintaining it. This, in turn, means that the work of educators requires professional training. Strzemeska emphasises that caring for young children is not a natural occupation for every woman; it requires pedagogical knowledge, patience, a systematic approach, and responsibility. This position placed her among the first people in Poland to speak of kindergarten as a field of professional work, not ad hoc charity.

New concepts, methods, and means of education

the first half of the 20th century

New concepts, methods, and means of education

1874-1955

MARCISZEWSKA- POSADZOWA

Stefania



**‘To look after children’s physical development by providing them with plenty of light,
plenty of fresh air, plenty of exercise and plenty of freedom.’**

– Stefania Marciszewska-Posadzowa

She was one of the most important figures in the history of Polish preschool pedagogy, combining organisational, methodological, and journalistic work with educational practice. Her work coincided with a period of dynamic development of preschool education as a distinct field of pedagogy, and her achievements were clearly practical and systemic in nature.

Marciszewska-Posadzowa was associated with the National Education Society, where she worked to educate rural teachers. In 1903, together with Cecylia Plater, she organised a course for rural educators in Chyliczki, near Warsaw, as a form of continuation training for nursery teachers. In subsequent years, she conducted similar courses herself, simultaneously establishing the Home for Street Children [Dom dla Dzieci Ulicy], which she treated as a place of pedagogical practice for future teachers. This was an innovative solution, combining theory with direct observation and educational practice.

She devoted numerous studies to the education of childcare workers, including the dissertation ‘Rady i wskazówki dla kierujących ochronami’ [Advice and Guidance for Childcare Managers], in which she addressed the organisation of childcare facilities, the role of the childcare provider, and the principles of raising young children. After 1920, Marciszewska-Posadzowa’s primary responsibility became the modernisation of childcare facilities, implemented on behalf of the Board of Education, a position she held until her retirement. During this time, she set up ten preschools, which were considered exemplary in Poznań. All of them taught in a national and religious spirit, consistent with her belief in the importance of moral and cultural education in preschool children.

After the end of World War II, in 1945 she began working as a preschool instructor at the Department of Education. However, changes resulting from the new educational policy forced her to resign from public activity after two years. Marciszewska-Posadzowa was valued as an organiser and manager of preschool institutions, a teacher, and a teacher of preschool methodology. Of particular importance were her publishing achievements, particularly the 17 volumes of the ‘Biblioteka Wychowania Przedszkolnego’ [Preschool Education Library], which created a coherent, original organisational, methodological, and programmatic approach to working with preschool children. This concept encompassed the holistic development of the child and preparation for school, and she advocated for these materials to be available in open circulation, with practitioners working in childcare and preschools in mind. Her approach was based on child activity, play, physical exercises, handicrafts, and activities related to cleanliness and hygiene. She treated children as individuals with rights and responsibilities, preferring educational methods that did not restrict their natural activity. She also devoted a significant portion of her work to teaching religion to young children, developing methods tailored to their developmental capabilities. Marciszewska-Posadzowa’s most important achievement is her consistent emphasis on the importance of the preschool period as one of the key stages in a person’s life, requiring consciously planned, professional pedagogical influence.

New concepts, methods, and means of education

1878–1942

KORCZAK

Janusz



‘Children are the people of the future. So they’re yet to come; it’s as if they weren’t here yet.
And yet we are here: we live, we feel, we suffer.’

– Janusz Korczak

He was a paediatrician, educator, writer, and one of the most distinguished theoreticians and practitioners of formalised child upbringing in Poland. His pedagogical achievements, rooted in his daily work with children, were crucial to the development of early childhood education, particularly in the areas of organising the educational environment, adult-child relationships, and treating children as individuals. From an early age, he was interested in new trends in pedagogical thought. He was familiar with and analysed the concepts of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Friedrich Fröbel, Herbert Spencer, Leo Tolstoy, as well as the pedagogical progressivism of John Dewey, Ovide Decroly, and Maria Montessori. The experiences he gained during his stay in Switzerland and his reading of foreign pedagogical works influenced his own position, which combined the ideas of the New Education with a critical reflection on the real conditions of children's lives.

The most important areas in which he implemented his pedagogical concepts were the educational institutions he ran: ‘Dom Sierot’ [Orphanage] in Warsaw, founded and run jointly with Stefania Wilczyńska, and ‘Nasz Dom’ (Our Home) educational institution, co-founded in 1919. Although these institutions primarily served school-age children, their operation was also crucial for developing the practice of raising younger children and for conceptualising early primary education as a holistic process, embedded in a child's daily life.

Korczak created a unique system of educational work based on partnership, responsibility, and children's self-governance. The institutions he led featured aspects such as a children's parliament, a peer court, a child-edited press, a duty roster, and various forms of shared responsibility for community life. These solutions were educational in nature and served to shape moral and social attitudes and the ability to live in a group.

Korczak was also a pioneer in educational diagnostics and research into the world of children. The institutions he ran systematically documented the psychophysical and social development of their pupils, and observed their behaviour, peer relationships, well-being, and needs. He treated the child as a subject of research, not an object, which was innovative for the era. His belief in the subjectivity of the child was also expressed by the launch of ‘Mały Przegląd’ [Little Review] in 1926 – a magazine edited primarily by children. This journal provided a unique space for free expression for children and young people and a tool for civic and social education.

In his theoretical works, particularly ‘Jak kochać dziecko’ [How to Love a Child] and ‘Prawo dziecka do szacunku’ [The Child's Right to Respect], Korczak formulated principles that became the foundation of modern pedagogy: the child's right to respect, to make mistakes, to their own pace of development, and to participate in decisions about matters that concern them. His pedagogical thought remains one of the most important reference points for a humanistic approach to preschool and early primary education.

New concepts, methods, and means of education

1881-1959

CICIMIRSKA

Natalia



**‘Singing in nursery school cannot be confined to certain hours only, as is the case in schools,
because song should be a constant companion to the child,
both whilst they are playing and whilst they are engaged in other activities.’**

– Natalia Cicimirska

She was a Polish preschool educator, teacher, and author of methodological works, active in the first half of the 20th century. Her activities included work in nurseries and kindergartens, training educators, analysing modern preschool education systems, and popularising foreign pedagogical solutions in Polish settings.

She received her pedagogical education in Lviv, where she graduated from a teachers' seminary. Before World War I, she was involved in preschool education, and from 1912, she ran a nursery in Lviv. The experience she gained in her daily work with children became the foundation for her later methodological developments.

In 1919, she published 'Moja ochronka: podręcznik metodyczny: zbiór pogadanek i pieśni' [My Nursery: A Methodological Manual: A Collection of Talks and Songs]. This publication was a practical manual for nursery teachers and educators. It covered work organisation, suggested educational talks, and a repertoire of songs appropriate to the children's ages. The book presented the kindergarten as an educational environment in which planned activities, daily rhythm, and the conscious use of words and music in working with children played a significant role.

In subsequent years, Cicimirska expanded her interests to include analysis of contemporary preschool education systems. In 1925, she published 'Nowe systemy wychowania przedszkolnego' [New Systems of Preschool Education], a work devoted to discussing pedagogical solutions developed in European countries. The publication was a review and comparative study, aiming to familiarise Polish educators with current trends in preschool education.

In 1931, she published the book 'Gry i zabawy w przedszkolach zagranicą' [Games and Play in Kindergartens Abroad], which presented specific forms of child activity used in preschools outside Poland. The author focused on describing games and play and their educational and teaching functions, pointing out the possibilities of their use in preschool practice.

Cicimirska also co-authored 'Podręcznik dla ochraniarek' [A Handbook for Nursery Teachers] and co-edited, with Maria Weryho, the book 'Jak zająć dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym' [How to Engage Preschool Children]. These publications were methodological in nature and aimed at preschool educators.

A significant area of her activity was training the teaching corps. She taught preschool methodology at teacher training institutions, managed a training preschool, and participated in pedagogical courses abroad, including at the J.J. Rousseau Institute in Geneva. After World War II, she worked in Wrocław, involved in organising and improving preschool education.

New concepts, methods, and means of education

1881-1974

FALSKI

Marian Ignacy



‘Understanding the principles and mastering the technique of reading is such a difficult task that it should always take place under the simplest and easiest conditions possible.’

– Marian Ignacy Falski

He was an educator, educational activist, and researcher, specialising in education, educational psychology, and educational statistics. His work played a key role in shaping early primary education in 20th-century Poland, in practical, organisational, and scientific dimensions.

Falski's most famous achievement was the primer 'Nauka czytania i pisanie dla dzieci' [Learning to Read and Write for Children], first published in 1910. This textbook, commonly referred to as 'Falski's Primer', became the most popular primer of the 20th century and for decades served as the fundamental tool for teaching reading and writing in elementary grades. The primer's design was based on the gradual introduction of letters and words, taking into account children's perceptual abilities and principles of learning psychology. In it, Falski combined his teaching experience with research findings on the reading process, making the textbook modern and empirically grounded.

Falski's interest in educating young children also manifested itself in his social activities. He was a board member of the Society of Friends of Children, which in 1914 initiated the establishment of the first play and work centre – an innovative form of childcare and education combining elements of work, play, and social education. At that time, Władysława Weychert-Szmanowska provided pedagogical care for the children. This initiative was part of a broader search for new ways of educating younger children in urban settings.

Falski was also an active researcher into the process of learning to read. At the Jagiellonian University, he conducted experiments on the psychology of reading at Władysław Heinrich's Laboratory of Experimental Psychology, where from 1916 he served as a demonstrator. He subsequently utilised the results of his research in works devoted to the methodology of early reading instruction. In 1917, he was awarded a Doctor of Philosophy degree by the Jagiellonian University; his thesis supervisor was Władysław Heinrich.

After Poland regained independence, Falski was engaged in the organisation of the school system. As an expert and education official, he participated in developing solutions for public education. In 1931, acting as an expert for the League of Nations, he conducted research on the organisation of schooling in China, which demonstrated international recognition of his expertise in educational policy.

From 1954 to 1965, Falski was a full professor and headed the Laboratory of the System and Organisation of Education at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. At the same time, he was involved in public life as an advocate for the democratic school and the autonomy of the scientific community. He was one of the signatories of the so-called 'Letter of 34,' a protest by intellectuals against the ideologisation of public life and restrictions on freedom of speech.

1881-1956

New concepts, methods, and means of education

ŻUKIEWICZOWA

Zofia



‘A teacher who does not constantly explore and learn gradually withdraws from life; in other words, they become superfluous, whilst life, in its ever-changing manifestations, passes them by.’

– Zofia Żukiewiczowa

She was a Polish educator, a pioneer and promoter of modern preschool education methods, who undertook extensive methodological and organisational work to promote preschools as educational institutions with a role beyond childcare. She began her professional career after completing a two-year pedagogical school, then took up the position of principal of a girls’ school, which provided her with a practical foundation for her later career in childcare. Her work focused on preschool pedagogy, to which she devoted most of her career, combining organisational, editorial, and methodological work.

Żukiewiczowa was a key figure in the Preschool Educators’ Section of the Polish Teachers’ Union and co-editor of the pedagogical journals ‘Przedszkole’ [Preschool] and ‘Wychowanie Przedszkolne’ [Preschool Education]. In these periodicals, she published instructional and methodological articles, primarily aimed at educators and teachers working with preschool children. Her writings influenced the professional pedagogical thought of this community in the 1920s and 1930s.

A central theme in Żukiewiczowa’s work was preschool education as a distinct pedagogical field, differing from school teaching and requiring its own methods and organisational plans. In her articles and the book ‘Wychowanie przedszkolne. Wskazówki metodyczne uwzględniające zainteresowanie dziecka’ [Preschool Education: Methodological Guidelines Considering Children’s Interests], she emphasised that early preschool education should respect children’s natural developmental needs, and that methods should stem from their activity, play, and experience.

In her methodological guidelines, Żukiewiczowa emphasised that preschool should not be a ‘small school’ – play, movement, daily rhythm, and contact with nature were, for her, fundamental forms of working with children. She emphasised that a child’s cognitive, emotional, and social development occurs primarily in spontaneous and active situations, and the educator’s task is to organise and support such activity, while ensuring safety, order, and the harmonious rhythm of collective life.

Żukiewiczowa also focused on the broad organisation of preschools. She described the principles of establishing them, their equipment, and spatial management, as well as preschool cooperation with families and the local community. She advocated for a unified approach to preschool operations nationwide and for systematic education and professional development for educators.

A significant part of her activity was participation in international pedagogical conferences and movements, including in Geneva and Paris, which constituted a rare example of direct exchange of pedagogical ideas between Polish practitioners and European educational centres. She was also active in organisations promoting modern education, including as chairwoman of the League of New Education, and organised exhibitions showcasing the achievements of preschool pedagogy.

New concepts, methods, and means of education

1897-1976

BOGDANOWICZ

Zofia Maria



'In order to put our educational philosophy into practice with regard to the very youngest children, we must create an atmosphere that encourages us to establish as close a bond with them as possible.'

– Zofia Maria Bogdanowicz

She was a Polish preschool educator, teacher, and author of methodological publications whose work focused primarily on creating, evaluating, and popularising games and teaching aids for preschools. She was one of the educators who co-created the professional foundations of preschool education methodology in the 20th century, emphasising the importance of carefully selected materials and activities for child development.

She trained for her profession under the supervision of Maria Weryho-Radziwiłłowiczowa. In 1919, she worked as a teacher at the Nursery Teacher Training College in Częstochowa. After graduating from the Pedagogical Institute in Warsaw in 1925, she began an intensive publishing career, contributing to the journals 'Wychowanie Przedszkolne' [Preschool Education] and 'Przedszkole' [Preschool]. Her texts had a clear methodological character and were addressed directly to kindergarten teachers, as support in their daily teaching and educational work.

During the occupation, Bogdanowicz participated in clandestine teaching for kindergarten teachers and served as a soldier in the Home Army. After 1945, she actively participated in the reconstruction and organisation of preschool education in Poland. During this time, the bulk of her literary output was created, including both her own publications and works prepared in collaboration with her husband, Jan Bogdanowicz.

The most important area of her activity was the development of teaching aids and group play. Bogdanowicz systematically evaluated the designs of toys and materials used in preschools, analysing their educational, didactic, and aesthetic value. She popularised the most valuable sets of aids and also prepared models of new solutions adapted to the developmental needs of preschool children. Her approach combined practicality with the belief that carefully selected games and materials are key tools for supporting a child's cognitive, linguistic, and social development.

A special place among her works is occupied by the book 'Zabawy dydaktyczne dla przedszkoli' [Educational Games for Preschoolers], a collection of 118 games for groups. This publication provided practical methodological support for preschool teachers and educators. Detailed descriptions of the games, accompanied by methodological commentary, served to stimulate cognitive functions, perception, speech, and thinking, as well as to develop independence, responsibility, and the ability to cooperate within a peer group. The collection included numerical tasks, motor and artistic activities, and role-playing games. Bogdanowicz proposed games for four age groups of preschool children, encouraging educators to modify and use them creatively, in accordance with the educational goals and the children's needs and interests.

These concepts were complemented by the publication 'Pomoce do zajęć i zabaw dla przedszkoli' [Aids for Activities and Play for Preschools], in which Bogdanowicz consistently developed the idea of conscious and purposeful selection of teaching materials as an essential element of professional preschool work. Her work made a lasting contribution to the development of preschool education methodology, particularly in the practical use of play as a teaching and educational tool.

1907-1987

New concepts, methods, and means of education

MERŽAN

Ida



‘Each of the children, feeling like an equal member of their group, developed well.’

– Ida Merżan

She was an educator, teacher and journalist associated with the Korczak school of institutional education, active during the interwar period and also in post-war Poland. Her work lay at the intersection of educational practice, pedagogical reflection and the documentation of experiences at the Orphanage at 92 Krochmalna Street in Warsaw. She did not create a separate system of preschool or early primary education, but she contributed to the development and dissemination of educational practices inspired by the ideas of Janusz Korczak.

Merżan was directly connected with the Orphanage – initially as a resident, and later as a carer. The attached boarding house enabled young people to gain teaching experience by participating in its daily life and working with the children. Merżan thus came to know the Korczak system not only as an observer, but also as a member of the community who shared responsibility for its running. After the war, she joined the team of carers at the Janusz Korczak State Children’s Home No. 2, which operated in the former building of the Orphanage.

Merżan’s most significant work on the Orphanage is the book ‘Aby nie uległo zapomnieniu. Rzecz o Domu Sierot Krochmalna 92’ [Lest It Be Forgotten: An Account of the Orphanage at 92 Krochmalna Street], which is both a memoir and a documentary account. The publication is a valuable source of information on daily life in the institution, its organisation and Korczak’s educational practices. The author’s personal experience lends her account the character of a testimony, enabling the reader to reconstruct both the organisational arrangements of the Orphanage and the atmosphere of the relationships between the children, the carers, Janusz Korczak and Stefania Wilczyńska.

In her memoirs, Merżan described the educational system of the Orphanage through specific situations and aspects of its day-to-day running. She described the premises, the organisation of communal life, the children’s council, the peer court, the ‘parliament’, the newspaper, the letterbox, and the principles of shared responsibility between children and adults for the community. Her account is therefore not limited to portraying the person of Korczak, but documents the workings of an institution in which the child’s agency was expressed, amongst other things, through the right to speak out, to have a say and to participate in resolving the community’s problems.

From the perspective of preschool and early primary pedagogy, Ida Merżan’s significance lies primarily in her consolidation and dissemination of knowledge regarding educational practices that also encompass younger children and those preparing for a career in education. Her publications provide insight into specific ways of organising adult-child relationships and of fostering independence, responsibility and cooperation. Although the approaches described were not intended solely for preschools and schools, they contributed to the Korczakian tradition of thinking about the institutional upbringing of children.

New concepts, methods, and means of education

CZERWIŃSKA

Helena



‘[...] they also made a significant contribution to shaping the state’s education policy in the field of preschool education.’

– Jerzy Doroszewski on Helena Czerwińska and Maria Weryho-Radziwiłłowiczowa

She was one of the key figures in Polish preschool education in the interwar period, particularly distinguished in the field of organising the education of preschool teachers, professional development of teaching staff, and creating programmatic and methodological foundations for the work of preschools and nursery teacher training colleges.

She served as head of the State Nursery Seminary in Warsaw, while also running a school for preschool teachers. This institution was considered exemplary and highly rated by the then-education authorities, both for its organisation and its content. Czerwińska placed great importance on the quality of professional preparation for educators, combining theoretical training with systematic pedagogical practice.

After Maria Weryho retired, she succeeded her as a pedagogical instructor in nursery seminaries, continuing her efforts to standardise educational standards for teachers nationwide. In 1937, she was appointed kindergarten inspector at the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Education, placing her among those responsible for pedagogical oversight of preschool education in Poland.

Czerwińska actively participated in developing methodological materials. Along with Maria Dzierzbicka, Zofia Bogdanowicz, and Antonina Juriewicz, she served on the committee that prepared a guide to teaching and upbringing and the book ‘Rady i wskazówki dla wychowawczyń w przedszkolach’ [Advice and Tips for Preschool Educators]. This publication served as the first curriculum for nursery teacher training colleges and also served as a practical methodological guide for preschool educators, organising the goals, content, and forms of educational work.

Helena Czerwińska was also a member of the editorial committee of the journal ‘Wychowanie Przedszkolne’ [Preschool Education] and published in ‘Przedszkole’ [Preschool]. She actively collaborated with the Preschool Educators Section of the Polish Teachers’ Union, engaging in the process of improving and supplementing the professional qualifications of educators. These activities were consistent with the implementation of the postulates formulated in the first issues of the Section’s press organ.

The Warsaw centre was the most dynamic in this area, organising continuing education courses, training sessions, self-study circles, and meetings. In 1935, the Kindergarten Educators Section of the Polish Teachers’ Union (ZNP) organised a continuing education course in Warsaw for unqualified kindergarten teachers. It consisted of three stages and included a month-long initial course (candidates acquired knowledge in pedagogy, childcare methodology, psychology, subject knowledge in mathematics, natural sciences, history, and Polish, as well as gymnastics, hygiene, drawing, singing, and crafts), an independent written project completed throughout the year, and a final course in the following school year. The training programme was developed by Czerwińska, then director of the State Seminary for Educators in Warsaw. During the course, participants had the opportunity to observe classes and children in kindergarten, reinforcing the practical dimension of their education.

Helena Czerwińska’s work was characteristically systemic and long-term. Her achievements contributed to the professionalisation of preschool teacher education, the development of professional development programmes, and the consolidation of the core curriculum for preschool education in interwar Poland.

New concepts, methods, and means of education

DZIERZBICKA

Maria



**‘[Radio is] a supporting tool that brings the school closer to modern life,
provides useful variety in the classroom, and assists the teacher.’**

– Maria Dzierzbicka

She was one of the key figures in Polish preschool education and educational thought of the interwar period, involved both in educational administration and in pedagogical reflection on the role of preschool within the school system. Her activities included administrative work at the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Education, journalistic activity, and participation in the development of the core curriculum and methodologies for preschool education.

Dzierzbicka was one of the regular and most frequently published contributors to the monthly ‘Oświata i Wychowanie’ [Learning and Upbringing], giving the periodical a distinct ideological profile. As an employee of the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Education, she was part of the trend for promoting preschool as an integral element of the school system, not merely a care facility. She also published in the magazine ‘Przedszkole’ [Preschool], contributing to the discussion on the development of modern preschool education in Poland.

Together with other pioneers of the preschool movement – Zofia Bogdanowicz, Natalia Cicimirska, and Helena Czerwińska – she participated in the work of streamlining and professionalising the education of preschool teachers. Her work was part of the broader process of institutionalising preschool education in the Second Polish Republic. Of particular significance were the legal changes introduced in 1933, when, pursuant to the decree of the President of the Republic of Poland of 27 October, qualification requirements for applicants for the position of preschool teacher were established. These regulations were closely linked to the Education System Act of 11 March 1932, which Dzierzbicka commented on in the educational press as the first act introducing uniform guidelines for the entire country and integrating preschools and the education of preschool teachers into the school system.

Another important area of interest was the role of modern media in education. In 1938, Dzierzbicka described radio as ‘a very significant factor in the upbringing and education of the masses’ (Dzierzbicka, 1938, p. 501). She emphasised that the new invention enabled immediate access to a wide audience and emphasised that radio eliminated spatial barriers to accessing educational content and allowed the message to reach a wide audience almost simultaneously. At the same time, she warned against replacing teachers with radio broadcasts, postulating that radio should function in schools as a tool supporting and supplementing the teaching process.

Dzierzbicka emphasised the need to develop a new form of radio education, based not on visual representation but on interaction solely through sound and words. In this context, she emphasised the need to develop listening skills in students, seeing it as an important yet underappreciated element of education and upbringing. Her thoughts place her among educators who undertook early reflection on the role of media in education.

New concepts, methods, and means of education

SCHÄTZEL

Ida Maria



‘The ideal of the educator is shaped by intuition, underpinned and grounded in psychological and pedagogical sensitivity and knowledge.’

– Ida Maria Schätzel

She was a Polish psychologist and educator active in the first decades of the 20th century, closely involved in the development of modern preschool pedagogy and in reflecting on the adaptation of foreign educational concepts to Polish conditions. Her work spanned the intersection of educational theory, child psychology, and preschool practice, with a particular focus on the pedagogy of Maria Montessori.

Schätzel's most important authorial achievement was the book 'Idea wychowania przedszkolnego. Casa dei Bambini jako szkoła wszechstronnej pracy dziecka' [The Idea of Preschool Education: Casa dei Bambini as a School for the Versatile Work of the Child]. This publication was one of the first attempts in Polish to systematically and scientifically discuss the Montessori system in relation to preschool education. Schätzel did not limit herself to describing the new method but subjected it to a comprehensive analysis, revealing its psychological foundations, pedagogical assumptions, and significance for contemporary and future pedagogy. She placed particular emphasis on the psychological foundations of the Montessori method, emphasising the importance of observing the child, their individual pace of work, and their natural developmental needs.

Schätzel conceptualised preschool education as a process of comprehensive child development, achieved through activity, work, and experience. She interpreted Casa dei Bambini as an educational environment, not a school institution in the traditional sense, emphasising the role of the child's independent work and the importance of a properly prepared environment. A crucial element of her reflections was the juxtaposition of Montessori pedagogy with the Froebel method, identifying their ideological connections and differences in the organisation of the educational process. The author also analysed the connections between the Montessori system and the idea of a work school, seeing the Children's Homes as a realisation of the postulates of the new education.

A characteristic feature of Schätzel's thought was caution against directly adopting foreign pedagogical concepts. In 'The Idea of Preschool Education...', she explicitly questioned the feasibility of applying the Montessori method in Polish nurseries and preschools. She emphasised the need to adapt it to the social and cultural conditions and nature of the Polish child, as well as to the principles of Polish pedagogy. Thus, she treated the Montessori system as an inspiration and point of reference, not as a model requiring uncritical imitation.

The role of the preschool teacher occupied a significant place in her reflections. Schätzel emphasised that the work of a teacher requires not only solid pedagogical and psychological preparation, but also self-discipline, reflectiveness, and the ability to recognise when to be proactive and when to withdraw, leaving the child space for independent work. Drawing on the writings of Maria Montessori, she emphasised the mutual learning process between child and educator as the foundation for the development of pedagogical theory and practice.

Schätzel also co-authored the 'Podręcznik dla ochroniarek' [The Handbook for Nursery Teachers], one of the key collective methodological works for preschool educators. Her participation in this project demonstrates her commitment to systematising preschool education practices and to the professional training of childcare workers. This handbook combined theoretical reflection with the needs of everyday educational work, serving as an important tool for disseminating modern pedagogical ideas.



Development of early education theories and methodologies

the second half of the 20th century

FIEDLER

Maria



‘After all, what children learn at nursery should simply be the result of their lifestyle and activities, not an end in itself.’

– Maria Fiedler

She was a Polish author of methodological studies in the field of elementary and preschool education, associated particularly with the promotion of early mathematics education and with reflection on preparing children for their role as a learner. Fiedler’s work demonstrates a consistent interest in shaping children’s concepts and ideas at the threshold of school education. During the interwar period, she published the work ‘Zakres wyobrażeń i pojęć dzieci w pierwszym roku nauki’ [The Scope of Children’s Concepts and Ideas in the First Year of School], which indicates an early, diagnostic and didactic approach to elementary content and a search for ways to support children in their transition from everyday experiences to more structured cognitive representations. In the post-war years, she also addressed the organisation and specificity of preschools in rural settings, publishing the book ‘Przedszkole na wsi’ [Rural Preschool] (1957).

In her methodological writings, Fiedler took a critical view of the excessive rigidity imposed on nursery school work by an inflexible timetable, the school-style division of content into separate subjects, and the mechanical implementation of the curriculum. She advocated for greater elasticity in the organisation of activities, making use of children’s natural interests, and adapting content and teaching methods to their age and stage of development. At the same time, she warned against transferring the school model of teaching to nursery schools and overburdening children with information.

Maria Fiedler’s greatest impact, however, was in the field of early mathematics education. Her book ‘Matematyka już w przedszkolu’ [Mathematics in Preschool] served as a guide for teachers and was included in a series aimed at preschool practitioners. The author also participated in the creation of collective methodological compendiums. In one of the guidebook volumes for preschool work, she published a chapter on ‘Kierowanie rozwojem myślenia matematycznego’ [Guiding the Development of Mathematical Thinking]. From a practical perspective, this meant providing teachers with a structured proposal for the goals and content of preschool mathematical education, as well as indicating the situation of such content in the overall educational and teaching process.

In historical and pedagogical literature, Maria Fiedler is sometimes seen as one of the women who co-created the substantive base of preschool education in Poland and, as an individual associated with the magazine ‘Wychowanie w Przedszkolu’ [Preschool Education], important for the transfer of ideas and methodological solutions to everyday practice.

TOPIŃSKA

Zofia



‘The fundamental pedagogical skill of nursery staff is understanding children’s needs (both developmental and individual) and finding appropriate ways to meet them within the specific context of settings for the collective care of young children.’

– Zofia Topińska

She was a pedagogue involved in the post-war professionalisation of preschool education, who co-edited methodological studies and edited a magazine for educators. She studied psychology at the Jagiellonian University, and from the 1930s was involved in the Warsaw community of Żoliborz in child welfare work, employed at the kindergarten of the Workers’ Society of Friends of Children. Her achievements were primarily at the intersection of preschool practice and its methodological description. She organised the language of teachers’ work, emphasised the importance of planning and selecting forms of child activity, and promoted reflection on play as a key developmental activity in preschool.

Topińska’s lasting contribution to preschool practice is related to the reorganisation of the teacher’s role in organising the educational environment and to play methodology. Her monograph, ‘Kierowanie zabawą dziecka w przedszkolu a warunki jego aktywności’ [Managing Children’s Play in Preschool and the Conditions of Their Activity], was an important attempt to describe the relationship between organisational conditions and children’s activity, as well as ways to manage play without stifling student initiative. Topińska is credited in topic-based literature as the author of supplementing P. A. Rudik’s popular typology with two additional categories: exploratory and tracking play (alongside, among others, thematic, constructional, didactic, and movement play). This expansion had a methodological dimension, legitimising children’s exploratory activities (searching, testing) in preschool practice, reinforcing a focus on cognitive curiosity and independent action in the environment.

In the history of Polish preschool pedagogical press, Topińska holds a special place as the first person to edit the monthly ‘Wychowanie w Przedszkolu’ [Preschool Education] in its earliest period. It is estimated that she edited the magazine from 1948 to 1959, with the first issue published in November 1948. The magazine was initially founded within the Workers’ Society of Friends of Children, centred around the Warsaw Housing Cooperative in Żoliborz. This dimension of activity was clearly practical in nature. Editorial work meant constantly translating pedagogical ideas into methodological guidelines, organisational solutions, and descriptions of best practices applicable to preschools.

A significant area of her influence was co-editing methodological compendiums for teacher education. Along with Maria Kwiatowska, she co-edited ‘Pedagogika przedszkolna’ [Preschool Pedagogy], prepared institutionally by the Institute of Teacher Education.

KWIATOWSKA

Maria



‘The effectiveness of nursery schools, however, will always depend on taking into account the developmental characteristics of the child as an active participant in the educational process’

– Maria Kwiatowska

She was a Polish psychologist and educator (PhD, Dr. hab.), involved in teacher training and developing the theoretical and methodological foundations of preschool education. Her work focused on the preschool child, understood holistically—from the perspective of psychological, social, and cultural development—and on preschool as a collective educational institution that consciously organises conditions conducive to child development.

Kwiatowska’s contribution primarily involved systematising knowledge about preschool education and translating it into practical solutions. She co-authored and edited textbooks for preschool staff and teacher training systems, including ‘Metodyka wychowania przedszkolnego’ [Methodology of Preschool Education] (with Zofia Topińska) and subsequent works such as ‘Pedagogika przedszkolna’ [Preschool Pedagogy]. Her work also includes editing ‘Podstawy pedagogiki przedszkolnej’ [Fundamentals of Preschool Pedagogy]—a comprehensive compendium that conceptualises preschool pedagogy as knowledge about guiding child development in institutional settings, based on collaboration with psychology, social sciences, and the humanities.

In Kwiatowska’s view, guiding a child’s development did not mean passively waiting for the natural mechanisms of maturation to take effect, nor did it mean subordinating education to a rigid transmission of information. The nursery was to consciously organise conditions conducive to development, provide the child with valuable content and stimulate the child’s own activity. She viewed the child as a creative agent and a partner in the educational process, whose contributions should be incorporated into the organisation of everyday life at the nursery. Understood in this way, nursery pedagogy was intended to combine scientific knowledge with practice, providing the teacher with a basis for recognising the child’s needs, planning interventions and consciously modifying the educational environment.

The relationship between theory and practice occupied a significant place in Kwiatowska’s concept: scientific knowledge was intended to assist the teacher in consciously guiding the child’s development, but she also regarded the experiences of practitioners as a source for verifying and enriching pedagogical knowledge.

Her approach was characterised by combining a psychological perspective with preschool methodology. Kwiatowska emphasised the importance of developmental diagnosis, planning educational and teaching activities, and consciously selecting children’s activities. Within the curriculum, learning about the environment (social, natural, and technical) and aesthetic education were particularly important. In these areas, she emphasised the role of children’s experience, action, and expression—especially in contact with fine art, literature, and visual art—as well as the importance of the preschool environment (its organisation, daily rhythm, and everyday culture) as a developmental factor.

WALCZYNA

Jadwiga



‘In the process of preparing candidates for the profession in a practical manner, it is necessary to set out dynamic models of behaviour in order to counteract mere imitation and to encourage the creative transformation of the educational reality in accordance with scientific principles and in harmony [...] with the needs of children.’

– Jadwiga Walczyna

She was a teacher and researcher in elementary education, associated with the University of Warsaw, and the institutional development of preschool and early primary education in post-war Poland. In 1957, she was employed at the Department of General Pedagogy at the University of Warsaw, headed by Bogdan Suchodolski; in 1961, she obtained her doctorate based on a dissertation on preparing young people for the teaching profession. After her doctorate, she developed research on the theory of early primary education and preschool upbringing. The first of these strands resulted in her habilitation thesis, ‘Integracja nauczania początkowego’ [The Integration of Early Primary Education], which constituted one of the most important Polish attempts to conceptualise the integration of education and upbringing in early primary classrooms.

Walczyna developed her own model of early primary education, synthesising the associative-subject approach with the holistic (combinative) approach, and then subjected it to empirical verification in experimental research. The essence of integration was not the ad hoc correlation of topics, but rather the structural linking of content, methods, and the organisation of school work within five integrated fields of study (words and numbers; social studies; natural sciences and technology; arts education; and physical education), with a concentric-spiral arrangement of content (while maintaining a linear arrangement for language and mathematics) and a source-based approach to the world experienced by the child. Walczyna emphasised the primacy of activation, problem-based methods, and learning by doing, as well as the need to move away from methodological prescriptions in favour of the creative initiative of a reflective, practical teacher, capable of translating theory into practice through a flexible workday organisation (comprehensive lessons, flexible time management, individualisation, and the use of spontaneous situations).

A second, particularly significant strand of her work was research on preschool education, with an emphasis on socio-moral education. Walczyna developed the concept of socialising preschool education, which conceptualised children’s preparation for school as a process requiring collaboration between the preschool, the family, and the local community. She developed this thesis in the monograph ‘Kształtowanie postaw społeczno-moralnych dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym’ [Shaping the Socio-Moral Attitudes of Preschool Children], cited as the basis for her professorship. From the perspective of preschool practice, her postulates regarding the organisation of educational interventions were also crucial: differentiating the time and forms of work according to age, providing conditions for individualisation, emphasising direct contact between children and situations of a socio-moral nature, and consciously selecting teaching aids and resources.

Walczyna played a significant organisational role at the University of Warsaw. Following structural changes, she co-founded and directed units responsible for training elementary teachers, including the Department of Early Primary Education, which from the 1979/1980 academic year functioned as the Department of Preschool and Early Primary Education. She also held senior positions (including director of the Institute of Pedagogy at the University of Warsaw) and collaborated with the Committee on Pedagogical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences, the OMEP, and the Ministry of Education.

DUDZIŃSKA

Irena



‘Conducting open lessons requires teachers to possess strong teaching skills, tact and a good understanding of each child, as these lessons are intended to serve as a model of good teaching practice and should not give rise to jealousy or misunderstandings.’

– Irena Dudzińska

She was one of the authors who co-created Polish preschool education methodology in the second half of the 20th century, combining a research perspective with a practical description of a teacher’s work. Her publishing activity focused on two areas of particular importance to preschool life: (1) the social functioning of children in peer groups, including the dynamics of conflict, and (2) preparing children for early reading and organising teaching situations appropriate to their developmental age.

The clearest example of this interest in peer relations is the book ‘O współżyciu dzieci w grupie przedszkolnej: konflikty i próby ich rozwiązywania’ [On the Coexistence of Children in a Preschool Group: Conflicts and Attempts at Resolving Them]. Dudzińska conceptualised conflict as a phenomenon embedded in the everyday life of the group, not as an incident requiring only discipline. She directed teachers’ attention to the fact that disputes over toys, play space, or social roles are part of learning to cooperate. In this approach, conflict becomes both a source of diagnosis (how children negotiate, how they react to failure, how they build alliances) and a field of educational intervention, understood not as suppressing tensions but rather as organising conditions for their constructive resolution.

The second distinct thread in her work was the topic of early literacy. The book ‘Dziecko sześciolatnie uczy się czytać’ [A Six-Year-Old Child Learns to Read] situated reading instruction within the context of a child’s maturity and the teacher’s methodological responsibility. In her approach, learning is not juxtaposed with a child’s activity. Reading is to be introduced in a way that is tailored to a six-year-old’s abilities, through gradated tasks, building motivation, and embedding exercises in meaningful learning situations for the child.

Another significant aspect of Dudzińska’s activity was her editorial work on collections of methodological studies that systemised knowledge about the organisation of the educational and teaching process in preschool. Under her editorship, the volumes ‘Metodyka wychowania w przedszkolu’ [The Methodology of Education in Preschool] and the comprehensive guide ‘Wychowanie i nauczanie w przedszkolu’ [Education and Teaching in Preschool] were published. Historical and pedagogical literature emphasises Dudzińska’s research on the educational process in preschool and its methodological dimensions, and the works she edited helped to create a foundation for the professionalisation of preschool practice in Poland.

1927 – 2022 Development of early education theories and methodologies

WILGOCKA- OKOŃ

Barbara



**‘In my reflections on maturity or school readiness, I wish to shift the focus
to the maturity of the school itself.’**

– Barbara Wilgocka-Okon

She was one of the most influential Polish researchers in preschool and early primary pedagogy and psychodidactics, with strong ties to the University of Warsaw. Her achievements were distinguished by her consistent treatment of early childhood education as an area requiring pedagogical diagnosis, based on empirically verified criteria for child achievement and on an analysis of the conditions created by school.

The core of her work was research on school readiness/maturity and the conditions for a child's success at school. Wilgocka-Okon emphasised that school readiness is not solely a characteristic of the child but also results from the social environment and the requirements and readiness of the school to accept the student. In this sense, she shifted the emphasis from selecting children to the institution's responsibility for organising learning. Her publications combined a psychological and developmental approach with practical implications for teachers: how to recognise the needs and abilities of six- and seven-year-olds, how to plan adaptive support, and how to reduce the risk of failure in learning to read and write. Wilgocka-Okon developed tools for diagnosing school maturity/readiness, which for many years functioned in Polish pedagogical practice as one of the basic solutions for assessing a child's readiness to begin school. The methodological framework for this diagnosis was her publication 'O badaniu dojrzałości szkolnej' [On the Study of School Maturity], in which she organised the assumptions and methods of diagnostic procedures.

Another important area of Wilgocka-Okon's activity was applied research on children's achievements in early grades (speaking, reading, writing) and their pedagogical and psychological determinants, conducted in close connection with school practice. The results of this research were used to modify teacher training methods and to formulate recommendations for the organisation of work in preschool and grades I-III.

An important, practically oriented thread in her writing was also the issue of students' workloads and the rationalisation of the organisation of school work, understood as the selection of requirements and the pace of work appropriate to the developmental capabilities of children.

As a result, Wilgocka-Okon co-created a trend in Poland in thinking about early childhood education, in which diagnostics (recognising readiness and progress), sensitivity to the social context and the school's responsibility for the learning conditions are the foundation of the teacher's methodological activities and the organisation of the institution's work.

CACKOWSKA

Maria



‘Blurring the boundaries between subjects, helping children to form a coherent picture of the world in their minds, understanding the processes taking place within it, and learning about the role of humankind in the natural world and society.’

– Maria Cackowska

She was one of the most important Polish researchers of elementary education in the second half of the 20th century, consistently focusing her work on improving teaching in grades 0–III and I–III and providing real support to teachers. Her achievements were distinguished by her treatment of early primary education as a stage of educational entry, where the quality of a student’s future is determined by the organisation of the learning environment, the relevance of content, the selection of methods, and the way children are guided towards independence.

Cackowska created the concept of integrated education (integral), understood not as the occasional combination of topics, but as a coherent model encompassing content, methods, work organisation, and planning of the educational and teaching process. In this approach, the key was to move away from excessive segmentation of teaching and create conditions for children to learn through action, solve problems, and experience the world from a multifaceted perspective throughout the workday, while consistently building basic competencies. Cackowska’s hallmark was that she based her integration proposals on extensive empirical diagnosis. She led nationwide research on the effectiveness of early primary education (grades 1–3, in a variety of educational settings), the results of which were collaboratively developed and published under her editorship as a multi-volume study demonstrating both the strengths and weaknesses of this stage of education. Based on this, she formulated systemic conclusions, including the abandonment of the subject-lesson model in favour of integrated education, lowering compulsory schooling from age 7 to age 6, and a four-year period of early primary education in grades 0–3. The implementation and research aspects of her work were particularly valuable. She led the launch of a teaching experiment in primary schools, which prepared teachers, developed integrated curricula and model scenarios, and then systematically monitored children’s developmental progress and achievements in the integrated model compared to traditional teaching. The research results indicated a clear long-term effect. Initially, older children had an advantage, but in subsequent years the advantage shifted to students learning in the integrated model; in third grade, children learning in the integrated mode more often achieved higher results.

At the same time, Cackowska developed a research stream on early literacy. She conducted extensive comparative studies on the effectiveness of literacy teaching methods and analyses of primers, treating them as a basis for modernising school and preschool practice. These studies culminated in monographs on the primer model and literacy instruction in preschool classrooms.

Another significant dimension of her influence was the training of staff. She was active in advisory and programmatic structures, including the Committee on Pedagogical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences. She collaborated with the Ministry of National Education, led academic teaching, and initiated teacher training (including in the area of integrated education). Throughout her career, she was associated with Maria Curie-Skłodowska University.

1935 – 2002 Development of early education theories and methodologies

WIĘCKOWSKI

Ryszard



‘Individualisation in teaching is the organisation of teaching that, by its very nature, takes into account the diversity of the class.’

– Ryszard Więckowski

He was one of the most outstanding Polish educators of the second half of the 20th century, and his work played a significant role in shaping reflections on early primary education and the conditions for rational reform of the education system. His pedagogical thinking stemmed from the belief that a child’s education in the early years of school is fundamental, as it is at this stage that learning mechanisms, attitudes towards school, and the foundations for further cognitive and social development are formed.

He devoted a significant portion of his analyses to educational reforms. Więckowski consistently highlighted that changes in education, especially those concerning primary school, cannot be implemented in isolation from knowledge of child development and the realities of teacher work. He was critical of reforms based on short-term administrative decisions, lacking continuity and a stable theoretical foundation. He emphasised that in early primary education, solutions leading to the formalisation of teaching, overburdening teachers, and limiting the school’s pedagogical autonomy are particularly dangerous.

In his reflections on the organisation of the educational process, Więckowski emphasised the need to integrate children’s educational experiences. He understood integrated education not as a technical combination of curricular content, but as a holistic approach to a child’s activity, in which cognition, action, emotions, and social relationships are mutually determined. He ascribed a special role to language, treated as a tool for organising experience and integrating various areas of learning.

A key element of his thinking was the training of early primary teachers. Więckowski emphasised that teachers working with children of early primary age should possess broad pedagogical and diagnostic competencies, enabling them to recognise the individual developmental needs of each student. He viewed teachers as organisers of the learning environment, responsible for creating conditions conducive to cognitive activity, rather than merely implementers of imposed curriculum content.

The main focus of his reflection was the learner, viewed as the subject of the educational process. Więckowski stressed the child’s natural activity and their ability to learn through action, experience, and reflection. This premise informed his concept of individualised learning, treated as a fundamental didactic principle, particularly important in early primary education. In his view, individualisation did not mean isolating the student, but rather consciously differentiating forms and methods of work while maintaining the social character of the classroom.

This perspective was complemented by the concept of natural learning strategies, in which Więckowski distinguished perceptual-reproductive, perceptual-explanatory, and perceptual-innovative strategies. He described these strategies as ways of engaging in a child’s cognitive activity that should serve as a reference point for planning the teaching process. He considered recognising and supporting them to be one of the fundamental tasks of the teacher in early primary education. Ryszard Więckowski’s collective works create a coherent vision of early primary education as an area requiring stable theoretical foundations, reflective teacher education and reforms based on reliable knowledge of child development and the realities of school work.

ŚLIWERSKA

Wiesława



‘Assessment, monitoring, evaluation, certificates, promotions, qualifications – these are typical manifestations of exercising power over people as objects.’

– Wiesława Śliwerska

She was an early primary teacher who co-founded the ‘education in freedom’ movement in Polish primary schools in the early 1990s. Her professional practice was situated in the area of integrated early primary education, where the organisation of the learning environment, the teacher-child relationship, and building students’ intrinsic motivation are crucial. Śliwerska’s most recognisable contribution is associated with co-authoring (with Bogusław Śliwerski) the publication ‘Edukacja w wolności’ [Education in Freedom], prepared as a collection of teaching ideas and solutions supporting early primary education without structural and symbolic violence (including without subordinating the learning process to the logic of selection and grading). This approach emphasised student autonomy, relationships that respect the agency of those involved, and the creation of teaching situations that ignite curiosity and meaningful learning, rather than reinforcing conformism and external control.

Of particular significance in her work was the practical implementation of the ‘author’s class’ concept at Primary School No. 37 in Łódź. In the early 1990s, within the context of a state school, she co-developed a model of early-years education centred on the pupil, their agency, interests and creative activity, whilst at the same time limiting the role of traditional mechanisms of control, selection and grading. The experiences of this class were subsequently analysed and described in the publication ‘Edukacja w wolności’ [Education in Freedom], which covers both the psycho-pedagogical principles of the original concept and an assessment of its practical implementation.

Her work was not limited to formulating the principles of alternative education. She also developed original teaching activities for children and solutions designed for direct use in the first three years of Polish primary school, combining reflection on freedom in education with concrete teaching practice.

At an institutional level, Śliwerska helped to foster a community of grassroots educational initiatives. In 1991, in Łódź, together with Bogusław Śliwerski, primary school teachers and educators from other educational institutions, she helped establish the Polish Educational Association ‘Szkoła dla Dziecka’ [School for the Child], which brought together people interested in seeking alternatives to the authoritarian, transmission-based and selective model of schooling.

A significant aspect of Śliwerska’s practice was also preparing materials for working with children in the field of Polish language education. She is the author of exercises and publications used in school and therapeutic work (including the PUS system – aids supporting language and spelling exercises). This type of work fits into the practical dimension of early primary education: providing tools that structure exercises, support systematic work, and develop students’ linguistic awareness and self-control.

SAWICKA

Antonina



‘As an educational institution responsible for the conscious and purposeful upbringing of children aged 3–6, a nursery cannot operate in isolation. Cooperation with parents and the wider community is essential to achieving positive results in the educational work carried out with the children.’

– Antonina Sawicka

She was a Polish author of methodological studies in preschool education, active especially in the second half of the 20th century. Her work was overtly more practical in nature. Sawicka organised key areas of preschool work and translated them into specific procedures and forms of teacher action. One of her most recognisable publications is ‘Współpraca przedszkola z rodzicami’ [Cooperation between Preschools and Parents]. This book reinforced the belief that preschools do not operate independently of families but rather enter into a relationship of shared responsibility with them. It was intended to expand and complement the educational impact of the family home and, in difficult situations, take corrective and supportive action. In practice, this meant emphasising ongoing communication about the child, individual contact with parents, working with a team of parents, and involving parents in the life of the group and the institution. In more recent studies on family pedagogy, Sawicka is often cited as the author who systematised the forms of teacher-parent contact, demonstrating the enduring importance of her proposals in the literature on preschool-home partnerships.

Another important aspect of her work was patriotic education for young children. In her monograph ‘Z problematyki wychowania patriotycznego w przedszkolu’ [From Issues of Patriotic Education in Preschool], she demonstrated how to foster attachment to community and culture in a way appropriate to the child’s age, through everyday experiences, symbols, customs, exposure to children’s language and literature, as well as through the organisation of preschool group life. In this area, Sawicka emphasised the teacher’s role as the organiser of the educational environment, consciously selecting content and situations that foster the formation of social attitudes.

Sawicka’s output was complemented by materials supporting teacher education and training, including the compendium ‘Wybór tekstów do ćwiczeń z pedagogiki przedszkolnej’ [Selected Texts for Exercises in Preschool Pedagogy], which served as a structured reading resource for studying the fundamentals of preschool pedagogy. Sawicka also published articles in the professional journal ‘Wychowanie w Przedszkolu’ [Preschool Education] addressing the topic of working with children’s literature and culture (e.g., the use of Maria Konopnicka’s works in preschool).



Original concepts and new perspectives

contemporary

Original concepts and new perspectives

PUŚLECKI

Władysław



1933 – 2008

‘[A pupil’s empowerment is] a stage of mature autonomy, self-determination and self-fulfilment, based on a solid foundation of substantive knowledge, an understanding of one’s rights – which uphold universal human values – and the competent and responsible exercise of those rights in social interactions in the broadest sense.’

– Władysław Puślecki

He was a Polish educator and professor of humanities associated with the Opole centre, which was important for the development of early primary education and teacher training. He served as director of the Institute of Early Primary Education (later the Institute of Educational Studies) at the University of Opole from 1989 to 2003, co-creating the institutional framework for research on elementary education and early primary education. He was a former chair of the Elementary Education Group of the Polish Academy of Sciences’ Committee on Pedagogical Sciences and a member of the executive committee of the Polish Pedagogical Society (PTP).

The core of his work is the concept of liberating education in early primary education. This is an alternative to transmission didactics, focusing on student agency, meaning-making learning, and cognitive activity. From this perspective, elementary school should support children in independent learning, understanding and selecting information, and acting responsibly, rather than limiting them to reproducing content and carrying out prescribed tasks.

The second key theme is student empowerment, understood as gradually developing agency, co-decision-making, and shared responsibility for the learning process. Puślecki emphasised that assessment practices and school standards can both reinforce and inhibit empowerment; therefore organisational and didactic solutions are needed that truly open up a space for choice, dialogue, and co-creation of learning rules. In practice, this means designing situations in which students move from ostensible participation to genuine initiation of actions, justification of their own solutions, and taking responsibility for the results of their work. Within liberating education, the category of student freedom occupies a significant place, conceptualised bipolarly as freedom ‘from’ (e.g., coercion, fear, rigid routines, objectification) and freedom ‘to’ (question, dialogue, negotiation, collaboration, choice, criticism, and initiative). This leads to the following methodological consequences: a preference for problem-based, dialogic, and activating learning, with an emphasis on self-regulation, reflection, and responsibility for the results of one’s own work.

The third strong strand of his proposal concerns the concept of integrated education in grades I-III, which involves combining content, activities, and student experiences into larger, meaningful wholes, rather than fragmenting them into isolated segments. Integration here is qualitative, meaning it is a way of organising learning around meaning, action, and issues relevant to the child, which promotes both cognitive development and the shaping of social attitudes. The practical dimension of his work was reinforced by combining conceptual design with attempts to test these concepts in action and with reflection on the conditions for developing student creativity and engagement at the early primary education stage.

Original concepts and new perspectives

b. 1940

GRUSZCZYK- KOLCZYŃSKA

Edyta



‘In the teaching of mathematics to preschool children, the child’s personal experiences are of paramount importance. They form the building blocks from which the child constructs concepts and skills.’

– Edyta Gruszczyk-Kolczyńska

She is an educator, professor and researcher in preschool and early primary education, whose work has had a significant influence on thinking about the teaching of mathematics to preschool children and those in the first three years of Polish primary school. Professionally, she was associated with the Maria Grzegorzewska Academy of Special Education, where, amongst other things, she was the initiator and first director of the Institute for the Support of Human Development and Education, as well as with the Higher School of Pedagogy in Łódź and the Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw.

At the heart of her concept is the idea of children’s mathematics, developed with Ewa Zielińska – an approach that assumes that a lasting understanding of mathematical concepts is developed primarily through the child’s actions (manipulation, comparison, measurement, classification, strategy development) rather than through verbal explanation. This model organises content and activities so that the child builds concepts based on their own experiences and gradually moves from action to generalisation, at a pace appropriate to cognitive development. In practice, this means designing teaching situations (at home, preschool, and school) in which mathematics is visible in real-world tasks, games, and problems, with the teacher acting as a facilitator of the learning environment rather than simply a provider of instructions. The method is described in detail in the book ‘Dziecięca matematyka. Książka dla rodziców i nauczycieli’ [Children’s Mathematics: A Book for Parents and Teachers].

A second important area of her research was the identification and support of mathematically gifted children. Gruszczyk-Kolczyńska pointed out that these aptitudes become apparent even in early childhood, for example in the way children reason, recognise patterns, devise strategies independently, and show an interest in tasks requiring intellectual effort. At the same time, she emphasised that giftedness does not develop on its own: poorly organised education, excessive adherence to set patterns in a child’s activities, and the expectation of a single ‘correct’ solution can undermine their cognitive autonomy. She therefore advocated identifying children’s potential as early as possible and creating conditions for its development through open-ended tasks, problems requiring reasoning, and situations that allow children to formulate and test their own ideas.

Another significant contribution of Gruszczyk-Kolczyńska is her consistent approach to the risk of failure in learning mathematics as a phenomenon requiring early diagnosis, prevention, and supportive interventions. Her work emphasises that mathematical difficulties often increase when a child fails to develop basic mental operations and numerical concepts, and when school practice is limited to exercises aimed at achieving results rather than working on reasoning. In this sense, the proposed solutions are clearly practical, encompassing both the organisation of activities and the selection of tasks, as well as the way the child is guided (in a way that fosters independence, perseverance, and a sense of agency in task-based situations).

The importance of her work for preschool and early primary education lies in providing a coherent methodological foundation: how to build early mathematical concepts on action, how to recognise the mechanisms of difficulties, and how to design support that actually improves the quality of learning, instead of merely increasing the number of exercises.

Original concepts and new perspectives

b. 1942

ROCLAWSKI

Bronisław



‘I call for each child to be given sufficient time to prepare for learning to read and write, and for the time taken to achieve reasonably fluent writing and proficient reading comprehension to be reduced to a minimum wherever possible.’

– Bronisław Ročławski

He is a linguist and specialist in language teaching, affiliated with the University of Gdańsk, where he obtained his PhD in 1972 and his postdoctoral qualification in 1985, as well as with academic institutions in Warsaw, Olsztyn, Ciechanów and Poznań. His research focuses on early literacy (preschool and early primary education) and the relationship between speech development, phonological awareness, and reading and writing.

From the 1970s onwards, Ročławski conducted research into improving the quality of pupils’ education and teacher training, which led him to formulate his own teaching approach, known as ‘glottodidactics’. In the relevant literature, this system is also sometimes described as the ‘Ročławski method’ or the ‘phonetic-letter-colour method’, emphasising that the teaching of reading and writing is firmly grounded in sound linguistic knowledge and in the diagnosis of pupils’ actual difficulties in phonemic analysis and synthesis. Izabela Ročławska, a specialist in early primary teaching methodology, also contributed to the development of the didactic and methodological aspects of this concept. A distinctive feature of the Ročławski method was the parallel pursuit of three strands of activity: the development of synthesis, analysis and letter recognition skills. A prerequisite for commencing proper reading and writing instruction was said to be a passive knowledge of the entire alphabet and a sufficiently developed ability to carry out phonemic synthesis and analysis of words. Reading was associated primarily with synthesis – that is, putting smaller elements together to form a whole – whilst writing was associated with analysis, which involves breaking words down into sounds. The teaching method utilised an extended set of letters and LOGO blocks, which enabled pupils to link graphic symbols with their corresponding sounds, recognise different spellings and gradually develop an awareness of spelling. Ročławski rejected a rigid sequence of teaching material that was the same for all children, basing the learning process instead on an assessment of their abilities and individual pace of development.

In Ročławski’s view, the key task of preschool and early primary education is to prevent school failure in literacy by preparing children for reading and writing sufficiently early and over an extended period (rather than limiting efforts to a brief, one-year preparation). He attached particular importance to the development of linguistic skills, including correct articulation and the ability to consciously manipulate sounds, as he interpreted deficits in this area as one of the main causes of later difficulties at school, which are sometimes attributed to diagnostic labels.

The practical dimension of his concept is also revealed in his consistent emphasis on the role of teacher competence. Ročławski critically assessed the state of teachers’ preparation for teaching reading and writing, emphasising the need for a solid linguistic background and a reflective approach to teaching practice. In this context, initiatives promoting glottodidactics through professional development (courses, summer schools) are crucial. Their goal is to combine theory with methodological skills and prepare staff to implement solutions in their work with preschool and early primary-age children.

Ročławski’s most important publications include: ‘Nauka czytania i pisania’ [Learning to Read and Write], ‘Słuch fonemowy i fonetyczny. Teoria i praktyka’ [Phonemic and Phonetic Hearing: Theory and Practice], ‘Badanie tempa i techniki czytania’ [A Study of Reading Pace and Technique], and ‘Podstawy wiedzy o języku polskim dla glottodydaktyków, pedagogów, psychologów i logopedów’ [Fundamentals of Knowledge of the Polish Language for Language Teachers, Educators, Psychologists and Speech and Language Therapists]. These works combine linguistic, phonetic and speech and language therapy knowledge with the methodology of children’s language education.

Original concepts and new perspectives

b. 1942

ŁUKASZEWICZ

Ryszard



‘Curiosity is one of the sources of life; it fuels the imagination; it paves the way for independence, adventure and travel; it fuels passions, talents and interests, and encourages us to ask further questions; it stirs emotions and the courage to learn, to try, to challenge; it fosters determination and the will to discover, to create, to achieve and to go beyond.’

– Ryszard Łukaszewicz

He is a professor of humanities and an educator affiliated with the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń and the Free Educational Initiatives Foundation, as well as academic institutions in Wrocław, Wałbrzych and Toruń. His achievements lie at the intersection of academic reflection and long-term implementation work on an alternative school model. Of particular note is the Wrocław School of the Future project – an experimental facility developed as a coherent vision of primary school, challenging the interpretation of school as an institution of ‘organised submission’ and the subordination of children solely to adult expectations.

Łukaszewicz emphasises education as the creation of human potential, fostering a child’s curiosity, imagination, and independence, and fostering the conditions for learning through action, experience, and interpretation of the world, rather than reproducing pre-made content. In his approach, questions play a key role as a source of motivation and a driving force for learning, focusing students’ attention on the search for meaning and understanding.

A distinctive organisational and methodological approach developed within the Wrocław School of the Future is the method of designing educational opportunities (POE), understood as purposefully constructed learning situations based on open-ended tasks requiring action, experimentation, and exploration. In practice, this is intended to strengthen students’ self-esteem, activate cognitive structures, and encourage children to undertake ‘untried’ activities, rather than limiting them to superficial activities and school-based replication.

A key element of his thinking about education is the narrative model, which views learning as the construction and reconstruction of meanings, revealing a multiplicity of meanings and values, and allowing learners to contribute their own perspective to the world. This orientation is combined with an emphasis on the child’s agency and on organising the learning environment in a way that supports activity, sensory and motor experience, as well as aesthetic and imaginative ways of knowing.

Another important element being developed within the Wrocław School of the Future is STOPES – ‘System Treściowej Organizacji Procesu Edukacji Szkolnej’ [System of Content Organisation of the School Education Process], described as a ‘scaffolding of organising ideas’ intended for subsequent levels of education, including preschool and early primary education (and subsequently grades 4–6, and after the reform, also 7–8). STOPES has a hierarchical structure, leading from the level of general assumptions to the sequencing of content and planned educational opportunities. In this sense, Łukaszewicz’s work combines the concept of upbringing and learning with a precisely designed, implementable model of school organisation.

Original concepts and new perspectives

b. 1943

BOGDANOWICZ

Marta



‘In every case, the early detection of developmental irregularities, early intervention and specialist support are essential for overcoming difficulties.’

– Marta Bogdanowicz

She is a professor of humanities, a clinical child psychologist, and a researcher and practitioner specialising in early developmental support and the prevention of school failure. She is affiliated with the University of Gdańsk and the University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Warsaw. Her work combines clinical and pedagogical perspectives, identifying the mechanisms of developmental and academic difficulties and designing solutions that can be implemented in preschool, grades 1-3, and educational therapy. She is also one of the pioneers of the Veronica Sherborne Developmental Movement Method in Poland and an international trainer of this method (International Sherborne Cooperation).

Bogdanowicz's greatest contribution to preschool and early primary education is the Good Start Method (GSM) – a programme supporting psychomotor development, preparing for reading and writing, and providing corrective and compensatory work. According to the author, the core of the method is multisensory learning and the purposeful integration of functions crucial for mastering school activities: auditory-linguistic, visual-spatial, tactile-kinaesthetic, and motor. GSM grew out of working with children in various institutions (including preschool, school, and counselling) and was developed from the late 1960s, inspired by the French Bon Départ method, which was then transformed and adapted to Polish conditions. Organisationally and methodologically, GSM is based on combining graphic patterns/movement with rhythm (song/poem) and the child's own actions, which are intended to strengthen eye-hand coordination, perceptual analysis and synthesis, and readiness for learning to write.

Another important area of her work is the early diagnosis of dyslexia risk and the dissemination of screening tools that support the decisions of teachers and specialists at the beginning of school. Related to this area is the Dyslexia Risk Scale (DRS), which she developed and uses to initially assess the severity of at-risk symptoms in children. In school and counselling settings, such tools are used to guide children through appropriate supportive interventions.

Bogdanowicz's contribution also includes building a professional community around the issue of dyslexia. In 1990, she founded the Polish Dyslexia Society and served as vice-president of the European Dyslexia Association. Her work is aimed directly at preschool and grade 1–3 teachers, educators, speech therapists, and therapists, reinforcing the practical nature of her work.

Original concepts and new perspectives

b. 1945

DURAJ- NOWAKOWA

Krystyna



‘Teachers must be allowed to assess the needs of young learners when it comes to the overarching themes of lessons – what they expect, what they like – and, whilst allowing for a degree of spontaneity in their activities, take these needs into account.’

– Krystyna Duraj-Nowakowa

She is an educator, professor, specialist in teacher studies and teaching and methodologist in the field of educational research. Her career has spanned teaching experience, followed by academic work since the mid-1970s. In 1985, she was appointed to the position of docent, and in 1993, associate professor; she was awarded the title of professor of humanities in 1998, and appointed full professor in 1999. Later in her career, she was affiliated with the Ignatianum Academy in Kraków, as well as with universities in, amongst others, Toruń, Warsaw, Łódź, Lublin, Rzeszów, Katowice, Szczecin, Poznań, Opole, Kielce, Zielona Góra and Białystok.

Duraj-Nowakowa was interested in a systems approach to education–viewing the upbringing and learning process as a coherent whole of interconnected elements, rather than the sum of isolated activities. In preschool pedagogy, a practical expression of this thinking was her concept of systemic themes, which organised the planning of content and children’s activities into larger, logically interconnected wholes. A systemic theme is understood as a methodological unit with a special structure; it begins with an overarching theme (a core), around which subtopics or equivalent themes are grouped, while maintaining the continuity and logic of the content and taking into account the child’s abilities. In practice, this means planning work according to daily, weekly, monthly, and annual rhythms, with the possibility of flexible time management and combining various forms of activity (guided activities, play, artistic and technical activities, trips, conversation, experiments). This concept also organises group life: teamwork, contact with the social environment, joint management, and joint planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of activities. In this approach, the role of the kindergarten teacher is not limited to implementing the theme of the day, but to consolidating and integrating children’s experiences, organising the learning environment and stimulating planning and control activities, while simultaneously fulfilling caring, educational and teaching functions.

The second pillar of her work is pedeutology and the professionalisation of the teaching profession, particularly in elementary education. Duraj-Nowakowa develops the concept of professional readiness as a process of developing the competencies, dispositions, and reflectiveness necessary for effective action in the real-world context of teaching. From the perspective of a preschool and grades 1-3 teacher, this emphasises independent assessment of situations, responsible selection of teaching and educational strategies, professional ethics, and continuous improvement of skills based on observation and critical reflection on the effects of one’s own actions.

Her achievements are complemented by her contribution to pedagogical methodology, especially the development of a systems approach (modelling, systems research procedures) and the pursuit of conceptual precision and a close connection between theory and educational practice in kindergartens and schools.

Original concepts and new perspectives

b. 1949

BAŁACHOWICZ

Józefa



‘Every child has the right to experience school education as a challenge and an opportunity to explore the world and develop their skills in line with their full potential.’

– Józefa Bałachowicz

She is an educator and researcher affiliated with the TWP College of Education in Warsaw and the Maria Grzegorzewska Academy of Special Education, where she works as a professor in the Department of Early Childhood Education and conducts research and teaching in the areas of preschool and early primary education and pedeutology. Her work is particularly prominent in the critical analysis of school culture: the mechanisms of knowledge transmission, the instrumentalisation of the learning process, and the limitation of child and teacher agency.

A central theme in her thinking is shifting the emphasis from curriculum implementation to education based on values such as agency, relationality, participation, and democracy in everyday school life. Describing changes in early primary education, Bałachowicz points out that, despite reforms, difficulties persist in breaking the ‘vicious cycle of transmission’ and the instrumental model. She proposes a humanistic perspective and a democratising practice, developed in a variety of projects, especially ‘Edukacja Środowiskowa dla Zrównoważonego Rozwoju w Kształceniu Nauczycieli’ [Environmental Education for Sustainable Development in Teacher Education], implemented in collaboration between academic communities in Poland and Norway.

Bałachowicz’s significant contribution is the operationalisation of the concept of teacher educational activity in early primary education. She distinguishes four basic styles of educational activity: instructional, partial activation, negotiation, and delegation. This typology organises teaching practice according to the distribution of control over learning (from teacher domination and step-by-step guidance, through limited activation of student activity within the framework of predetermined goals, to dialogic negotiation of meanings and giving children real responsibility and autonomy in their actions).

Bałachowicz proposes a complementary theoretical framework that allows for the diagnosis of child education models and their corresponding patterns of engagement/direction of learning. She distinguishes four systems built on two axes: from transmissive, closed education to open, transformative education, and from a directive perspective to an orientation towards engagement and participation. In her reflection on educational change, Bałachowicz also emphasises the importance of collaboration between research and practice, as well as the learning of educational institutions through critical analysis of their own solutions. She points to the need to design early primary education as an environment of dialogue and relationships, in which children learn through participation, collaboration, and interpretation of the world, while teachers act as reflective professionals-responsible for the meaning, values, and quality of the child’s educational experiences.

At the same time, Bałachowicz plays organisational and community roles in Polish early primary education, including as a coordinator of research in the field of early primary education and as a participant in editorial and expert activities, which strengthens the transfer of scientific ideas into the practice of teacher education and the debate on the quality of elementary education.

Original concepts and new perspectives

FILIPIAK

Ewa



‘The early years of schooling present a challenge for teachers, who should create an environment in which children can develop independent thinking and action, and introduce them to work as an activity focused on carrying out tasks that are meaningful and important to them.’

– Ewa Filipiak

She is a Polish educator and teacher, specialising in early primary education and research on child learning and development in the school environment. Her academic and professional path is connected to the Bydgoszcz centre; she graduated in pedagogy with a specialisation in early primary education, then defended her doctorate on the linguistic activity of children of early primary school age and her habilitation on the contexts of this activity's development; in 2013, she was appointed professor. At Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz, she holds leadership positions in the areas of teaching and research on the culture of education, and initiates development projects aimed at improving the quality of education. She was also affiliated with the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń and the Gniezno Millennium University, based in Gniezno.

The core of her contribution to preschool and early primary education is the development of a sociocultural perspective (inspired by the concepts of L. S. Vygotsky and J. Bruner, among others) as a basis for designing instruction that builds the capacity to learn, understood not as a student's inherent characteristic but as a result of participation in well-designed social practices, such as dialogue, collaboration, problem-solving, feedback, and working with language as a tool for thinking. In this approach, early primary teachers organise situations in which children learn through participation in a social learning network, rather than by reproducing ready-made answers.

In her practical approach, Filipiak develops and promotes developmental teaching in early primary education, emphasising developmental tasks, the zone of proximal development, theoretical thinking, and learning through action and collaboration. She emphasises the shift from superficial activity to cognitively meaningful activity, that is, activity that leads to understanding, transfer, and self-regulation of learning. She combines this perspective with implementation research and projects aimed at changing school practice (including projects on developing students' learning abilities, as well as application programmes and reports for teachers and students preparing to work in elementary education).

Another important area of her interest is developing teachers' competencies as designers of learning environments. She co-creates methodological guides and solutions that support teachers' professional learning (including materials targeted at elementary education practice), while also promoting an approach in which teachers are reflective examiners of their own actions and co-creators of a learning culture in the classroom.

Original concepts and new perspectives

GUZ

Sabina



**‘A happy childhood, spent in an environment conducive to a child’s harmonious development,
is an invaluable asset that the child carries into adulthood.’**

– Sabina Guz

She is an educator and professor affiliated with the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin and the research and teaching team of the Department of Early Childhood Education, as well as the TWP College of Education in Warsaw. Her work focuses on early childhood education, particularly the systematic description and dissemination of Maria Montessori’s pedagogy as a coherent model for organising a child’s learning environment.

Guz emphasises preparing children for self-education, building their ability to assess their own development, fostering intrinsic motivation, decision-making, and continuing lifelong learning. In practice, this translates into consistently strengthening students’ independence and responsibility through a purposefully designed educational environment in which children learn through action, at a pace adapted to their own abilities.

Guz’s significant contribution concerns the analysis of the role of Montessori teaching materials as tools for cognitive development. She emphasises the importance of the child’s personal contact with the material and the gradual progression from concrete activities, through imaginative operations, to generalisations and abstract activities. In this approach, Montessori materials function as manipulatives, objects that support the child’s progression to subsequent levels of understanding of problems and concepts (particularly in the areas of mathematics and geometry), thus shifting the burden of learning from rote memorisation of definitions and algorithms to independent exploration, construction, and discovery of patterns. This approach has direct practical significance, as it guides teachers in designing teaching situations so that the student becomes the author of their own understanding, not merely the executor of instructions.

At the same time, Guz developed a reflection on the conditions under which children learn in peer relationships. She co-authored a paper describing collaborative learning as a process requiring time, space, diverse materials, and opportunities for manipulation. She also presented a project that embodied a teaching experiment in which developmental and didactic tasks implemented in peer teams served to foster authentic collaboration and develop key competencies. In her view, Montessori pedagogy (with its emphasis on independence and self-directed work) is embedded in a broader framework in which the quality of the educational environment, relationships, and developmental tasks remain crucial.

The practical dimension of Sabina Guz’s work consists primarily in organising the principles of the Montessori system (including the role of the teacher and development materials) and in providing arguments and methodological premises for education that consistently builds the child’s cognitive independence from the earliest stages of education.

Original concepts and new perspectives

KLUS-STAŃSKA

Dorota



‘We must not forget that a consequence of constructivist theory is the assumption that people always construct knowledge; it is simply that, under different conditions, they will construct something different.’

– Dorota Klus-Stańska

She is a Polish educator and teacher, a professor at the University of Gdańsk, and head of the Department of Childhood and School Research. She also has links with universities in Chojnice, Olsztyn and Warsaw. Her work focuses on educational constructivism, educational theory, early education pedagogy, and critical analysis of developmental barriers in school culture. Her contribution to preschool and early primary pedagogy is primarily conceptual and practical. Klus-Stańska consistently describes learning as constructing meanings in relation to language, experience, and the social context of the classroom, rather than as reproducing pre-existing content. This understanding of teaching shifts the focus from implementing material to designing the learning environment, problem-solving, conversation, working with children’s interpretations, and reflecting on how children arrive at understanding.

A strong thread in her work is a critique of transmissionist teaching traditions and the mechanisms through which school knowledge becomes a tool of subordination (including routines, rituals, the dominance of a single ‘correct’ answer, and the reduction of student activity to replay). This line of thought has direct implications for teaching practice, pointing out how lesson organisation, instructional language, and methods of assessing achievement can block cognitive independence and a child’s agency.

Another key element of her approach is the recognition that a child’s knowledge is a dynamic, personal construct that emerges through the interpretation of experiences, rather than through the simple absorption of ready-made information. From this perspective, a mistake is not merely a shortcoming or a failure, but can reveal the child’s way of thinking and serve as a starting point for further learning. The teacher’s role, therefore, is not so much to correct answers quickly as to recognise the meanings attributed by the pupil and to create conditions for these to be developed and reconstructed.

Klus-Stańska is the author of influential didactic syntheses. In her book ‘Dydaktyka wobec chaosu pojęć i zdarzeń’ [Didactics in the Face of the Chaos of Concepts and Events], she organises the basic categories of didactics and demonstrates the consequences of conceptual chaos for school practice. In her book ‘Paradygmaty dydaktyki. Myśleć teorią o praktyce’ [Paradigms of Didactics: Thinking about Practice through Theory], she builds a map of coexisting didactic paradigms and demonstrates that different theoretical assumptions lead to different methodological decisions (e.g., what constitutes ‘student activity’, ‘understanding’, ‘control’ and ‘error’). In the field of early primary education, she also addresses the meanings and meaninglessness of school practices, drawing attention to the tensions between declarations of reform and actual practice in grades I-III.

Her organisational contribution to the development of discourse on early primary education is also significant. Klus-Stańska initiated the creation of the journal ‘Problemy Wczesnej Edukacji’ [Issues in Early Education] in 2005, of which she is editor-in-chief. From 1994 to 2002, she founded and ran the experimental ‘Żak’ Primary School in Olsztyn, based on educational constructivism, which further strengthens the practical roots of her teachings.

Original concepts and new perspectives

SURMA

Barbara



**‘In the religious education proposed by Cavalletti, “being” means, above all, living in a relationship that stems from the need to “be loved” and to “be someone’s child”.
God, who is Love, responds to this natural need.’**

– Barbara Surma

She is a Polish educator and preschool teacher, with a long-standing commitment to the Montessori movement and the religious formation of children through the lens of Maria Montessori’s pedagogy. She is a trained educator (Master of Philosophy in Pedagogy, 1995, with specialisations in catechetics and care-and-education pedagogy), a doctor of humanities in pedagogy (2007), and obtained her habilitation in 2018. Since 1999, she has been teaching and researching at the Ignatianum University/Academy in Kraków, while simultaneously working at the Integrative Montessori Preschool in Kraków as a teacher in an integrated group (1995–2014). She completed two-year continuing education studies for catechists in Rome (Vicariato di Roma) specialising in catechesis according to Montessori principles and obtained an international certificate entitling her to conduct training in Montessori pedagogy. Her activities also include conducting postgraduate studies and training for teachers and catechists.

Surma developed the theoretical foundations and practical implications of implementing Maria Montessori’s system in Polish settings and with reference to international comparisons (Poland–Italy). In this approach, education is organised through a prepared environment, developmental materials, and the consciously shaped role of the teacher as a designer of the learning environment and a careful observer of the child’s activity. A constant thread in her interpretation of Montessori is the education for values (including responsibility, peace, and relationality), understood as the result of treating the child as a subject and building a work culture based on independence and meaningful action.

The second recognisable strand of her work is the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (La Catechesi del Buon Pastore)–a religious formation programme for children aged 3 to 12, developed in Rome from the 1950s by Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gobbi, and rooted in Montessori experiences. Surma emphasises the belief in a child’s particular religious sensitivity in early childhood and the need to organise interactions that foster focus, silence, and a child’s personal response, rather than merely the transmission of content. The practical centre of the method is the ‘atrium’–a prepared intermediate environment between school and church, where the child moves from individual activity to meditation and prayer. The following elements are essential to this methodology: individualisation, an indirect role of the adult (accompanying rather than directing), and the function of a prepared environment enabling the selection of activities according to developmental needs. In her work, Surma also highlights the ‘sign method’ (biblical-liturgical language based on signs, not definitions) and the category of relationship (‘covenant’) as the core of introducing children to religious experience. This approach combines her work with preschool and early primary children with the design of tools and formation programmes for adults.

Original concepts and new perspectives

WLAŹNIK

Barbara



**‘All artistic activities undertaken by children are a realm of exploration for them,
a way of discovering the world of colours and shapes.’**

– Barbara Wlaźnik

She is the author of methodological studies addressed to preschool teachers, focusing on the design and organisation of educational and teaching work in preschool and on the selection of activities that meet the developmental needs of the child.

The most well-known book is ‘Koncepcja pracy wychowawczo-dydaktycznej w edukacji przedszkolnej. Plany pracy i scenariusze zajęć’ [The Concept of Educational and Teaching Work in Preschool Education: Work and Lesson Plans], which provides a structured approach to planning preschool activities throughout the year. It includes the goals and objectives of educational and teaching work, examples of annual and monthly work plans, and lesson plans. The publication is designed as a tool to support teachers in translating preschool tasks into specific educational activities and expected developmental outcomes for children. The work is intended for practical use and is particularly aimed at beginning teachers, who can use it to help design coherent interventions and document the teaching process.

Wlaźnik also explored the role of children in peer groups and the determinants of their social standing within the group. In 1999, she published the article ‘Od czego zależy pozycja dziecka w grupie?’ [What Determines a Child’s Position in a Group?] in the journal ‘Wychowanie w Przedszkolu’ [Preschool Education], in which she addressed the mechanisms of peer acceptance and rejection, as well as the importance of educational activities and the organisation of group life for relationships between children.

Another area of interest for Wlaźnik was the artistic creativity of preschool children. In her publication ‘Twórczość plastyczna w edukacji przedszkolnej’ [Artistic Creativity in Preschool Education], she viewed children’s artistic activity as a space for exploration, experimentation and discovery of the world of colours and shapes. This approach allows us to view drawing, painting and other forms of expression not only as activities aimed at producing a specific result, but also as a way of exploring reality and revealing children’s ways of thinking, perceiving and reacting to their surroundings.

Original concepts and new perspectives

ZWIERNIK

Jolanta



‘When playing, a child [...] is the director, actor, set designer and, ultimately, the scriptwriter. It is play that enables them to experience a sense of agency [...] which forms the basis for other activities they undertake now and in the future.’

– Jolanta Zwiernik

She is an educator and professor affiliated with DSW Ideis University in Wrocław (formerly the University of Lower Silesia). She graduated from the University of Wrocław and focuses her research on childhood and early childhood education, with particular emphasis on children’s everyday lives and living environments.

The core of her contribution to preschool and early primary education is the development of a perspective in which the child is understood as an autonomous subject, a competent participant in social life, capable of interpreting their own experiences and co-creating meaning. In this approach, it becomes crucial to give children a voice in research and in the design of educational practices, so that early childhood education institutions not only organise children’s time but also create conditions for real agency, choice, and participation.

A particularly important strand of her work concerns childhood spaces—the places and everyday landscapes in which children function, learn, and build relationships. Zwiernik demonstrates that space is not a neutral backdrop for upbringing, but actively co-shapes children’s experiences (opportunities for exploration, safety, peer relationships, access to independence). Analysis of micro-environments such as the backyard or playground reveals the tension between adult discourse on care (control and risk reduction) and an emancipatory approach (recognising developmental risk, movement, and shared decision-making).

In terms of methodology, Zwiernik is recognised as an author and promoter of participatory research with children. Her research practice emphasises the value of methods that enable children to express and co-create data (e.g., free-form conversations, photographs taken by children, drawings, experience mapping) in accordance with the logic of the mosaic approach, widely used in early childhood research. This method of working has direct implications for preschool and grades 1-3, as it supports teachers in diagnosing children’s experiences from the inside and in designing an educational environment more appropriate to their real developmental needs. Her work strengthens early childhood pedagogy as an area in which the child’s place, relationships, and voice are equally important components of the quality of learning and nurturing.

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Characters depicted without the use of a reference photograph

In the case of the individuals listed below, no reference photograph was used due to a lack of available photographic material or the necessary consent to use a photograph or likeness. Their likenesses in the illustrations have been obscured, turned away or depicted in such a way as to prevent facial recognition: Marta Bogdanowicz, Maria Cackowska, Natalia Cicimirska, Helena Czerwińska, Irena Dudzińska, Maria Dzierzbicka, Maria Fiedler, Maria Germanówna, Edyta Gruszczyk-Kolczyńska, Aleksandra Gustowiczówna, Dorota Klus-Stańska, Maria Kwiatowska, Stefania Marciszewska-Posadzowa, Teresa Pruszek-Mleczkowska, Maria Sariusz-Jaworska, Antonina Sawicka, Ida Maria Schätzel, Justyna Strzemeska, Barbara Surma, Bronisław Roctawski, Zofia Topińska, Jadwiga Walczyna, Barbara Włażnik, Jolanta Zwiernik, Zofia Żukiewiczowa.

