

## **Polish teachers seem to be diversity-sensitive**

Polish teachers in general appear to be sensitive to diversity. Sixty-six percent of the survey's participants did not agree that diversity is a threat to society.<sup>1</sup> As they declare in the questionnaire, they would resolutely react to an imaginary case of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation occurring in school. Asked in an open question on how individuals can differ in society, only 15% of the educators asked were able to name more than three diversity dimensions<sup>2</sup>. Sensitivity towards one or some dimension of diversity, therefore, does not seem to equal simultaneous awareness of others.

The teachers who filled out the questionnaire believe that people mainly differ according to their faith, culture and language, and, finally, general attitude. All surveyed participants confirm that they apply diversity as a topic in their work, but 49% did not precisely define the dimension (race, faith ...) regarding to which they chose to do so. Thirty-six percent refer to the intercultural and language-related dimension, the highest scorer amongst the categories, when asked in which way they approach diversity. Second came "religion" and "physical ability" - each accounting for 11 %.

**These are the core findings of a survey on diversity conducted amongst Polish teachers by the author in the framework of the Czech-German Young Professionals Program 2014.** The author was interested in whether Polish teachers show sensitivity to diversity and if they take action to promote it in the classroom. Finally, it was important to the author to examine the reaction to diversity-related challenges possible to occur in the school. The core premise behind the study was that apart from governmental education priorities, it is the attitudes of individual teachers which influence the pupils to at least a comparable extent.

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<sup>1</sup> On a scale of 1 ("do not agree at all") to 10 ("fully agree"), 31 of 47 of respondents chose options 1 and 2.

<sup>2</sup> Although manifold suggestions were possible (and actually given) by the respondents, the author created for analytical purposes the dimension "faith", "physical appearance", "gender", "age", "physical ability", "social and material status", "ethnicity", "sexual orientation", "culture and language" and "attitude". In doing so, he was able to categorize the bulk of the answers.

### *Understanding diversity*

**Question three**, an open question, asked participants how an individual can differ in society. Only 15 % of the participants named more than three diversity dimensions: "Faith" (45 %) and "external appearance" (51 %) prevailed, being mentioned by almost half of the respondents.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, 30% of the surveyed teachers suggested that people differ according to their attitude. Surprisingly, only 4% of the respondents proposed physical ability as a main factor by which people can differ. Apart from **question three** discussed above, the educators also used **question one**, "What is diversity in society for you?" and "What do you associate with this term?", to further specify dimensions in which people can differ. Although it came as an unintended consequence by the author, this was an ideal opportunity to evaluate the consistency of answers across the survey. It seems respondents were consistent when filling out the questionnaire: The sample of answers to **question one** confirms what was revealed in the answers to **question three**. Only 19% of the respondents named more than three diversity dimensions in answer to **question one**. The top scorers with **question one** were "Faith" (49 %), "culture and language" (45 %) and "attitude" (45 %).

### *Reacting to discrimination*

The participants of the survey declared that they would react to discrimination in school and they were able to describe strategies how to tackle discrimination. Confronted with an imaginary case of discrimination based upon the sexual orientation affecting a pupil, 68% would consequently discuss homosexuality and discrimination with their pupils. Thirty percent would consult external actors and colleagues. It goes without saying that these declarations do not guarantee that the surveyed would or could actually apply the described strategies in real life situations.

When confronted with an intercultural challenge that demands a position to be taken, for instance, should a Muslim girl be allowed to skip sports classes for religious reasons, opinions differ. Having only two possible options for an answer, 51% of respondents answered

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<sup>3</sup> "Faith": 45 %; "External appearance": 51 %.

"yes" and 49% "no". However, comments regarding this question<sup>4</sup> show a more diverse range of opinions and possible reactions. This might be a sign of indecisiveness and uncertainty. Some contradicting opinions are presented regarding the legal background of the situation. Worth noting is the fact that although not asked explicitly to find a compromise for the given situation, 26% of the teachers who took part in the survey proposed to discuss the participation of a Muslim girl in sports lessons with all parties involved in order to find a solution satisfying for everyone.

### *Applying diversity mainly understood as raising awareness about other cultures*

When it comes to question 6b, "Do you apply the issue of diversity in your work at school?", there was not a single respondent who negated the statement. However, as many as half of the teachers surveyed (49%) did not specifically define in which way they do so (although the descriptive part of the question contained suggestions) and how they precisely approach the topic. This result indicates that the respondents might have believed reporting that they do not apply diversity would be seen as unfavorable - the tendency towards socially desirable responses<sup>5</sup> might have applied in this case. The intercultural and language-related dimensions was the first choice of the teachers surveyed in the framework of this research, when confronted with the task how and what dimension of diversity to discuss. Thirty-six percent refer to cultural differences and languages when asked what elements of diversity they raise in class. In spite of the suggestions in the descriptive part of the question, very few respondents referred to the dimensions of "religion" and "physical ability" (both 11 %), "sexual orientation" (2%) or "age" (0%). These dimensions seem to be, reasons unknown, of less relevance when it comes to raising diversity awareness in school.

Although only six percent of teachers rated diversity as a threat in question 2a, some three percent of the answers submitted in 2b give interesting insight to latent Islamophobic positions (e.g. a quote from

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<sup>4</sup> Respondents had the possibility to justify their "yes" or "no" choice.

<sup>5</sup> In depth on this problem: van de Mortel, Thea F: Faking it: social desirability response bias in self-report research, in: Australian Journal of Advanced Nursing, Vol. 25, No. 4. Lismore, 2008. Page 40-48, accessed October 18th: [http://epubs.scu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=hahs\\_pubs](http://epubs.scu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=hahs_pubs)

one of the answers "Following, however, what happens in the contemporary societies, especially in the West, I observe that people of Muslim faith presently fight their "Holy War", my translation, M.K.). This might be due to the high-scale media coverage on Syria and the IS during the time the survey was carried out.<sup>6</sup>

### *Methodological approach and target group*

This research can only be considered a non-representative pre-study due to several limiting factors (e.g., number of respondents = 47). It is important to stress that sensitivity to diversity and what goes with this, discrimination and strategies to counter it, cannot solely be examined by survey. Other methods such as field observations should be taken into account as Kinga Wysieńska suggests.<sup>7</sup> This is mostly due to the fact that, in regards to the discussed topic, opinions, attitudes and behavior can differ greatly even with the same respondent. This is why conclusions in this article are drawn only regarding the teacher sample, not all Polish teachers.

Respondents were approached by the author through his personal and business network and by addressing formal actors and institutions in the Polish educational system. Interestingly, 62% of the persons who filled in the questionnaire work in a school located in a city with less than 100.000 inhabitants. Although it was not examined where the respondents were born and raised, these results seem to contradict the common belief that smaller communities in Poland are less sensitive to diversity. Seventy percent of all teachers surveyed have between 11 and 30 years of work experience. Sixty-two percent work in the Polish *gimnazjum*, a mandatory high school of the grades seven to nine. As multiple employments in several schools are typical for Poland, *liceum* (high-school, grade 10 to 12, leading to A-levels) ranks second at 32 %.

The questionnaire contained closed as well as open ended questions in order to allow the respondents to, on the one hand, express their opinion without constraints, and, on the other hand, produce

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<sup>6</sup> 28 September - 11 October 2014

<sup>7</sup> compare: Wisieńska, Kinga: Wiedz, co badasz, badaj, co potrafisz wyjaśnić – o metodach badania dyskryminacji, in: Katarzyna Wencel, Kinga Wisieńska [ed.]: Status, Tożsamość, Integracja. O (nie)równym traktowaniu imigrantów w Polsce, Warsaw, 2013. Page 9-27, accessed October 18th: <http://interwencjaprawna.pl/wp-content/uploads/status-tozsamosc-dyskryminacja.pdf>.

standardized data. Question 2a was phrased on purpose in a negative way in order to attenuate the tendency towards "socially desirable responses". Respondents were confronted with two imaginary cases that required them to take a position. These were purposefully projected away from the respondent ("A colleague asks you for advice") in order to allow the respondents to take some distance to the situation presented.

*The questions:*

1. What is diversity in society for you? What do you associate with this term?

2a. "Diversity is a danger to society!" – To what extent do you agree with the statement above? (scale from 1 to 10)

2b. Please explain your answer to question 2a.

3. How can a person differ from others? Please give one or more nouns defining possible characteristics.

4. Pupils of a colleague of yours bully one boy in her class, because they assume him to be homosexual. Your colleague asks you for advice. Please put yourself in the situation of your colleague. What advice would you give him/her in this situation? Would you react being in her shoes?

5a. A girl of Muslim faith enters your school. Supported by her parents, she refuses to take part in sports lessons for religious reasons. Your colleague asks for your opinion. Should the girl be excused from sports lessons? (options: yes/no)

5b. Please explain your answer to question 5a.

6a. Are you raising the issue of diversity in your work at school? In regards to this question, please understand diversity as differences regarding faith, nationality, culture, sexual orientation, physical ability, age or other.

6b. If yes: Please describe in which way you raise the issue. If no:

Why don't you raise the issue and would you like to do it?

7. Statistical data: I teach in the following kind of school (multiple choice: „gimnazjum” (lower secondary school), “liceum” (upper secondary school), “szkoła zawodowa” (vocational school), “technikum” (technical college), “szkoła podstawowa” (grammar school))

8. Statistical data: I teach in school for already ... (seniority; single choice, 0-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-20 years, 21-30 years, longer)

9. Statistical data: City of my school

10. Statistical data: I would like to receive information about the results of this research and win one of the vouchers for EMPIK. Please enter your e-mail address below (voluntary)

11. I would like to add the following regarding this questionnaire ... (voluntary) Thank you for your participation!

The questionnaire in the Polish original version is still available at:  
<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/viewform?om=true&richtext=false&formkey=dGttQWVjNkM2REZUTTg4dVq5b1B5RVE6MA#gid=0>

# DIVERSITY SENSITIVITY OF POLISH TEACHERS

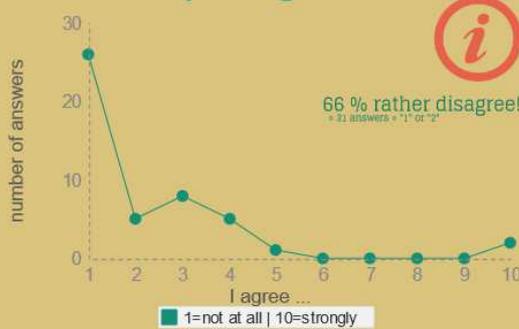
- results of a survey\* by @maltekoppe 

## Key findings

"The respondents perceive diversity as something positive. They can name discrimination-sensitive dimensions (e.g. faith, gender). As they declare, they would resolutely react to an imaginary case of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation occurring in school. However, as far as methodology is concerned, one has to bear in mind that discrimination can not solely be examined by surveys."  
- author

\* Non-representative survey conducted 28 September - 11 October 2014. Find the questionnaire here (in Polish): [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/viewform?usp=drive\\_web&formkey=dGttOWVlNkM2REZUTTg4dVg5b1B5RVE6MA#gid=0](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/viewform?usp=drive_web&formkey=dGttOWVlNkM2REZUTTg4dVg5b1B5RVE6MA#gid=0)

## "Diversity is a threat to society!" Do you agree?



number of respondents in the survey:

47

100 % !

of the above declare to apply diversity in class



The question was an open one. Some respondents proposed several solutions simultaneously. Therefore, the total number of responses is larger than 47. Some suggested reactions are not included in this graph.

One of the questions in the survey was:

"The pupils in the class of a colleague are of the opinion that one boy amongst them is homosexual. They bully him because of their assumption."

Please put yourself in the shoes of your colleague. What advice would you give? Would you react?

The vast majority of surveyed teachers would use this situation to discuss discrimination and sexual orientation in class.

## Profile of the respondents

## ... and one quote:

62 % of the surveyed teachers ...



work at a Polish "gimnazjum" (7-9th grade)

multiple answers possible, 8 % = other

70 % of the respondents have between ...

11-30 years

... of teaching experience

62 % of the teachers surveyed live ...



in cities with less than 100,000 inhabitants

4 % = no answer

"In Poland, for example, people of Polish nationality, Catholics and Caucasians prevail.

This causes us to not be as open, but we are changing gradually."

(a respondent, translation by Malte Koppe)