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Employing the Project Method in the Implementation of Regional Education in Grades 1–3 of Władysław Syrokomla Primary School in Michałowo

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ABSTRACT

Regional education is an enduring process, which serves to introduce children into the cultural world of their most immediate society, while simultaneously preparing them for a life as part of a community. Regional education enables a better understanding of individuals hailing from the local community as well as makes it easier for students to find answers to the questions: Who are they? What are their roots? According to what values do people from their family and locality act? How does the culture they were born and raised into differ from those found in other regions of Poland? This article demonstrates the importance and benefits of regional education as well as the employment of project method in regional education, on the basis of particular methodological approaches. The present paper draws from literature concerned with regional education subject area as well as early childhood education, along with project method. This article is also based upon the information acquired through cooperation with the Municipal (Polish: *Gminny*) Cultural Centre in Michałowo and Władysław Syrokomla Primary School in Michałowo as well as conversations with residents and local activists.

KEYWORDS: regional education, project method, student of early childhood education.

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Introduction

Regional education is vital, as it contributes to getting acquainted with the self and the place of belonging. Students' development cannot proceed without their families or social environment they inhabit, which is why regional education fulfils such a key role in the didactic and nurturing process of every child. Regional education enables students to access that what is most precious within immediate surroundings, brings out the potential of a place, people, and multiplies it by passing it on to the next growing generation. Moreover, if the inter-generational communication is in any way upset, regional education builds the path of dialogue, so important during the transfer of culture.

In the era of a "global village", regional education's meaning is shifting, on the one hand, globalisation advances, and on the other, the more multicultural we are, the more we feel like citizens of the world, the more often we experience longing for our roots. The need to go back to our roots may manifest itself in many ways, one trend that is noticeable nowadays is a tendency to withdraw from the artificial and modern, and turn towards what is traditional, local, and natural.

The notion of education and regional education as well as their significance

According to Wincenty Okoń, traditionally understood education is "the body of processes and influences, whose purpose is to change people—above all children and youths—according to the ideals and pedagogical objectives present in a relevant society" (Okoń, 2001, p. 87). Czesław Banach expands upon this theory, writing that it is "a multilateral and multifunctional as well as interdisciplinary and continuous process, which unfolds in three temporal dimensions: past, present, and future. In each of these dimensions, education pertains to the local environment, country, Europe, and the world" (Karbowiczek, Kwaśniewska, & Surma, 2017, p. 221).

The term regional education traces its origin to the notions of region and regionalism. "Region" has a lot of meanings, one may single out, e.g. a geographical region or an administrative region, "as a territory, it is a certain area within which arose some specified characteristics, and its residents are aware of traditions and a value system as well as a sense of their own identity" (Nikitorowicz, 2009, p. 513). When a certain territory "is characterized by distinctiveness and specificity of the cultural features of the people that continuously inhabit it", it is a cultural region (Nikitorowicz, 2009, p. 513). While discussing regional education, researchers refer to the region in an ethnographic as well as in the abovementioned cultural sense. The notions of region and regionalism

form the basis of regional education and are multidimensional, which influences the precision of defining what regional education is in actuality. According to a general definition of regional education, which can be found in a Polish language dictionary, it is noted that it is “a concept that highlights a didactic importance of local cultural heritage as an indispensable element of an identity of an individual as well as society” (Encyklopedia PWN, n.d.). In other words, if one desires to become a formed and conscious, independent entity, while still retaining a place and functioning in a social group, one needs to know regional values and matters, their own culture, to achieve this aim. Irena Jarzyńska stresses that “regional education facilitates a pupil to discover their cultural identity and their own place in the world, it is also a source of national identity, it enables self-identification and interpretation” (Jarzyńska, 2010, p. 80). The key component of regional education is, therefore, developing different types of identities within the student, e.g. personal—understood as a collection of identities resulting from various relations and roles that enable self-determination, social—connected to the features attributed to an individual by others, its foundation is the sense of belonging to a group and relations with others, cultural—consisting in the identification of an individual or a group with determined cultural values, regional—referring to a determined territory and its important features, and national—forming part of a system consisting of the knowledge about “us” and “others”, attitudes and sentiment to own nation and emotional sphere, bond with the nation (Popielarczyk-Pałęga, 2018, p. 18). In this manner, we satisfy one of the basic needs, which is possessing a formed identity. Wiesław Theiss differentiates between narrow and wide scope of regional education, where narrow is understood as “a didactic-nurturing process, relying on acquiring, teaching, and popularising the knowledge of local environment, of the lives of its inhabitants, learning about social, natural, and cultural environment” (Popielarczyk-Pałęga, 2018, p. 80). In a wide sense, “it is a process of shaping and developing competencies (...), it is the behaviour that connects to the realisation of local needs, e.g. economic, cultural, educational, and political” (Popielarczyk-Pałęga, 2018, p. 80).

Dzierżymir Jankowski understands regional education in terms of “introducing the individuals and small social groups to the traditions and current socio-cultural life of the region and local environment” (Petrykowski, 2003, p. 36). Within the framework of regional education, he distinguishes both conscious and deliberate actions as well as spontaneous ones. In his analyses, Piotr Petrykowski, raises a doubt as to the validity of the existence of the term “regional education”, proposing instead another one, e.g. “intracultural education”, arguing that regional education is a notion that is too general and imprecise (Petrykowski, 2003, p. 270). Petrykowski analyses various concepts of regional education, making it evident how many ways there are of understanding and interpreting it. Regional education may be perceived as “a component and contents of general education”, with the scope encompassing: natural environment, industry

and parts of social and economic environment, social and cultural environment (Petrykowski, 2003, p. 35–37). Another concept positions regional education as the return to the roots, understood as, among others, “ethics, language, domestic, local, and regional culture”. From this viewpoint, a person builds their identity in levels, first familial, ethnic, regional, national, and at the end, human (Petrykowski, 2003, p. 38–41). The third manner of representing regional education is connected to acquiring competencies within the local environment, shaping abilities, and respect for cultural heritage and values (Petrykowski, 2003, p. 43–45). The fourth approach to regional education calls it a structural system, a multi-level reality wherein the following structures are present: didactic (integration of knowledge), nurturing (shaping attitudes), and caring (care reaching beyond the school programme), whereas this system should also focus on what is contemporary, on the current student problems (Petrykowski, 2003, p. 45–48). The fifth viewpoint treats regional education as the scope of knowledge (knowledge of the local natural environment and ecological development, knowledge of the local topography, historical knowledge—local events, prominent persons, political structures, knowledge of the local community involving multiculturalism, knowledge of the local vernacular and literature, knowledge of the local architecture as well as artistic and artisanal work), and puts forward a proposition of creating a school subject that would address it (Petrykowski, 2003, p. 48–50). The sixth concept included in the programmes of the former Ministry of Sports and Education involves cultural heritage, which, in this case means “enabling young people to learn about their own cultural heritage, regional traditions, internalising regional values and matters, shaping and consolidating regional attitudes” (Petrykowski, 2003, p. 50–51). Another idea is regional education as the school’s task, that is deliberate actions shaping the attachment within students (emotional bond) and inducing them to cherish their own region (Petrykowski, 2003, p. 54–55). The last concept cited by Petrykowski is founded on the slogans “knowing, strengthening, making aware”—getting to know the region, strengthening the regional identity, making people aware of the need for self-development and getting involved in the local social and economic and cultural life (Petrykowski, 2003, p. 56–58). Regardless of the nomenclature or concepts, in the literature there exists a belief that regional education should be the starting point for general education. Nikitorowicz puts “microcosm—mother tongue, religion, genealogy, traditions, customs, practices, and behavioural norms” above “mesostructure—education in the national dimension” and education concerning the world. Then, globalism is not a threat (Nikitorowicz, 2009, p. 216). Regional education is tasked with delivering knowledge, protecting local values, introducing them, and shaping the sense of being rooted by building bonds (Nikitorowicz, 2009, p. 218).

The contents of regional education shall include culture, history, geography, nature, society (Jarzyńska, 2010, p. 82). To be more precise, it will deal with “spiritual

and material culture, local vernacular, architecture, folklore, legends, folk art, knowledge of local heroes and events (history elements), customs, communing with nature, landscape, intergenerational transmission, interpersonal contacts” (Nikitorowicz, 2009, p. 218). Regional education pertains to so many fields that the researchers put forward a conclusion, wherein they highlight that for education to be effective, there needs to be cooperation among the specialists from various fields, among others: archaeologists, ethnographers, psychologists, art historians, pedagogues, sociologists, local experts, entertainers (Brzezińska et al., 2006, p. 14–16). Functions listed as relevant to regional education at the first level of education are: social, cultural, and nurturing. Social function refers to the bond with the region, the sense of community, and social activity, cultural to the protection of the region’s folk culture, and nurturing to the shaping of the sensitivity and respect for the beauty of regional culture and nature as well as to the interest in history, present, and the development of the region (Jarzyńska, 2010, p. 82). In summary, regional education is a path to protecting and knowing the “little homelands”, to preserving and expanding the cultural heritage, to intergenerational exchange, openness, tolerance, peace, self-knowledge, consistent identity, awareness, knowing others, meeting other people, to integration, values, developing competences, self-developing, preparing for life, communication and cooperation, it is a “window to the world”.

Project method as one of the activating methods

Project method is one of the teaching methods, or education methods, to be precise. According to Wincenty Okoń, the term education method is more appropriate due to the fact that it includes both the student and the teacher, refers to teaching and learning (Okoń, 2003, p. 245). However, both shall be used within this chapter. The general definition of teaching method describes it as a way of acting, researching (Karbowniczek, Kwaśniewska, & Surma, 2017, p. 232). Okoń provides the definition of education method more precisely, according to him, it is a “tested and systematically used set of actions of teachers and students, realised in a deliberate manner for the purpose of bringing about the predetermined changes in the students’ selves” (Okoń, 2003, p. 246–247). Conversely, Czesław Kupisiewicz deems teaching method to be a deliberate method of work that is systematically employed by the teacher towards children, leading to fulfilling the aims of education (Kupisiewicz, 2009, p. 102). There are many definitions of education methods, however, their principal purpose should be encouraging students to act, independently discover, deepen the knowledge and use it in practice. Currently, according to the constructivists, the most important aspect of the education process is engagement and involvement of the child. The teacher is to be

a partner, supportive companion, utilising such methods that would let the students build knowledge independently. At the same time, it is important that students' activity involves all spheres of children's development, such as physical, cognitive (knowledge, abilities), emotional (engagement, motivation), and social (social competencies). Successful education requires a departure from expository methods and turning to a constructivist direction (Nowak, 2008, p. 327). Knowledge is to be solely the means of acquiring certain abilities, and not the main purpose of education. Executing this path is possible thanks to the project method, among others.

Project method, while demanding and not without its faults, definitely deserves teacher's attention, if only for the fact that it is based on students' resources, bringing to light their interests and needs. What is more, the interdisciplinarity of project method fits very well into the mould of integrated teaching, while working with this method, it is possible to connect contents from all types of education present in grades 1–3. Apart from this, project is closer to students' daily life than dry facts quoted from textbooks, which is why it shall much better prepare them for social life and getting involved in socially important matters, e.g. connected to ecology. During the execution of the project, students take on roles of little researchers, explorers, which makes them develop the ability of finding and curating necessary information, which is indispensable in the current world, filled to the brim with various information and sources. Thanks to project method, students can be fully roused to activity, independence, and taking initiative in the education process. This method provides a variety of possibilities, from individual to group work, from the topics contained within the teaching programme to those with wider scope, or from artistic to scientific projects. From the earliest years of primary school, project work lets teachers develop competences that positively influence further education as well as students' functioning in subsequent professional life.

**“Tour around Niezbudka” Project as Joanna Worona’s original
methodological proposition of regional education implementation
in grades 1–3 of Władysław Syrokomla Primary School
in Michałowo**

The objective of the project was to familiarise the students with history, culture, and natural beauty of Michałowo as well as to develop a sense of belonging to the “little homeland”. Due to the age of the participants—9 year olds, 3rd grade of primary school—the project has a mostly structured form. The project interweaves various types of education: Polish studies, natural, social, musical, art, technical, IT. The project's duration is one semester (summer), during which teachers, in a flexible way, may under-

take the proposed actions in the form of nine themed meetings. The project does not include precise dates for implementation of the respective stages, and the given class duration times are solely an approximate, so that the teacher can adjust the aforementioned elements to students' needs and capabilities. The suggestions included in the class scenarios can be utilised as separate project actions if a given group is not able to undertake the entire project, e.g. little theatre based on the legend about the establishment of Michałowo, or reconstructing the old photos from an album of Michałowo. Each of the proposed scenarios can be extended or shortened, so that the class can be aligned with the children's interests. The teacher has the option to choose, modify, or change the order of classes. The programme of the project includes themed classes, trips, contest, and organising exhibitions of photos and works. The project is assumed to accomplish the following results: deepening of the students' emotional bond with the local environment, evoking interest in history, nature, and culture of the locality, developing teamwork skills, and using various sources of information.

Benefits of realising the “Tour around Niezbudka” Project

The “Tour around Niezbudka” Project involves utilising the project method in the course of regional education in the 3rd grade of primary school. It proposes combining various types of education within project activities for the purpose of getting to know the students' place of residence better. It connects to regional education in a wider context. It involves cooperation with institutions, specialists, in the scope of history, natural beauty, culture as well as society of a chosen locality. The project highlights the benefits arising from carrying out regional education and utilising project method to do so. The indicated project proposal fulfils the predetermined goals. It makes it possible to get to know the historical and legendary past, culture, local society, and nature of the Municipality of Michałowo.

The “Tour around Niezbudka” Project has been realised in Władysław Syrokomla Primary School in Michałowo since 2022, by teachers of the 3rd grade. According to the teachers, thanks to the participation in the “Tour around Niezbudka” Project, and due to the assistance provided by the project activities related to regional education, among others, the students gain knowledge about their place of residence as well as various skills connected to, e.g. independent acquiring of information from different sources, carrying out an interview, teamwork, using MS Word and PowerPoint programmes, ability of shared decision-making, and organisational skills associated with organising an exhibition for the purposes of the project. During the project, students have an opportunity to work in groups, but also independently. They develop their communication skills as well as personality traits, such as, e.g. conscientiousness or

engagement. Additionally, children are able to build their own identity and the sense of belonging to a local society to a fuller extent. The teachers, on the other hand, thanks to observing the students during the execution of the project, among others, acquire valuable information about each pupil, which help them to push the personalisation of teaching, which is such a widely discussed matter, nowadays. Personalisation understood as fully matching the methods and contents, among others, to the needs, skills, interests of a student, pre-established in the community of the grade, school, or local.

Features of the area that the project is realised in

The area that the project is realised in is the locality and municipality of Michałowo, located in Podlaskie Voivodeship, 36 kilometres from Białystok, within the area of Wysoczyzna Białostocka. From east, Michałowo borders Belarus (Nos, 1996, p. 5), which is the reason for Belarusian influence on the local culture, e.g. in the local vernacular. The Municipality of Michałowo incorporates mainly rural areas. Neighbouring municipalities are the Municipality of Gródek, Narew and Narewka as well as Zabłudów (Nos, 1996, p. 5). Michałowo is a locality that is interesting also in the historical context. The settling of Michałowo area, together with its environs, began in the 15th century. It started with the establishment of settlements populated by hunters, pitch burners, honey harvesters, etc. The settlers were tasked, among others, with providing the Jałówka manor house with game and honey, farming, and guarding the surrounding forests. Up to the 18th century, the area of the Municipality of Michałowo was settled mostly with Belarusian, Belarusian-Lithuanian, and Ukrainian peoples. Only in the 18th century, the area began to attract numerous Poles as well as Jews. In the 19th century, Michałowo was inhabited by a significant number of Germans, thanks to whom the textile industry commenced in this area (Nos, 1996, p. 20, 43). Nowadays, the residents are mostly Polish, as the Jews were removed during the II World War, Belarusians emigrated to USSR, and the Germans were forced by the contemporary Soviet authorities to leave the area of the municipality in 1940 (Nos, 1996, p. 46). In the past, it was possible to encounter the following types of artisanship and services, from which some survive until today: carpentry (construction of wooden buildings), woodwork, tavillonnage (roof shingle making), cooperage (making barrels, buckets, etc.), pottery, glassblowing, blacksmithing, weaving, sewing, wheelwrighting (fixing wheels of carts), stovemaking (building and fixing stoves) (Nos, 1996, p. 67–74). The interesting, formerly encountered professions include being a feldsher—a person who provides medical aid, while being educated in medicine to a moderate degree (Gorbacz, Apiecionek, & Greś, 2010, p. 188–189). The oldest village of the Municipality

of Michałowo is Sokole, which traces its beginnings to an inn built in the 17th century called “Sokół” (falcon) (Gorbacz, Apiecioneck, & Greś, 2010, p. 42). A hundred years later, more villages arose, including Niezbodcze, which its owner—a nobleman and a former officer Seweryn Michałowski—called, together with his entire estate, Niezbudka (Gorbacz, Apiecioneck, & Greś, 2010, p. 162). Seweryn Michałowski purchased the estate from the family of Chodkiewicze (the grange was established in the place of a hunting lodge, as the emolument of Aleksandrowa Chodkiewiczowa) (Gorbacz, Apiecioneck, & Greś, 2010, p. 43). Even before the purchase, the estate was listed in the documentation as “Niezbudka, Niezbudek, Niezbodcze, Niezbudka”. The settlement by the river Supraśl was, in turn, named Michałowo by the nobleman (Gorbacz, Apiecioneck, & Greś, 2010, p. 188–189). Despite the change of owners, the estate retained its name for many years, later being alternately called Michałowo-Niezbudka, until the name Michałowo remained (Dobroński, 2018, p. 3–4). The contemporary emblem of the Municipality of Michałowo includes the phrase “do not forget” as well as the symbol of forget-me-not flower petals, referring to the name “Niezbudka”, which means forget-me-not. Currently, the residents widely vary in terms of religious and cultural affiliation, characteristic for the regions of Eastern Poland. Michałowo is inhabited by both Eastern Orthodox Christians and Catholics. Until 2008, Michałowo was a village, in 2009, it officially became a town (Gorbacz, Apiecioneck, & Greś, 2010, p. 8).

Summary

The benefits from implementing regional education as well as utilising the activating project method, both demonstrated in this article, undoubtedly influence the development of students and the work of teachers. It is an important fact, as the education process requires constant refinement. According to Ken Robinson (a British consultant in the field of creativity, education, and human resources), a teaching system that has its source in the industrial, linear model, reliant on producing qualified factory workers, has to definitively come to its end, the strictly industrial era is over, it is no longer working (Robinson, 2010). The teaching system must be changed, personalised, so that it could better address the requirements of the contemporary world and the needs of modern students. What is more, he believes that the majority of students at schools where the obsolete teaching methods are employed do not fulfil nor develop their potential, and they are not aware of the talents and skills they possess (Robinson, 2010). The project method is, in the opinion of the author, one of the modern methods, which lead to a new current in teaching. Within a well-tailored and carried out project, each student, their assets, experience, and knowledge, are used, they can then find their strengths as well as learn something from others.

Education is becoming more and more open to the surrounding environment, the need to leave the school walls is increasingly brought up, along with the education that touches upon real life. A project that has connection to regional education enables that. If children start with what is near, with their own roots, and then move further away, towards that which is unfamiliar, it is easier for them to follow this way, along which they shape themselves and their “map of reality”. When they work on projects that are important to them, they overcome difficulties, carry out interesting tasks, derive joy and satisfaction from learning, see a point in it and get involved. Learning is then not only about mastering some scope of the material or necessity, it is getting to know oneself and the world in an effective way. Is moving away from well-known pattern easy? Is the project method easier in execution from other well-known teaching methods? In the opinion of the author, the answer to these two questions is: no. However, to be able to modify something, a certain amount of effort needs to be invested, often changing the marginalisation of regional education as well as the method of working with students already at the stage of early childhood education.

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