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PLANNED CHANGES IN POLISH DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM FOR SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

Abstract

Paper describes a current condition of the system of improving teachers in Poland and changes planned. Analysis of the system structure of improving and the scope and aims of institutions supporting improving the functioning of schools and teachers were included in the first part of the text. In the second part were described planned changes including both organizational new solutions integrating all sorts institutions of a system of improving both supporting schools and teachers and the change in the way of conducting improving based on the process-based approach.

Keywords: improving schools and teachers, professional development.

Introduction

Currently in the majority of school systems in the world solutions for improving the quality of education are sought. In many cases implemented reforms are based on research, analysis and reports illustrating different school systems and their elements, providing recommendation for tendencies in planned transformation. The McKinsey report published in 2007, a study in which 25 school systems are compared, demonstrates that the top-performing school systems focus their activities on selecting the right people to become teachers and continuous development of their professional skills [Barber, Mourshed 2007]. Andreas Salcher commenting the results of this report points out that: "Is just the teacher's ability that decides every day whether children understand the world a little bit better and relate to their parents delightedly what they have learnt today and enjoy going to school the following day" [Salcher 2009, p. 64–65]. Seen from this perspective, the quality of education system is not determined by structural reforms of school systems (e.g. like those carried out in Polish education system in 1999[1]), but by the quality of teachers' preparation to perform their profession.

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[1] The 1999 education reform in Poland was based on two fundamental changes: structural – introduction of new type of school „gymnasium", and curricular – introduction of new curricula.

An essential impact on teachers' performance has the initial training and whether teachers upgrade their knowledge and develop skills during teaching practice. In Polish teachers' education system the pre-service teacher training lays within competence of universities providing professional training and having autonomy in creating the content and course of studies under general guidelines. Second field related to in-service teacher's training is to a greater extent governed, directly or indirectly, by the Ministry of Education through influencing professional development training institutions and creating in-school model of teacher development.

Planned model of supporting schools and teachers focuses on second of the mentioned aspects that is in-service professional development. Analyses of current support system for schools and teachers implemented by the Ministry of Education led to determination of fundamental problems related to its' performance, that became framework of new support school and teacher development system project:[2]

Development process is focused on individual teacher, is addressed to teacher's training needs, that are frequently different from the school's needs.

Participation in different forms of development does not translate into teachers' professional practice nor into the process of making changes in schools; schools fail to deliver mechanisms of supporting teachers in making changes.

Different forms of professional development are scattered between many institutions of supporting system; lack of mechanisms imposing cooperation between these institutions.

Predominance of incidental approach, based on single, short training forms that does not translate into permanent improvement of the quality of the educational processes.

Apart from focusing on teachers' professional development consisting in the improvement of teachers' individual qualifications, professional development is put into context of needs related to work and development of individual schools as organizations. Certainly there are two reasons for that. In the first place, there is no clear connection between the existing teacher professional development and the effectiveness of instruction. Second reason seems to be connected to the conviction of policymakers about crucial importance of organization and necessity to subordinate teacher professional development to the needs of organization (school). This approach is reflected in the title of mentioned project „Teachers' professional development system based on open-access, comprehensive school support", co-financed by the European Union under European Social Fund.

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[2] Presentation: *System doskonalenia nauczycieli oparty na ogólnodostępnym kompleksowym wspomaganiu szkół,* Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji, Olsztyn 2011.

Current state

Current school support system is based on three fundamental, independent of each other from the point of view of organization as well their domain of action, institutions: Psychological and Pedagogical Counseling Centers, pedagogical libraries and teachers' development agencies of different legal status (managing authority: public, nonpublic) as well as different regional access level.

Psychological and Pedagogical Counseling Centers are specialized institutions pertaining to education department dedicated to diagnostics, therapy, prevention and counseling in communities where children and adolescents are raised. These institutions play an important role in school support system that consists in providing assistance based on expertise that frequently exceeds possibilities and needs for application in every school (e.g. specialized diagnosis). The majority of Psychological and Pedagogical Counseling Centers are public institutions (about 90%) that operate in all administrative districts in Poland.[3]

Second group of institutions providing support for schools and teachers are pedagogical libraries. Organization of professional development courses for teachers of school libraries in form of workshops, trainings, seminars, conferences or discussion panels is one of their tasks. Moreover they are expected also to support teachers in subject matter classes (core curriculum) by teaching education classes, library classes and giving help in carrying out in-school professional development. All pedagogical libraries are public institutions, present in almost every county.

The most significant role in teachers' development system play professional development agencies. Their basic task in the education system is, above all, to carry out different forms of teacher development (seminars, conferences, lectures, workshops and trainings), with regard to peculiarity of subject matters and general knowledge as well as teacher's professional skills. This task comprises also counseling and methodical mentoring.[4] The tasks of public teachers' professional development agencies depend on their operational level:
- central (run by the ministers of: education, national heritage and agriculture),
- regional (run by voivodeship self-governments),
- local (run by county, city and commune self-governments).

Table 1 shows the comparison of tasks of public agencies supporting teachers' professional development.

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[3] Administrative division in Poland is organized in three levels of local self-governments: 16 voivodeships, 379 counties and 2478 communes.

[4] Based on: Regulation of the Minister of Education on Teachers' Professional Development Agencies of 19th November 2009.

Table 1.

Comparison of basic tasks of agencies playing significant role in the teachers' professional development system

TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY	PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL COUNSELING CENTER	PEDAGOGICAL LIBRARY
– Subject matter and methodical counseling; – providing support to the school's management and WDN (In-school teachers' professional development); – organizing certifying and qualifying courses; – organizing different forms of cooperation and experiences exchange; – supporting teachers' professional development; – publishing informational and methodical materials; – inspiring teachers to innovation and promote best practices; – performing other tasks requested by the managing authority.	– Diagnosis of particular educational problems; – psychological and pedagogical assistance for children; – career counseling; – early support; – prevention; – therapy, family assistance; – supporting educational function of school; – issuing certificates related to special education, deferred and early admission to school.	– Collecting and making accessible library materials and multimedia collections; – bibliographic information; – providing help in instruction and WDN (In-school teachers' professional development); – information work and publishing; – meet-the-author sessions.

Source: Czech, E., Domańska, D., Gęba, K., Kordziński, J., Tarkota, J. (2010). Compilation: *Założenia i modele funkcjonalne powstawania i działania Centrów Rozwoju Edukacji*. Warszawa: ORE.

There are about 400 teachers' professional development agencies in Poland, about 30% of them are public, the rest are nonpublic agencies.[5] At the same time it is notable that nonpublic teachers' professional development institutions employ a little over 30% of staff dedicated to the development activity. That means that public agencies are responsible for supporting teachers and schools in their professional development. Therefore the key role in the development system plays easy access and possibility to participate in their offerings. Voivodeships' self-governments have an obligation to run such agency therefore the easiest access to professional development agencies is in the capital cities and more difficult access in remote towns. Teachers' professional development agencies operate in only 54 of 379 counties and only eight communes. There are also significant differences in regional "saturation" of their activity in different regions of Poland. On one extreme we can place Dolnośląskie Voivodeship, where apart from two agen-

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[5] Presentation: *System doskonalenia nauczycieli oparty na ogólnodostępnym kompleksowym wspomaganiu szkół*, Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji, Olsztyn 2011.

cies managed by voivodeship's self-government operate other 21 agencies run by counties (out of 29 counties of the voivodeship), and on the other extreme there are voivodeships like Kujawsko-Pomorskie and Lubuskie, where the only public teachers' professional development agencies are those run by the voivoedeships' self-governments. Table 2 shows a comparison of regional disparity of teachers' professional development agencies. Also the evidence from research reports the importance of accessibility to the agencies. Over 46% of teachers justify their choice of a particular agency with its' easy access.[6]

Table 2.

Regional disparity of teachers' professional development agencies

Voivodeship	Number of public agencies run by			Number of non-public agencies	Total
	Commune	Country	Voivodeship		
Dolnośląskie	0	21	2	13	36
Kujawsko-pomorskie	0	0	3	9	12
Lubelskie	0	2	1	8	11
Lubuskie	0	0	2	1	3
Łódzkie	0	2	4	15	21
Małopolskie	0	3	1	41	45
Mazowieckie	1	6	2	32	41
Opolskie	0	3	2	7	12
Podkarpackie	0	2	1	9	12
Podlaskie	0	3	3	10	16
Pomorskie	4	1	1	31	37
Śląskie	1	2	5	40	48
Świętokrzyskie	0	2	1	18	21
Warmińsko-mazurskie	1	2	2	15	20
Wielkopolskie	1	3	5	33	42
Zachodniopomorskie	0	2	2	17	21
Total	**8**	**54**	**37**	**299**	**398**

Source: Presentation: *System doskonalenia nauczycieli oparty na ogólnodostępnym kompleksowym wspomaganiu szkół*, Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji, Olsztyn 2011.

Beside the question of regional incidence of teachers' development agencies, evaluation of their effectiveness in supporting teachers plays an important role. A study done by Danuta Elsner and Krzysztof Bednarek supplies information on the attitudes of teachers towards the support provided by the development agencies and evaluation of performance of particular agencies done by teachers [Elsner, Bednarek 2010].

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[6] Quoted data come from evaluation research (external evaluation) of teachers' professional development agencies carried out within pedagogic supervision. In the research participated 866 teachers using services of 14 teachers' professional development agencies.

The evidence shows that teachers perceive given support as one-way process, considering themselves as recipients and manifesting passive attitude of receivers. They want to be provided with advices and counseling, supported, trained and informed (Figure 1 reports the percentage share of expected forms of assistance). Solely small number of teachers perceive the support as cooperation requiring active involvement of both parts. Frequently, the main interest of teachers is to obtain assistance in solving their individual specific problems, present in their school practice.
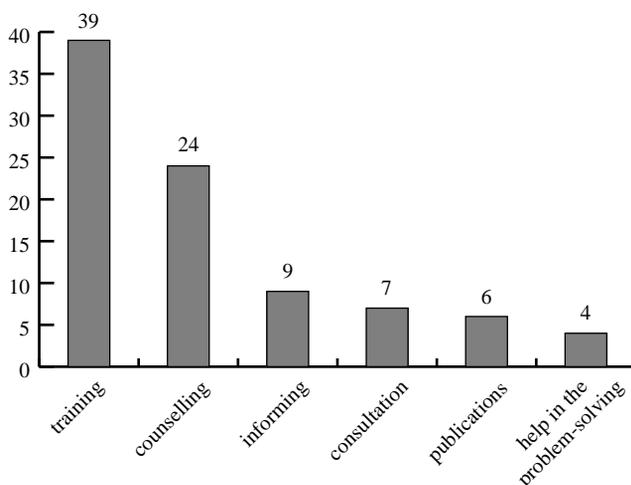

Figure 1. Expected forms of assistance (in percentage terms) delivered by advisors and counselors (N-866)

Source: Elsner, D., Bednarek, K. (2010). *Pomoc doradców metodycznych i konsultantów placówek doskonalenia nauczycieli w opinii jej beneficjentów. Raport z badań.* Warszawa: Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji.

When asked individually, both teachers and school principals speaking on behalf of their schools, express their desire to contact and cooperate with teachers' professional development agencies more frequently, preferably on a regular basis. Unfortunately, the agencies rarely offer cyclical cooperation and if so, these offers are addressed to individual teachers.

Successive steps of teachers' professional development require different development methods and contents [Day 1999]. In contrast, quoted research show that development agencies do not diversify working methods upon teachers' development phases. Certainly it is related to the fact that the main users of their offer are schools (courses dedicated to group of teachers from the same school) rather than individual teachers presenting different level of professional development.

Another deficiency of teachers' development system reported by evidence is lack of follow-up support, that could give support in implementation of developed solutions and practice acquired knowledge and skills.

Above mentioned analyses help to gain understanding of decisions made in regard of basic tendencies in planned changes in the teachers' professional development system in Poland, that focus on one hand on the organizational aspect, and on the other on methods to support teachers and schools not practiced by now on a large scale. Later on main assumptions of the new teacher professional development system in Poland, based on analysis of government department's materials, will be presented.

Planned changes in professional development system for schools and teachers

On the basis of documents created in the framework of the „Teachers' professional development system based on open-access comprehensive support for schools" project, we can reconstruct main assumptions of planned support system and their implementation. The main conditions to be met by the new teachers' professional development system comprise:
– supporting agencies located close to school, therefore operating in its' vicinity;
– responding to the needs of school, that is adapting the offer and professional development process to current needs of individual schools, to provide school with assistance within entire development process starting from assessment of needs to monitoring of outcomes of implemented changes;
– using the potential of various institutions providing services for teachers' professional development.

Realization of above mentioned assumptions requires making changes at the organizational level – creating new institutions, accreditation system of those new institutions, creating new strategies and methodologies of professional development as well as recruiting and training experts possessing capacities to implement effectively presented assumptions.

The support system is aimed to prepare and carry out a comprehensive offer to provide schools with direct support as well as recruitment and training experts able to perform effectively following tasks of the agency:
– support in problem diagnosis,
– presenting possible practices leading to solve diagnosed problems,
– assisting schools during implementing of change, improvement,
– elaborating joint result assessment and cooperation in formulating conclusions for further work.

Other important tasks of the support system will comprise:
– arranging cooperation between schools (e.g. creating networks of schools), consisting in cooperation between principals and teachers (e.g. internships coordinators, subject matters teachers, class teachers),
– creation and management of resource data bases indispensable for correct task completion (experts, publications, initiatives),
– informing about tendencies in national education policy.

Structural changes of support system for schools and teachers

Realization of the first of fundamental assumptions that is approaching institutions giving support to schools, requires launching new organizational solutions. Basic assumption of the project's authors is to create new type of institution, operationally called Center for Education Development (CED) aiming at providing support to schools and teachers through realization of tasks presented in the previous paragraph. One of basic dilemmas to consider is how near to schools (in terms of spatial location) should be CED situated. Bearing in mind localization of currently existing institutions supporting schools (teachers' professional development agencies, Psychological and Pedagogical Counseling Centers, pedagogical libraries), yet also economic reasons, CED have been attributed to counties.

Principal assumption for creating CED is the use of institutions that already exist in the school supporting system. They will form part of newly appointed institutions or provide them with support.

It is important to bear in mind (what was already mentioned in the initial part of this article) regional diversity of localization of supporting institutions in Poland, with special regard to teachers' professional development agencies. Therefore creation of CED in counties will be determined by the current state of school supporting system in individual counties and this, in turn, results in necessity of creating alternative ways of founding CED. Current state as well as legal possibilities have been analyzed for the needs of the project, three creation (functioning) models of CED as an independent unit have been proposed:[7]

Coherent model – newly appointed CED can act as an independent institution or a group of institutions. Within this model CED would complete all tasks of previously existing units including individual tasks resulting from the aims of planned schools' and teachers' supporting system. In case of lack of teachers' professional development agency or pedagogical library in given county before formation of CRE, new unit would be committed to complete their tasks.
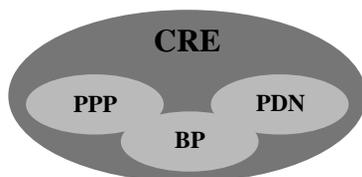

Figure 2. Coherent model of forming county Center for Education Development

Source: Czech, E., Domańska, D., Gęba, K., Kordziński, J., Tarkota, J. (2010). Compilation: *Założenia i modele funkcjonalne powstawania i działania Centrów Rozwoju Edukacji*. Warszawa: ORE.

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[7]   Source: Czech, E., Domańska, D., Gęba, K., Kordziński, J., Tarkota, J. (2010). Compilation: *Założenia i modele funkcjonalne powstawania i działania Centrów Rozwoju Edukacji*.Warszawa: ORE.

Cooperative model – Center for Education Development will operate as an independent institution and its' role will consist in coordination actions of individual institutions (Psychological and Pedagogical Counseling Centers, teachers' professional development agencies and pedagogic libraries) and schools. Within this model creation of Center for Education Development will not generate any intervention at the structural level and organization of existing units that would maintain their full autonomy (and independence in performing their tasks). Centre for Educational Development would perform its' own tasks, of which the most significant one would be coordination of cooperation between and with other supporting units. This model requires legal authorization of cooperation form of independent units.
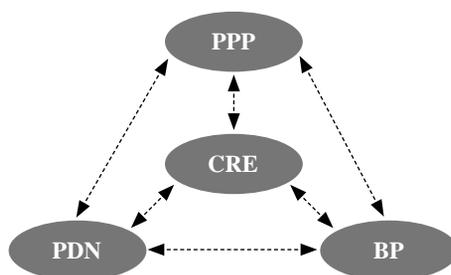

Figure 3. Cooperative model of organization of county Center for Education Development

Source: Czech, E., Domańska, D., Gęba, K., Kordziński, J., Tarkota, J. (2010). Compilation: *Założenia i modele funkcjonalne powstawania i działania Centrów Rozwoju Edukacji.* Warszawa: ORE.

Complementary model – assumes creation of new Center for Education Development institution performing its' own tasks that will comprise task pertinent to teachers' professional development agencies and pedagogic library (probable solution assumes that teachers' professional development agencies and pedagogical libraries will form a group of institutions). In compliance to this model, Center for Education Development would operate independently from Psychological and Pedagogical Counseling Centers acting in given county, however one of the tasks will be to coordinate partnership of Psychological and Pedagogical Counseling Centers with schools.
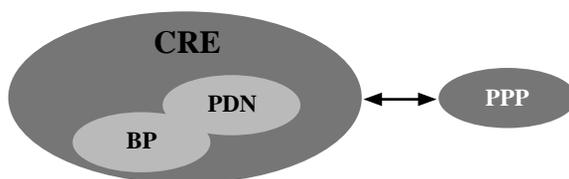

Figure 4. Complementary model of organization of county Center for Education Development

Source: Czech, E., Domańska, D., Gęba, K., Kordziński, J., Tarkota, J. (2010). Compilation: *Założenia i modele funkcjonalne powstawania i działania Centrów Rozwoju Edukacji.* Warszawa: ORE.

Local self-governments (counties) will play the key role in choosing adequate model for creation of Centers for Education Development, with special regard to particular conditions of given county (that will concern, first of all, number and type of locally operating agencies).

„Process" model of supporting development of schools and teachers

Beside prospective organizational changes aimed to achieve goals of the new support system, another significant change concerns development methodology. Current support system fails to satisfy schools and teachers due to short, one-time trainings, focused on individual teachers' needs taken out of context of school needs on one hand and on the other on poor implementation of built solutions, knowledge and skills into teachers' professional practice.

Elementary change in planned supporting system will concern duration of professional development course for schools and teachers – it will be a long-time process enabling opportunities to generate, test and sustain changes both at school's structural level and in terms of acquired skills by individual teachers that will translate to a larger scale into their practice. Due to these reason project-based system has been recognized as the most relevant to carry out teachers' professional development.

Three following means of receiving project-based support from Center for Education Development are provided:[8]

1. at school's request, according to its' internally determined needs,
2. by virtue of law in case of low evaluation stated in external evaluation,
3. in relation to national educational policy (determined by Ministry of Education).

Execution of the project (regardless of its' source or reason to launch it) will be based on some key points enabling completion of assumptions of new support system:

– development (in cooperation with principal and teachers) of detailed assessment of the school's and teachers' needs,
– planning and carrying out activities leading to solve diagnosed problems,
– assisting schools in implementing new solutions into each teacher's practice in order to reach sustainable improvement in the quality of work of given school,
– selecting best forms of development for individual schools (e.g. training or consultancy),
– making accessible indispensable materials and content-related tools.

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[8]   Report: *Reinforcement of Support of Schools' Improvement System With Special Regard to Teachers' Professional Development and Methodical Counseling – Support System Concept* (2010). Warszawa: ORE.

It's important to emphasize some significant differences in the approach towards currently existing supporting system. First of them is connected to the assumption of necessity to carry out in-depth diagnosis of difficulties encountered by school (or teachers). The diagnosis should be carried out by school representatives and advisor responsible for the project on behalf of Center for Education Development and, if necessary, Psychological and Pedagogical Counseling Centers .

Another crucial element concerns planning coherent procedure plan in solving diagnosed problem. These procedures can be aimed at fulfilling needs of groups involved in the school life (teachers, students, parents), with the assumption that the main role in carrying them out will be played by teachers, regardless of the fact to whom these actions will be addressed (e.g. preparing specific actions addressed to pupils or parents but carried out by teachers). Thus during planning different forms of teachers' work (e.g. team work) in search and creation of appropriate actions should be taken under consideration, as well as forms and methods of supporting teachers' professional development (e.g. trainings, workshops, methodical consulting, critical friends, collegial lessons, study visits etc.). It is important to underline one of the fundamental assumptions of the new supporting system that emphases transferring knowledge and skills built during different forms of professional development and relating them to planned procedures.

Cooperation and self-instruction networks

One of the most important elements of prospective support system for schools and teachers is building a model of professional development based on net of teachers and principals working in cooperation and learning from each other that will complete the activity of Center for Education Development. This form of professional development presumes that schools (teachers and principals) not only can receive support, yet can provide also help to each other in solving problems and learning. Since the activity of the net implies use of knowledge and skills of teachers operating in their local community, arises possibility of developing cooperation between teachers and schools operating in the same area that frequently struggle with similar issues. Nets of cooperating teachers and principals enable sharing with knowledge and skills as well as contributes to learning from each other, exchange of experiences, analysis of best practice, finding innovative solutions, collective completion of agreed tasks, teamwork for problem solving.

We can distinguish three models of prospective networks in regard to the content and their target:
 – cooperation and self-instruction network of principals (exemplary subjects: principal's tasks beyond pedagogy, building educational consistency at county level, organization of pedagogical and psychological assistance);

– problem oriented cooperation and self-instruction networks (exemplary subjects: creating author's curricula, teachers team work, work with students within research club, preventing non-attendance etc.);
– subject matter oriented cooperation and self-instruction networks (network of Polish language teachers – reader, cinematic education; mathematics teachers network – how to support students in learning mathematics, early school education; history teachers network – work with sources etc.).

It is assumed in the framework of the project that at county level (with one Center for Education Development) will be created about five networks of teachers and principals. In one network will participate from 20 to 25 teachers or principals from different schools. The participants will meet at least five times per year, the meetings will be organized and moderated by a coordinator (employee of Center for Education Development) adequately prepared to perform this task. If necessary it will be possible to provide the group of teachers with specialist help from external experts. Networks' subject will be chosen locally with regard to needs of individual teachers and principals. It is also planned to support local networks through exchange of experiences, best practices and carrying out professional discussions at local and national level by means of internet platform.

Competencies of support system personnel

One of the key elements contributing to the efficiency of prospected improvement is related to the qualifications of Center for Education Development personnel working in cooperation with schools. Aims and methodology of CED tasks require from supporting personnel to have specific knowledge and skills that by now were out of center of interest of educational programs for teachers. Therefore arises necessity to select right CED staff during recruitment process, with special focus to elements of already possessed competencies that can be used in future work, as well as planning and carrying out trainings that would complete required knowledge and skills.

Following planned operational model of CED it is not necessary for the personnel to possess specific educational knowledge (such knowledge should be provided by external experts). It is necessary, however, to possess knowledge and skills enabling to carry out:
– organization and execution of projects,
– problem diagnosis,
– moderating work of teachers' teams,
– running individual and group support (e.g. coaching),
– evaluation of executed projects.

Current activities within the *Support...* project aim to develop competency models for CED employees to perform different functions and prepare trainings that will provide them with basic knowledge and skills.

Conclusions

In the initial conceptual phase of the project schools' improvement needs were studied.[9] The report emphasizes also issues that can have negative impact on effectiveness of prospective improvement in the teachers' and schools' professional development system, that are among others:

– Different degrees of readiness of principals and teachers to participate in developing activities connected to the level of trust towards people from the outside and relating such initiatives to assessment of their work.

– Adequate competence level of Centers for Education Development advisors, necessary to moderate the work of teams of teachers and to manage the project.

– Situations and issues diagnosis based on real, specific problems related to the school life, defined by those who are responsible for its' activity.

Moreover, the threats to the effectiveness of prospective improvement can be intrinsic to the same concept of new support system. The concept demonstrates emphasis on development of school as organization and achieving set of goals that can be erroneously formulated at the system level or can be erroneously interpreted by principals and teachers. Consequently this can lead to subordination of project to other than educational needs of students and teachers' professional development needs. An example of such attitude can be currently observed in tendency in educational activity of schools and teachers consisting in achieving high outcomes in competency tests and subordinating the activity of school and teachers to this goal without considering development needs of children and youth.

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