



**Ewa Radanowicz (2020). *W szkole wcale nie chodzi o szkołę* (ang. *At school it is not at all about school*), ss. 296, Wydawnictwo SENSOR Justyna Radanowicz**

Ahead of the start of the new school year 2024/2025, the author of the quoted book has made it available as an open-access e-book with desire to reach the widest possible audience. In the reviewed monograph, Ewa Radanowicz shares with her readers the innovative activities she had managed to successfully implement since 2002 in the public school she run, which eventually led to a complete change in the functioning of her school. The book introduces us to the area in which all the innovations were applied, namely in Radowo Małe school infrastructure as well as educational management (Karwat, 1987, p. 11). A set of innovations introduced by Ewa Radanowicz is both understood as ‘activities, as a process of planning and implementing change; a comprehensive cycle of designing and applying novelty (e.g. introducing new teaching subjects into school practice, developing new curriculum content, implementing new forms of education’ (Przyborowska, 2013, p. 53) and as ‘a programme of change, a product of creative activity as the content of change, as a new element of pedagogical experience (e.g. a new grading scale, a new school system type, a new educational programme, a new educational law, new working tools, behaviours)’ (Przyborowska, 2013, p. 54).

The changes described in the book are considered a nationwide phenomenon, surprising in their size and effectiveness. Therefore, arises the question as to whether there were any factors that influenced the success of the changes implemented by the headmistress of Radowo Małe? The question seems to be very pertinent, as in Poland there are more and more educational innovators, who in their daily work, have to face many difficulties when introducing new ideas and solutions. Consequently, Ewa Radanowicz’s book is really valuable because, it can hopefully reveal features that can be imitated or implemented by other innovators. The book can serve as a reliable guidebook since the author not only shares her successes, but also candidly describes the difficulties she had to face in the course of introducing changes.

The book's target audience is therefore wide ranging from school principals, through teachers, parents ending with local government officials, whose support for innovative ideas is frequently invaluable. The monograph consists of nine chapters, which are preceded by a foreword and an introduction, and concluded by a conclusion. In addition, there are appendices at the end in the form of descriptions of several innovative educational projects carried out at the school. The first chapter points out the reasons behind Ewa Radanowicz decision to introduce changes. According to Marta Kotarba-Kańczugowska (2009, p. 20) the needs of a particular school may generate the emergence of internal (microsystem) innovations, which are initiated from the bottom up by teachers in order to solve specific, local problems points out.

The second chapter explains the principles of original curricula implemented by teachers. Chapters three, four and five bring readers' attention to specific roles of headteacher and teachers, as well as the environment in which the mentioned changes were implemented – Radowo Małe school. In order to fully conceptualize all the phases of innovation that the teachers and the school went through we need to refer to the Diffusion of Innovation in Education Model (DIEM) developed by Mark K. Warford (2005). Warford highlighted multiple starting circumstances required for innovation to emerge in school. The book *At school it is not at all about school* proves that the following conditions were fully met. First of all, many individual teachers described in chapter four of the book *Teachers and their development* became recipients/adaptors of the innovation (with their personality traits such as innovativeness, openness to change, comprehensive education, literacy, empathy, critical and abstract thinking and intelligence, as well as social-communication skills, networking skills). Secondly, the social and organisational system of the school described in chapter five titled *How we changed our school* of the book proved to be crucial. The catalyst for change was the organisational model of a democratic and open leadership style of the principal – Radanowicz, who naturally played a leadership role for change. Good relationships between staff at multiple levels of the organisation also cannot be overemphasised. Thirdly, the multi-level change cannot occur without availability of communication channels. In the book we may find teachers' testimonies of countless face-to-face contacts with the headteacher, and existing well developed communication structure within the Radowo Małe school.

As far as the main process of diffusion of innovations in education is concerned, Warford (2005, p. 11) described it in terms of two indicators: time needed for an innovation to be acquired and teachers' attitudes towards novelty. The first indicator, time, played an important role in Radanowicz's route of implementing changes. The book depicts a timeline of steady changes, starting with the post of the headteacher, which Radanowicz took in 2002 year, through many years of

“milestones” such as discovering ways of external funding the projects, finishing with presentation of research results conducted at the school by The Maria Grzegorzewska University scientists.

The second indicator, teachers’ attitude towards novelty, plays crucial role. It is important to look at members of the board of education in Radowo Małe school through Warford’s theory. He divided the teachers into adopters and change agents. The teacher-adapter will progressively go through the following phases: (1) lack of interest in the innovation, (2) the orientation stage, which involves showing interest in learning about the innovation, (3) planning to use the innovation and (4) the decision to adopt the innovation. Such a step-by-step process of change is well described in the reviewed monograph. Readers may find out that teachers are characterised by varying attitudes towards innovative solutions – some of them at the beginning openly deemphasise innovations introduced by other teachers.

The second group mentioned by Warford, change agents, play an important role in this transition. Thanks to their personality traits, communicativeness and positive attitude towards novelty, other teachers find it easier to abandon routine and turn to innovation. In doing so, Warford (2005, p. 12) draws particular attention to the role of change agents in building positive relationships between members of the school community. Radanowicz admits in her book that she was looking for opinion leaders among the members of the board of education in order to promote her innovative ideas. The reason for this is that they are able to influence their colleagues’ attitudes.

The next, sixth chapter, gives details of Radanowicz’s sources of inspiration when it comes to innovative ideas. She had a chance to observe successful educational solutions in schools e.g. in Belgium, the United Kingdom, Italy and France. Next two chapters of the book, titled *About school revolutions* and *About networking and the Spring of Education* explain the role of described school in sharing its own results and experiences with the educational environment in Poland. At this point it is worth mentioning the final stage of Warford’s DIEM, namely obtained results (2005, p. 10). The headteacher of Radowo Małe school encouraged the teachers involved in an innovation to look at whether and to what extent there has been an improvement in the efficiency and quality of their educational activities after adoption. Such analysis and evaluation become a decisive stimulus for other audiences – teachers employed in the same school – to adopt the new solution. Confirmation of the adoption of an innovation by a particular teacher is that the innovation has been institutionalised. This means that the innovation is no longer seen by him/her as a new idea or a new practice, but as a kind of

everyday life. The school described in the book has successfully and permanently implemented many original programmes and organisational solutions and was able to share its fruits with other schools in Poland as well as inspire other innovative teachers.

According to Warford's DIEM model, the success of an educational innovation depends critically on the collegial atmosphere within the teaching community. This atmosphere can either foster innovation or inhibit its acceptance, which was well depicted in the studied book. In this context, Warford (2005, p. 15) postulates that teachers acting as agents of change facilitate the spread of change by promoting the innovation within subject teams and teacher councils or with the mean of informal communication. Similar conclusions were reached by Elżbieta Zawadzka-Bartnik (2018, p. 190), whose view is that 'the difficulties in implementing innovation activities should also be considered from a social aspect'. In the book *At school it is not at all about school* all innovators, starting with the headteacher/leader often had to struggle not only with bureaucracy, but primarily had to overcome barriers related to the functioning of their school as a social institution, the general climate of the school which was not at the beginning favourable to innovative ideas.

The problems shared by many educational innovators concern incorrect interpersonal relations within the teaching staff or between the teacher and the headteacher, especially when conformism dominates or when rivalry between teachers prevails over cooperation. Therefore, the in-depth consideration of the organisational variables that determine the success of the diffusion process of educational novelty is truly important. It may happen that a teacher, guided by his or her own emotions and prejudices, will not pay attention to educational innovation at all and, consequently, will not make any effort to understand it and possibly use it in his or her pedagogical work. This may explain why top-down educational innovations and reforms have such low effectiveness. Only those grounded in teachers' subjective beliefs, as it was in the case of the reviewed school, foster the process of diffusion of new solutions.

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