

## **STUDIA NAD NIEPEŁNOSPRAWNOŚCIĄ**

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### **MARIA GRZEGORZEWSKA ACADEMY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION: THE BEGINNING OF THE INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES ON DISABILITY<sup>1)</sup>**

*Keywords:* The Maria Grzegorzewska University, Poland, Disability Study in Poland, special education, teachers training, higher education

#### **Introduction**

**Basic information about the country.** Poland is a country with over a thousand years of history. Poland (Republic of Poland – RP) is located in Central Europe. Polish administrative area is over 312 thousand km<sup>2</sup> (70th place in the world and 9th in Europe). Density of population in Poland is 123 people per 1 km<sup>2</sup> (as of 1 January 2015.). The estimated population in 2015 was over 38.5 million. The population of Poland is 34th in the world and 6th in the European Union (as of 1 January 2015.). It was in Poland where one of the oldest universities in Europe, the *Academy of Cracow* was founded (1364). In 1773 the *Commission of National Education* was appointed as a central educational authority, the first ministry of education in the world, which made a profound reform of education. In the year 2014/2015 there were 434 universities of different types. According to the data of the Central Statistical Office in the academic year 2014/2015, 1,405,133 people studied in Poland.

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**Current status of higher education.** In 2013 a *Report on the State of Higher Education* was developed. Details of the document of the *Ministry of Science and Higher Education* were based on the statistical sources of the *Central Statistical Office* (GUS) and the *Integrated Information System for Science and Higher Education* (POL-on). The data indicate the changes that occurred in higher education system over the years 1990–2011. One of the key changes in *Polish System of Higher Education* is an exceptionally large increase in the number of students. While in the academic year of 1990/1991 there were 390,409 people (net schooling rate in higher education was 9.8), in the 2011/2012 academic year there were 1,764,060 students (coefficient of schooling was 40.6). This situation was mainly the effect of the *Higher Education Act*, introduced in 1990, which allowed the existence of non-state universities, as well as recognized them as an equal part of *Polish System of Higher Education*. At the same time the report calls the attention to demographic factors – the most rapid increase in the number of students took place between 1990 and 2005, when the rate of schooling of higher education increased from 9.8 to 38.0-. From 2005 to 2011 the increase is much less clear, and since 2009 a slight decrease (from 40.9 to 40.6) has been recorded. This situation is mainly due to demographic changes like the declining number of young people. The authors also risked exposing forecast for the total number of students for the academic year of 2035/2036. Taking into account demographic factors and relatively constant net schooling rate of individual age groups, it was assumed that the total number of students in Poland will decline steadily until the academic year of 2025/2026, followed by its slight increase.

According to statistical data, the university educating the largest number of students in 2011 was the *University of Warsaw* (52,101 people, representing 3% of the total number of students). Students preferred faculties related to social sciences, economy and law (37% of students), while the least popular were the faculties associated with agriculture (1.7% of students). At the same time trends observed since 2007 indicate a gradual decline in interest in pedagogical, social, administrative, and legal faculties, and an increasing interest in science and technical ones.

An important trend – especially in the face of endorsed by *Poland Bologna Treaty* – is an increasing number of foreigner students. From 2004 to 2011 the number of people from abroad studying in Poland almost tripled. The authors note that at the same time a number of students – foreigners of Polish origin changed very little, which indicates the increasing attractiveness of Poland as an academic centre.

In 2015 a report *Diagnosis of Higher Education* was conducted. It also includes a program for the development of higher education by the year 2020. The document describes the overall higher education in Poland, taking into account the international and legal–economic situation of schooling and higher education, also referring to demographic trends. Particular attention is devoted to the implementation of the *Bologna Process, Framework for Higher Educa-*

*tion Qualifications* and analysis of the situation of Poland in *European Higher Education Area*. On the basis of the findings of the report, the *Strategy for the Development of Higher Education by 2020* was developed.

**Strategy for the Development of Higher Education.** Works on the development strategy of higher education were started after the publication of the 2007 report of the OECD, *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*, on higher education, which found lack of development strategy of higher education. In Poland, *Strategy for the Development of Higher Education for the years 2010–2020* was formulated and adopted by a consortium of rectors of Polish universities.

As the authors state, *Strategy* is a comprehensive document of a bold but realistic character (p. 17), noticing not only the need for internal changes in the *Higher Education System*, but also taking into account changes of the external nature, concerning both the domestic situation and place of Poland in the *European Union*. Proposals for action under the *Strategy* are based on a stable foundation, which is an *academic tradition and appeal to the ethos of higher education and the university values* (p. 16).

The *Strategy for the Development of Higher Education* adopted for the years 2010–2020 as priority directions of development indicates:

1. Ensuring equal opportunities and universal access to higher education and the required quality of studies;
2. Achieving by higher education, confirmed in a measurable way, international position adequate to the potential of Poland;
3. Introduction of new system and institutional solutions to higher education to achieve these objectives (p. 9).

Implementation of these measures concerns four separate areas: (1) educational activities of universities, (2) scientific and research and development activities of universities, (3) cooperation of universities with their environment, (4) *Higher Education System*.

In each of these areas, strategic objectives have been designated defining areas of change as well as operational objectives defining the directions of actions. For each purpose, specific tasks have been developed to make real implementation of strategic objectives.

In the area of *Educational Activities of Universities* the strategic objectives are: adapting the *Educational System* to the changing needs of education and improving the quality of education in terms of its mass production. The activities planned in this area are focused on finding and implementing solutions to better adapt universities to the changing reality. In the main aim of *Scientific and Research and Development Activities of Universities* area, it was indicated to increase the effectiveness of scientific research of the scientists. In the *Cooperation of Universities with Their Environment* the strategic objectives are: to expand the menial role of universities to society and to increase the degree of internationalization of Polish higher education and improving the position of Polish universities on an

international scale. Actions related to this objective include operation of universities in the surrounding reality in terms of local, national as well as international terms. They point out the actions of both a systemic (concerning the institution) and personal nature (concerning higher education staff, students, and other people not connected with the area of higher education). The only goal formulated in the field of *Higher Education System* is an indication of the need to improve the system solutions for higher education. The actions specified in this area include a variety of issues concerning the internal functioning of higher education (i.e., from legal solutions to specific budgetary and economic issues). They also define the place of autonomous universities in widely understood system of higher education.

### **Education and rehabilitation of people with disabilities**

**Historical Overview.** The beginnings of education of individuals with disability on Polish lands are associated with the education of deaf and deaf-mute children. Earlier efforts towards children with disabilities or “morally neglected” were limited mostly to caring actions. Typically, these tasks were performed by institutions related to the Catholic Church – congregations and parishes, but there also were factories run by public institutions (city councils), state, and private individuals (Grochowski, 1990). In the sixteenth century on Polish lands there were three types of specialist institutions intended for taking care of children and youth. These were: orphanages for orphaned children, establishments for foundlings, and educational institutions for morally neglected youth, so called *cuchthauzy* (Grochowski, 1990, p. 10). The role of shelters for abandoned and crippled children was often performed by hospitals, sometimes appointed especially for this purpose (Grochowski, 1990, p. 15).

The origins of special education are related to the education of deaf and deaf-mute children. In 1805 priest Anselm Zygmunt, after passing the examination entitling him to work with deaf children, began to teach a deaf-mute boy. He also developed the first Polish finger alphabet. He is credited with the formulation of assumptions of a school for deaf children in Vilnius. However, the project was not realized. During this time, they tried to create a school for the deaf in Volyn, where it ended up with a short-term functioning *Institute for the Deaf* in Romanov (1808–1832) (Grochowski, 1990; Kulbaka, 2012). The most important event in the education of deaf children turned out to be the 1817 assumption of the *Institute for the Deaf* in Szczuczyn (in 1817 it was transferred to Warsaw). Its founder and first rector was Rev. Jakub Falkowski, today considered to be the precursor of education of the deaf on Polish soil. An important event in the history of the *Institute* was the start of education of blind children. Initially, they were taught in classes with deaf pupils, then in 1942 a branch for blind boys was launched at the *Institute*. Since then, the *Institute* was officially renamed the *Institute for the Deaf and Blind*.

Who is inextricably linked to the care and education of blind children in Poland is Róża Czacka. In 1910 she founded the *Warsaw Asylum for Blind Women*. In the same year she created the *Society for the Blind*. She organized shelters for children, hostels for blind old women, and summer camps for wards of the Society. She had a significant impact on the spread of Braille on Polish soil. After the First World War, she founded the *Congregation of Franciscan Sisters Servants of the Cross*, whose main priority was serving blind children.

The first *Polish School for Children with Intellectual Disability* was established in 1897 in Poznan. There attended the students with milder forms of mental retardation. Children with profound intellectual disability remained in the special isolation wards at psychiatric hospitals. Poland's first class for more deeply mentally handicapped children was established in 1907 at a psychiatric institution in Owińska, near Poznan (Gasik, 1990, p. 76–104). The formation of more schools and centres for children with disabilities in a way necessitated actions aimed at special training of teachers.

**Present day.** Legal basis for the education of students with disabilities are defined by the *Act on the System of Education* of September 7, 1991 (as amended) and the relevant regulations issued by the *Ministry of Education*. This means that the education of this group of students – as well as able-bodied students – lies under the *Ministry of National Education*. Detailed rules define the scope and form of the implementation of support for students with disabilities. The education system provides, among others,

- realization of the right of every citizen of the Republic of Poland to educate and the right of children and young people to education and care, appropriate to the age and development;
- adjustment of the content, methods and organization of education to the psychophysical abilities of pupils, as well as the possibility of using psychological-pedagogical and special teaching aids;
- the possibility of receiving education in all types of schools by children and youth with disabilities and socially maladjusted, according to the individual developmental educational needs and predispositions;
- care of students with disabilities by enabling the implementation of individualized education process, forms, and programs of education and revalidation activities (Dz. U. of 2004. No. 256, item. 2572, as amended.).

A child with disability may be subject to appropriate forms of assistance and support from the moment of detection of disability to starting school (in the framework of *early intervention*) and during schooling at all stages of education.

Under the regulation, education, upbringing or care cover: students with disabilities, like students with impaired hearing, hard-of-hearing, blind, visually impaired, with physical disabilities, including aphasia, with mild, moderate and severe intellectual disabilities, with autism, including Asperger syndrome, and multiple disabilities; and students socially maladjusted and under the risk of

maladjustment.<sup>2)</sup> On the basis of this document rules and forms of education of children with these disabilities are defined. According to the *Act on the System of Education*, children and youth with disabilities have the right to study in each of the corresponding schools, and the decision about school choice is to be made by parents or guardians of the child. Students with disabilities, socially maladjusted or at risk of maladjustment, can implement compulsory education by the end of the school year in which they turn: 18 (primary school), 21 (middle school), and 24 (secondary school). For pupils who have a decision on special education, school has an obligation to construct the *Individual Educational-Therapeutic Program* (IPET), which should define among others: scope and method of adjustment of the educational program for psycho-physical capabilities of the child, recommended methods and forms of work, and actions supporting students' families<sup>3)</sup>. Children with disabilities who have not started school are targeted by the range of early development support. It includes comprehensive measures aimed at *stimulating psychomotor and social development of the child*<sup>4)</sup>. As part of the early intervention, a team composed of a special educator, psychologist, speech therapist, and other specialists, is responsible for developing and implementing an individual program of early intervention (including work with children and activities supporting the family of the child), as well as cooperation with relevant entities to provide the child with rehabilitation or therapy corresponding to its needs<sup>5)</sup>.

Separate rules govern the educational situation of children and adolescents with profound intellectual disability from 3 to 25 years of age. For them, remedial education activities are organized, which are focused in particular on: science communication, networking, implementation of self-reliance, developing interest in the environment, shaping the skills of teamwork, and learning purposeful actions<sup>6)</sup>.

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<sup>2)</sup> Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dn. 24 lipca 2015 r. w sprawie warunków organizowania kształcenia, wychowania i opieki dla dzieci i młodzieży niepełnosprawnych, niedostosowanych społecznie i zagrożonych niedostosowaniem <http://dziennikustaw.gov.pl/du/2015/1113/1>.

<sup>3)</sup> Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dn. 24 lipca 2015 r. w sprawie warunków organizowania kształcenia, wychowania i opieki dla dzieci i młodzieży niepełnosprawnych, niedostosowanych społecznie i zagrożonych niedostosowaniem <http://dziennikustaw.gov.pl/du/2015/1113/1>.

<sup>4)</sup> Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dn. 11 października 2013 r. w sprawie organizowania wczesnego wspomaganie rozwoju dzieci <http://www.dziennikustaw.gov.pl/du/2013/1257>.

<sup>5)</sup> Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dn. 11 października 2013 r. w sprawie organizowania wczesnego wspomaganie rozwoju dzieci <http://www.dziennikustaw.gov.pl/du/2013/1257>.

<sup>6)</sup> Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dn. 23 kwietnia 2013 r. w sprawie warunków i sposobu organizowania zajęć rewalidacyjno-wychowawczych dla dzieci i młodzieży z upośledzeniem umysłowym w stopniu głębokim <http://dziennikustaw.gov.pl/du/2013/529/1>.

## Academic training preparing for working with people with disabilities

**The origins and some representatives.** The forerunner of the scientific approach to disability was Maria Grzegorzewska (1888–1967), who formulated the timeless maxim “There is human being – not cripple”. In 1922, she organized *the Institute of Special Education* in Warsaw, which took up research activities in the field of special education and preparing teachers to work with students with disabilities. Maria Grzegorzewska was the first one in Poland who created the scientific basis of disability and undertook systematic research on all subdisciplines of special education, particularly on issues relating to people with visual impairments (i.e., tyflopædagogics, tyflopsychology). Her achievements greatly fit into the global special education and international research on disability. In the years 1958–1960 she was a professor at Poland’s first university Department of Special Education at the *University of Warsaw*. The academic status of special education in Poland dates back to that time.

At this point we mention some already deceased researchers, meritorious for special education. Józefa Joteyko (1866–1928) was a psychologist, educator, and exercise physiologist, president of the *Belgian Neurological Society* and a multiple winner of the *Paris Academy of Sciences*. Janina Doroszevska (1900–1997) was a professor at the *National Institute of Special Education* and professor at the *University of Warsaw*. She dealt with the issues of therapeutic pedagogy, prevention and medical, psychological, and pedagogical treatment. Aleksander Hulek (1916–1993) was a strong supporter and promoter of social integration, proponent of Polish rehabilitation in the international arena. Władysław Dykcik (1942–2013) was a special teacher, published numerous positions in the field of special education, social education, and sociology of education. Jan Pańczyk (1937–2007) is the author of numerous scientific, theoretical, and research works. He helped to organize Polish terminology in special education. He was a significant figure in laying the foundation for the theory and practice of special education and formulating university special education in Poland.

**Current professional training.** Training of the teachers of educational system takes place in higher education sector (first and second degree, uniform master’s degree, post-graduate studies). According to the latest legislation, undergraduate studies prepare to work in kindergartens and primary schools, while master’s degree allows to work in all types of schools (also in middle schools and secondary schools). In addition to general and substantive education, in teacher training, pedagogical training is valid. Improving the qualifications of teachers is essential for obtaining professional achievements and to participate in the promotion which requires documented improvement activities (postgraduate studies, courses, seminars).

Successful implementation of the core curriculum for students requiring special educational services (SEN) requires providing them with the necessary

conditions for teaching. One of them is to prepare competent teaching staff to organize and coordinate special education. In Poland, teachers are qualified for working with students with different disabilities in the context of: (1) specialty preparing to work with students with one kind of disability (e.g., Oligofrenopedagogy, surdopedagogy, tyflopedaogoy, teacher-therapist); and (2), specialty preparing for integrated education and inclusive education (special education teacher). Teacher education at a higher level takes place in the higher education sector in the framework of first and second degree and postgraduate studies.

Teachers who are involved in special education are the teachers of activities or subjects who have completed a master's/bachelor degree and are prepared to work with a specific group of students with disabilities. Universities also prepare teachers for integrated and inclusive education. Since 2015 a profession of special education teacher was introduced to classification of occupations<sup>7)</sup>. Special educator is a specialist possessing the knowledge and skills to work with students with various disabilities in kindergarten and communal and integrated school (or department). Its tasks include among others: co-organization of inclusive and integrating education, coordinating the activities of the team of teachers and other professionals, and carrying out revalidation activities in accordance with their qualifications.

Teachers have various opportunities to acquire skills and training. Universities are organizing postgraduate courses, training, and offering suitable qualifications or mastering professional competence to work with students requiring special educational services. Various forms of training are addressed both to teachers of special schools, integrated schools, as well as public ones. Since 2012, *Maria Grzegorzewska Academy of Special Education*, as the first university in Poland as part of the educational offer in the second degree studies and postgraduate studies, has launched the specialty Integration and Inclusive Education, which prepares teachers of public and integration outlets to work with students requiring special educational services<sup>8)</sup>.

**Faculties and specialties.** Specialties usually undertaken in the faculty of Special Education are education of people with intellectual disability (also known as the education and rehabilitation of people with intellectual disability, oligophrenopedagogy) and rehabilitation (rehabilitation pedagogy, resocialisation pedagogy with social prevention, judicial resocialisation, etc.). Increasingly specialties are created connected to work with people with autism, integration and inclusive education, power-assisted early childhood development, vocational counselling, and work with the elderly (gerontopedagogy), all of which are the response of higher education to public demand and changing reality. Specialties which are often cre-

<sup>7)</sup> <http://www.mpips.gov.pl/archiwum-projekty-aktow-prawnych-/archiwum-projekty-ustaw/rynek-pracy/r2014/rozporzadzenie-ministra-pracy-i-polityki-spoecznej-w-sprawie-klasyfikacji-zawodow-i-specjalnosci-na-potrzeby-ryнку-i-zakresu-jej-stosowania-/#akapit5>.

<sup>8)</sup> <http://www.aps.edu.pl/rekrutacja/pedagogika-specjalna/opisy-specjalno%C5%9Bci/studia-stacjonarne-ii-stopnia.aspx>.



ated and popular are also speech therapy and pedagogical therapy, but it is worth mentioning that these two specialties are of interest to the education and special education, so it happens, that they arise in the context of studies in both directions. Specialties rarely created by universities are specialties connected with the therapy of the specific group of people with disabilities (surdopedagogy, tyflopädagogia, therapeutic and healing pedagogy). It is probably due to a very narrow specialization within the framework of these studies, making it difficult for graduates to find themselves later on the labor market (despite a common practice to combine two specialties within a single course of study).

At *Maria Grzegorzewska Academy of Special Education* all specialties related to supporting people with disabilities are carried out at the faculty of Special Education. Currently (academic year of 2016/2017) at the undergraduate level there are: education and rehabilitation of people with intellectual disability, re-socialisation pedagogy, surdopedagogy, early support of child development, pedagogical therapy, speech therapy, therapeutic and healing pedagogy, tyflopädagogia, and social prevention with re-socialisation<sup>9)</sup>. At the second degree studies (Master complementary) can be found: education and rehabilitation of people with intellectual disability and autism, speech therapy, surdopedagogy with pedagogical therapy, integration and inclusive education, pedagogical therapy, rehabilitation of sight of the visually-impaired, rehabilitation of people with multiple disabilities, re-socialisation pedagogy with social prevention, socio-professional rehabilitation, therapeutic and curative pedagogy, and social prevention with judicial rehabilitation.

***Disability studies as a field of study or specialization.*** *Disability studies* as interdisciplinary study of disability is the field of study of *Maria Grzegorzewska Academy of Special Education* in Warsaw. It is Poland's first such course of study, implemented since the academic year 2016/2017.

### ***Disability studies at Maria Grzegorzewska Academy of Special Education***

**The history of the university and the present day.** A breakthrough for educating Polish special educators in Poland was the establishment of *National Institute of Special Education* (PIPS). The Institute was subject to the Ministry of Religion and Public Education. Among the lecturers of PIPS there were outstanding educators: Józefa Joteyko, Janusz Korczak, or Tytus Benni. The director of PIPS was Maria Grzegorzewska, who served this function until her death (up to 1967, with a break during World War II). PIPS trained special educators in four teacher specializations: mentally retarded, deaf-mute, blind, and morally neglected. Three groups were able to study at the *Institute*: teachers of elementary

<sup>9)</sup> <http://www.aps.edu.pl/rekrutacja/pedagogika-specjalna/opisy-specjalno%C5%9Bci/studia-stacjonarne-i-stopnia.aspx>.

schools and secondary schools (several years of practice were required), teachers of special schools, and people with higher education (with no teaching practice). People without teaching practice or higher education were not admitted (Gasik, 1991, p. 83). Considering the fact that the students already had basic pedagogical training, the curriculum of *PIPS* was dominated by methodical subjects, focused on working with students with specific disabilities (Gasik, 2010, p. 69). Special attention was paid while the practical classes. Until the outbreak of World War II, 660 teachers completed *PIPS* (Kulbaka, 2012, p. 24), with about 75% of that number were teachers of children with mental disabilities (Gasik 1990, p. 170).

During World War II action of *PIPS* were initially suspended and then resumed in the form of several secret courses for inspectors of special education at the turn of 1943 and 1944. During the war, at least 64 people associated with the Institute, including Janusz Korczak, Halina Jankowska, Wiesław Sterling and Jakub Segal died (Kulbaka, 2012, p. 25). After the war, at the end of 1945, *PIPS* resumed its activities. A new specialty was introduced to the curriculum: the education of chronically ill and disabled children. Creation of such specialty was planned in the interwar period, however, it did not happen until after the end of World War II. We can guess that the creation of this specialization was related to the new realities of social life (i.e., a large number of crippled and sick children as a result of military actions).

In 1950, *PIPS* was transformed into the *National College of Special Education*. Its primary submission was the training of special teachers, while the research activities were limited. An important event in the history of special education teachers in Poland was issuing a script *Special Education* by Maria Grzegorzewska (1957) as the first Polish comprehensive elaboration of issues of special education.

In the post-war period, *PIPS* ceased to be the only Polish educational establishment of special educators. In 1958 they established the *Chair of Special Education* at the Department of Education at the *University of Warsaw* (initially directed by Maria Grzegorzewska). Studies training teachers of schools and special centres were also launched at: *Gdansk University*, the *University of Silesia* (Katowice), *Jagiellonian University* (Krakow), *University of Maria Skłodowska-Curie* (Lublin), *Wrocław University*, the *University of A. Mickiewicz* (Poznan) and in a number of higher education schools inter alia, in Bydgoszcz, Czestochowa, Krakow, and Szczecin (Gasik, 1990, p. 277).

In 1976, the *National Institute of Special Education* was transformed into *Maria Grzegorzewska Higher School of Special Education*. Since then, the course of study at *WSPS* lasted four years, and since 1981, five. In 1989, *WSPS* earned the right to become an institute and to conduct PhDs and confer the title of Doctor of Humanities. Responding to changing social needs, offer of specialties taught in *WSPS* was constantly widened. In 1989, they were: oligophrenopedagogy, surdopedagogy, therapeutic pedagogy, correction education, tyflopädagog, speech

therapy, re-socialisation pedagogy, educational psychology of creativity, school educator, and computer-aided learning process.

In 2000, *Higher School of Special Education* was transformed into *Maria Grzegorzewska Academy of Special Education*. Currently, *APS* is a two-faculty university (Faculty of Educational Sciences and the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences), which instructs, besides special educators, also psychologists, social workers, and sociologists.

Among the greatest strengths of the university can be mentioned: a highly qualified teaching staff, diversified curricula, and study conditions. Currently, the *APS* teaches about 7.000 students, both in stationary and non-stationary mode. At the same time, the *University* conducts a number of postgraduate courses, which may constitute a complement and extension of the students' knowledge in the field of special education.

The programs of studies conducted at the *Academy* are focused on educating teachers and therapists to work with children, youth, and adults with intellectual problems, impaired hearing, speech and vision, motor disabilities, and emotional disturbances and behaviour. Studies are designed to prepare staff for working in school (special education teacher, assistant of a teacher), as well as in other special centres (therapist, teacher, guardian). An important area of education provided at the *Academy* is also activity in the field of social pedagogy like family support, cultural activities in the community, adult education, vocational counselling or psychopedagogy of creativity.

A separate field of study is the Artistic Education in the field of visual arts. Students of this course are trained in the field of fine arts, and trained to work in educational and therapeutic institutions.

Faculty of Applied Social Sciences educates students in the field of Social Work, Sociology, and Psychology. *APS* is the first university that brought a full-time degree in Social Work. The program of study is designed for the social needs of the growing population of elderly, disabled, and chronically ill, who need professional care and support.

In the academic year of 2007/2008 at the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences opened a five-year uniform degree in Psychology. This department has two specializations: clinical psychology and applied psychology. The first, prepares students for the role of diagnostician, therapist, and clinical psychologist; while the second focuses on business consulting, training, and coaching.

Study programs available at the *APS* in the Polish language are: Psychology, Sociology, Pedagogy, Special Education, Social Work, Artistic Education, and *Interdisciplinary Disability Studies*<sup>10)</sup>.

**Characteristics of the *Interdisciplinary Disability Studies*.** The direction of education of *Interdisciplinary Disability Studies* is carried out in accordance

<sup>10)</sup> <http://www.aps.edu.pl/university.aspx>.

with the humanist ideal of the patron of the *University* – creator of special education in Poland Maria Grzegorzewska – expressed in the message *There is human being – not cripple*.

Higher education of the *Interdisciplinary Disability Studies* is significantly incorporated in the mission of the *APS* as an university declaring its academic character and implementing research, teaching, and the idea of support to communities in need. Studies in this direction combine more than ninety years of research and teaching tradition of the *University* with contemporary apprehension of disability and the creation of social support systems.

The *Interdisciplinary Disability Studies* is an innovative (first in Poland) and independent direction of education of the second degree. Studies offer to acquire interdisciplinary knowledge, abilities, and social skills necessary to understand and explain disability and activities for people with disabilities and their families. The study program gives students the opportunity to design practical measures for disabled people and their environments. It also prepares to adopt and implement research on disability issues from an interdisciplinary perspective of the social sciences (including pedagogy, sociology, psychology, media studies, science of public policy, the science of cognition, and communication) and the humanities (including philosophy and study of family). The training program introduces students to the theoretical, methodological, and implementation recognition of disability in the individual, interpersonal, and general public dimensions. The results of research studies will help to formulate recommendations for the construction of systems of support for people with disabilities in society.

Education at MA level of *Interdisciplinary Disability Studies* passes and strengthens student's knowledge in the field of various dimensions of disability, including personal, social, cultural, legal, and economic ones. At the same time, it gives students the opportunity to take a critical discourse on the place of the Different one in society and the role of society in ensuring equal opportunities for all of its citizens.

**General academic profile of education of *Interdisciplinary Disability Studies* includes six modules (i.e., theoretical, methodological, research, language, teaching, and optional), whose topics are formulated against the background of current knowledge in the field of humanities, social sciences, and medicine. Specific areas of module theory include:** (1) the basis for the study of disability, (2) socio-ethical and legal aspects of the discourse on disability, (3) historical-anthropological approach to disability, (4) psychological and medical aspects of disability, and (5) pedagogical and strategic contexts of disability. Studying the theoretical module is ended by classes led by tutoring which guide and inspire the development of the student, serving the development of their cognitive potential and motivation to undertake independent research in the area of the pursued subject.

The program was designed in connection with the ongoing university theoretical elaborations and research on disability. Under this faculty teachers and students jointly engage in the development of implementation projects on systems of support for disabled people and their environments, and research projects on topics related with various issues concerning disability. In this way, education in *Interdisciplinary Disability Studies* creates the possibility of individual student development, and also strengthens the relationship between teaching and learning.

The *Interdisciplinary Disability Studies* is addressed to the graduates of social, humanitarian, medical, artistic, and technical faculties, who have their career aspirations combined with broadly defined activities for people with disabilities or intend to take an academic career in research on disability and are interested in continuing studies in stage III.

Studies of II-degree in *Interdisciplinary Disability Studies* end with writing and defending a thesis. At the same, time during the two years of learning, students create their portfolio (electronic and paper one) – as a condition of graduation – which is a collection of gathered papers during the study term. Portfolio documents student's achievements, is the source of their knowledge and reflection, and a tool for systematizing, enriching, and creating their own professional skills and acquiring professionalism.

**General information about the program and the characteristics of the graduate profile.** A significant increase in the social movement of people with disabilities and the intensifying of the need to initiate, design, and implement integrated support systems, require the preparation of professionals (i.e., leaders, professionals, and researchers). Competences gained in the course of *Interdisciplinary Disability Studies* will effectively lead a multi-faceted activities directed to people with disabilities and their communities. Among other activities, this competences will lead to act as a spokesperson defending the rights of disabled people, a leader fighting for their place in society and the change of social attitudes, a person involved in the preparation of media to promote people with disabilities, or a specialist working in local communities. Education in *Interdisciplinary Disability Studies* will also allow to acquire the knowledge and skills to undertake and carry out research on personal, social, political, economic, and cultural situation of the disabled.

The *Interdisciplinary Disability Studies* gives the opportunity to study for those graduates of 1st degree studies in the area of social sciences, humanities, medicine, and art and who are interested in exploring disability issues.

Detailed objectives include:

- 1) preparation for professional tasks in public service related to disability;
- 2) acquisition of broader and deeper knowledge, skills, and social competence in the design and conduct of research on disability issues in its connection with the humanities, social, and medical sciences;

- 3) preparation for further education at the third level of study;
- 4) manufacturing abilities to improve knowledge and acquire new skills using modern methods and means of gathering, organizing, and analyzing data;
- 5) improvement of competence for lifelong learning;
- 6) deepening ethical sensitivity and improvement of reflective and responsible attitude in the making and implementation of measures for the disabled and research projects on disability.

Social demand gives graduates of *Interdisciplinary Disability Studies* broad and attractive opportunities for the development of their careers. Studying in this department provides students with substantive, methodical, and methodological tools for the design and implementation of complex and multi-range activities for people with disabilities. It provides students with the competencies needed to perform the expert opinion-forming activities in the field of disability issues, as well as to act as a leader in managing the implementation of projects, to actively participate in social marketing to people with disabilities, and to the role of researcher of socio-cultural and politico-legal issues of disability.

Graduates of the second degree *Interdisciplinary Disability Studies* have a broader and deeper knowledge of disability in the context of interdisciplinary explanation of the humanities as well as of social and medical sciences. Studying in this department enables students to get familiar with tradition and contemporary social movements for people with disabilities, socio-demographic situation of disabled people in Poland and in the world, the historical conditions of research on disability, their most important trends, current trends, and leading representatives. The graduates have a rich and extensive knowledge about the processes of interpersonal and social communication, they know their accuracy and disorders, and ways to communicate with people with various disabilities.

Key concepts of man and its development (including the philosophical, psychological, sociological, educational, and medical ones), explored while studying *Interdisciplinary Disability Studies*, provide theoretical constructs for designing support systems for people with disabilities and their communities and for initiating studies on specific issues of disability. Studying introduces issues of creativity of people with disabilities, quality and style of life and welfare of the disabled, as well as achieving the objectives of standardization in the perspective of social inclusion.

Graduates know the traditional and modern trends of research on disability and present advanced knowledge and skills to conduct research on the issue. They can design their own path of development, are able to work in a team performing different roles, and have organizational skills to carry out the purposes of planning and implementation of professional activities or management.

Graduates also have an established knowledge of the principles and ethical standards, and are able to follow them in performing professional activities, perceive and analyze the ethical dilemmas associated with activities for people with

disabilities and their environment. They are aware of the ethical dimension of research and are able to apply the principles and ethical standards in the research procedure.

Studying at *Interdisciplinary Disability Studies* allows to educate graduates who are reflective, competent spokesmen of the disabled, professionals in the field of designing support systems, and scientists interested in the topic of studying the phenomenon of disability. Graduates have the necessary knowledge and abilities to work, to study, to speak, and write about disability in individual and social dimension.

Apart from the competences and skills aforementioned, graduates of *Interdisciplinary Disability Studies* have the competence to perform professional tasks in governmental and non-governmental mass media. They are also prepared for careers in science and academic. A graduate obtains a master's degree and is prepared to act as spokesman for the disabled, a specialist in the field of designing support systems, a scientist interested in the topic of research on disability, and is also prepared to undertake doctoral studies in the field of humanities and social sciences, as far as the specific conditions of recruitment do not contain any limiting clauses.

**Previous academic experience and prognosis.** The department was created by decision of the Senate of *Maria Grzegorzewska Academy of Special Education* on the January the 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016. Since the academic year of 2016/2017, begins the first year of a two-year studies program in this department. What is the current orientation of the university, what concept of *Interdisciplinary Disability Studies* to start at the Academy?

Here are a few justifications. The tradition of the *Academy* and the continuity of the idea of Maria Grzegorzewska build the mission of the *University* in a scientific exploration of people with disabilities and the looking for opportunities to provide them with appropriate rights as the ones held by other members of society. *Academy* undertakes more intensive cooperation with foreign research centers and universities, whose focus is to recognize the phenomenon of disability and prepare professionals to work with people with disabilities. For many years, the *Institute of Special Education* of the university takes the initiative of personalistic and interdisciplinary recognition of disability. Since 2003 there have regularly been organized international conferences called *PERSON*. Conferences are scientific meetings whose purpose is multifaceted discussion and the exchanging of experience in the field of studying the phenomenon of disability. In the conference of 2016, participants discussed the issue of early intervention and early support for the development of children with various disorders. Researchers are focused on personalistic recognition of the phenomenon of disability (Głodkowska, 2015). In 2005, the *Academy* established a scientific journal *Man – Disability – Society* which tackles the issue of disability from an interdisciplinary perspective. In 2013 a portal *Forum of Special Education*

was created as a tool to document and spread the knowledge in the area of disability<sup>11)</sup>. The university promotes the idea of integration and social inclusion of people with disabilities, by both, expanding the choice of education, as well as carrying out numerous research projects under an interdisciplinary perspective. There are analyses of the subjectivity, identity, normalization, integration, social support, family life, rights of people with disabilities, and the dignity of persons with disabilities or social exclusion.

We believe that *Interdisciplinary Disability Studies* in our university is a development venture, giving ample opportunities of research and teaching. What we consider to be extremely important is the ability to conduct interdisciplinary and collaborative research on the phenomenon of disability with the involvement of researchers from other universities in Poland and abroad.

**University activities undertaken for the benefit of people with disabilities.** Implementing the mission of the university contained in the words of Maria Grzegorzewska *There is human being – not cripple* the APS conducts a number of activities aimed at promoting people with disabilities. These are continuous, cyclical, and incidental activities.

The continuous actions also constitute the expression of the implementation of the *Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities*, and they are centered around three main tasks: providing students with disabilities to fully participate in didactical activities, taking action to adapt the architecture of APS to the possibilities of people with disabilities, and the development of appropriate attitudes towards people with disabilities<sup>12)</sup>. In order to allow students to fully participate in didactical classes, academics were provided with documents which contain tips on working with students with disabilities of sight, hearing, and speech. At the same time, under the *Provisions of November 15, 2007 on the alternatives applied to disabled students of APS*<sup>13)</sup>, there are opportunities for additional support for students with disabilities. These solutions do not relate to substantive aspects of the study, and they only adjust the environment and formal requirements to meet the needs of students. Depending on the needs of students, the effect may relate to consent to the recording of activities, ensuring the presence of a sign language interpreter, increasing the possibility of allowable absences in classes, and exemption from physical education classes. Separate solutions can be applied during examinations: the duration of the test can be extended, it is possible to use the necessary technical equipment (computers, alternative forms of saving), a change of the place of examination, and if necessary, the test may allow a third party (sign language interpreter, assistant, lector<sup>14)</sup>).

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11) <http://www.efps.pl/>.

12) <http://www.aps.edu.pl/studenci/pomoc-dla-os%C3%B3b-niepe%C5%82nosprawnych/zakres-pomocy.aspx>.

13) [http://www.aps.edu.pl/media/8340/rozwi%C4%85zania\\_alternatywne.pdf](http://www.aps.edu.pl/media/8340/rozwi%C4%85zania_alternatywne.pdf).

14) [http://www.aps.edu.pl/media/8340/rozwi%C4%85zania\\_alternatywne.pdf](http://www.aps.edu.pl/media/8340/rozwi%C4%85zania_alternatywne.pdf).



Cyclical activities are carried out in the form of various events activating and encouraging cooperation of children, youth, and adults with disabilities. Examples of such activities may be *OSPAR Festival and Knowledge Competition for Students with Disabilities*. *OSPAR* which is *National Stage of Presentation Artistic Realization* is organized since the 1996 festival of creativity, which involves children and young people with various disabilities from all over Poland. The creators of *OSPAR* do not impose a form of presentation on participants, so every year they impress the jury and the audience with their creativity and capabilities. Event of a more scientific nature is organized every three years with the *National Knowledge Competition* for young people with disabilities, in which young people with a disability may face each other in the positive competition in the field of science.

The activities happening only once are taken as needed, often as a response to public demand.

## Conclusion

Scientific recognition of disability in Poland dates back to the decade of the 20's of the twentieth century. Since then, special education has been intensively developing, building an image of people with disabilities and preparing professional staff to education, rehabilitation, therapy or rehabilitation. Universities meet with their educational offer the needs of the people with disabilities and labor market demand. Evidence of these changes is the involvement of universities in creating new courses and specializations, taking on new topics of research and development of international cooperation. We believe that the newly department of *Interdisciplinary Disability Studies*, established at *Maria Grzegorzewska APS*, referring to the international mainstream *Disability Studies*, is a clear example of the process. It clearly indicates a move away from the perception of disability through the prism of limitations, defects, and abnormalities, to the perception and appreciation of the value of each person, the search for their potential, and the recognition of differences as inherent human traits. We hope that *Interdisciplinary Disability Studies*, built on the foundations of teaching, will be an important basis for the broadening and deepening of comprehensive, holistic research on the phenomenon of disability.

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## Appendix

### Some national legal acts:

- Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 24 lipca 2015 r. w sprawie warunków organizowania kształcenia, wychowania i opieki dla dzieci i młodzieży niepełnosprawnych, niedostosowanych społecznie i zagrożonych niedostosowaniem społecznym* (<http://dziennikustaw.gov.pl/du/2015/1113/1>).
- Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 23 kwietnia 2013 r. w sprawie warunków i sposobu organizowania zajęć rewalidacyjno-wychowawczych dla dzieci i młodzieży z upośledzeniem umysłowym w stopniu głębokim* (<http://dziennikustaw.gov.pl/du/2013/529/1>).
- Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 30 kwietnia 2013 r. w sprawie zasad udzielania i organizacji pomocy psychologiczno-pedagogicznej w publicznych przedszkolach, szkołach i placówkach* (<http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/DetailsServlet?id=WDU20130000532>).
- Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 11 października 2013 r. w sprawie organizowania wczesnego wspomagania rozwoju dzieci* (<http://www.dziennikustaw.gov.pl/du/2013/1257>).
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### The list of selected national institutions working for people with disabilities

- Państwowy Fundusz Rehabilitacji Osób Niepełnosprawnych – <http://www.pfron.org.pl/>.
- Polskie Stowarzyszenie na Rzecz Osób z Niepełnosprawnością Intelektualną PSONI – <http://psoni.org.pl/>.
- Stowarzyszenie INTEGRACJA – <http://www.integracja.org/>.
- Polski Związek Głuchych – <http://www.pzg.org.pl/>.
- Polski Związek Niewidomych – <http://pzn.org.pl/>.
- Stowarzyszenie Rodzin i Opiekunów Osób z Zespołem Downa „Bardziej kochani” – <http://www.bardziejkochani.pl/>.
- Fundacja SYNAPSIS – <http://synapsis.org.pl/>.