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ABSTRACT

A course entitled "Schools and Democratic Society" was prepared between September, 1992 and March, 1993 as the result of a cooperative effort between the Polish Ministry of National Education and the Mershon Center of The Ohio State University. This document presents the rationale for the course. As Poland moves through the transition from communism to democracy, it is clear that the role of the school must change. The purpose of the course is to empower prospective teachers to take on the challenges of change toward democracy in the Polish school system. The course is organized around seven features of the educational system: (1) the position and role of the teacher; (2) student rights and responsibilities; (3) parent participation in schools; (4) school and local community; (5) distribution of resources for education; (6) school as an organization and as a community; and (7) the role of schools in a democratic society. (DB)

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"Schools and Democratic Society"

A Course Syllabus for Poland's Future Teachers

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SCHOOLS AND DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

RATIONALE

(Final Draft for Discussion in the Seminar)

Statement of Rationale

* A course entitled "Schools and Democratic Society" was prepared between September, 1992 and March, 1993 as the result of a cooperative effort between **The Polish Ministry of National Education** and **The Mershon Center** at **The Ohio State University**. The Mershon Center is an interdisciplinary organization that is internationally recognized for its work in designing curriculum, developing instructional materials, and training teachers. The project was partially funded by the **PEW Charitable Trust** of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA.

The authors of the syllabus (one political scientist, one sociologist, one educational psychologist, and two social psychologists) spent four months (September - December, 1992) at the Mershon Center working on the first draft of the Syllabus with consultation from American specialists in education. The primary specialists were **Dr. Luvern L. Cunningham**, Professor Emeritus of Education and former Dean of the College of Education at OSU, and **Dr Richard C. Remy**, Professor of Education, Associate Director of the Mershon Center and Project Director. This first stage of work was devoted to defining the main aspects of the school's operation in a democratic society and their relevance to Poland's present and future needs. Additionally, some new teaching methods were explored. The second phase took place in

Poland where detailed suggestions for the content of the course and teaching methods and procedures were developed.

* When looking back on more than forty years of communism in Poland one can find many reasons to be dissatisfied with schooling in our country. Teachers were probably in a position to be disappointed the most. On the level of doctrine, they were recognized as an important pillar for the "new type" of society -- responsible for forming and enlightening the young generation. In practice, however, Communist leaders were inclined to instrumentalize them harshly by enforcing strict subordination to bureaucrats and politicians. As a consequence, many within Polish society perceived them as more or less voluntary agents of indoctrination. Parents were concerned whether or not their children obeyed teachers' demands enough to avoid trouble, and they were hostile toward the politically imposed authority of the school. They could hardly influence the education of their children. The majority limited themselves to indirect control over schooling by correcting the child's knowledge when it didn't fit the family's standards and values. Students frequently didn't like school and its authoritarian atmosphere. There was no kind of authentic bond between school and community, nor could the community influence schooling in any respect.

Therefore, it is now an object of consensus that this unsatisfactory condition of Polish schooling must change; that it has to be democratized.

* Yet, this necessity of change also has a deeper

justification: a need to educate the young generation for life in a free and democratic Polish society. Modern democracy is more than a form of government. It is a mode of associated living. It assumes freedom, justice, and equality for everyone. It asks for participation and responsibility from everyone. In a democracy, nothing is decided once and for all. It is a process of continuous changes. No static "final product" of this process can be identified. The "democratic ideal" fulfills itself in the ways individuals and groups act and interact with each other. Thus, this implies that "education for democracy" should be based on democratic experiences. **It requires school to become a democratic environment in the sense of both democratic climate and democratic means.**

* Release from communism does not democratize school automatically. Moreover, many obstacles emerge that are related to the transitory character of the present. Political instability disturbs necessary legislative changes and produces a "carrousel of positions" in education. Economic crises limit some recognized possibilities of reform in school, making the already difficult financial situation of teachers and many students more difficult.

There are barriers created by the lack of democratic experiences as well. Very often, the main agents of school education do not know precisely **what** they can do and **how** to initiate democratic changes. They have problems with expressing mutual expectations, with compromising, and with reaching

agreement on issues of school and education. They do not know patterns of behavior that honor democratic values and procedures.

*** The purpose of this course is to empower prospective teachers to take on the challenges of change toward democracy in the Polish school system.** There is no possibility to build an algorithm to purchase this goal, but we can help students to construct a fundamental heuristic for "the beginning." By believing they will be able to recognize the utility of democratic skills and procedures for school life, they will also be able to improve and develop them further while collecting experiences as teachers.

To accomplish the objective of this course, students should have an opportunity for: **(a) cognitive insight into both actuality and potentiality of Polish school in the context of democracy.** Therefore, not only do they have to investigate the present situation of education in Poland, the character and consequences of reforms, barriers for them to hurdle, etc., but also the possibilities of development as they can be suggested on the basis of the Polish experience, practice of other countries, and democratic values and principles.

Simultaneously, participants in the course should be provided with the opportunity to **(b) practice basic competencies associated with citizenship in democracy and necessary for teachers in a democratic society.** These competencies are communicating, making judgments, and making decisions. This task requires not only acting, but also examination of one's own and

other's behavior while applying democratic standards.

Goals of the Course

A. Knowledge Goals

Specifically, this course should help students to:

- a. recognize the rights, responsibilities and role of the teacher in a democratic society;
- b. understand the different types of rights and responsibilities possessed by children in their role as students;
- c. appreciate the rights and responsibilities of parents in the education of their children and with regard to the school;
- d. consider the relationship between schools and their local community within a democratic framework;
- e. explore the meaning of democracy for the funding of public and private schools;
- f. explore the meaning of democracy for the organization and operation of school as a community;
- g. inquire into the role and purpose of schools in democratic society.

B. Skill Goals

Specifically, this course should help students to:

- a. exercise effective communication with other

actors of the "school scene" (pupils, parents, principals, teachers, etc.);

b. practice making judgments on the basis of democratic values;

c. experience making decisions anchored in democratic standards and principles.

The goals of the course imply methods of teaching. First, since recognition of values is involved, students have to feel free to analyze them and to confront them with personal standards and through many different perspectives. Second, for learning some democratic procedures and styles of acting there is no other way than practice. Therefore, there are proposed "inquiry" oriented methods for the course, some of which are based on experiences collected in real or simulated situations. If a side effect of the course will be an appreciation of these methods of teaching by prospective teachers, this effect can be considered an additional benefit.

The course is organized around the analysis of seven features of the educational system:

1. The Position and Role of the Teacher
2. Student Rights and Responsibilities
3. Parent Participation in Schools
4. School and the Local Community
5. Distribution of Resources for Education
6. School as an Organization and as a Community
7. The Role of Schools in Democratic Society

There were two criteria for the selection of the topics. First, there was a close connection between the different aspects of the organization and operation of schools. Examination of a "democratic alternative" for school needs as direct an application of values and procedures as possible and cannot be replaced with learning about democracy "as such." The second criterion resulted from the main domains of the reform of the school system in Poland. In these domains, prospective teachers will be able to exercise democratic standards and procedures if they desire to do so.

Suggested Number of Class Hours per Topic

(This course is designed to cover sixty class hours)

{minimum/maximum}

1. The Position and Role of the Teacher.....{14/20}
2. Student Rights and Responsibilities.....{8/10}
3. Parent Participation in Schools.....{4/6}
4. School and the Local Community.....{6/8}
5. Funding of Schools.....{2/4}
6. School as an Organization and as a Community.....{10/14}
7. The Role of Schools in Democratic Society.....{6?}