

BUILDING CURRICULA - WHAT TO DO AND WHAT NOT TO DO? EXAMPLES ON ELECTROMAGNETISM FROM RECENT POLISH TEXTBOOKS vs MOSEM PROJECT

Andrzej Karbowski, Grzegorz Karwasz, Wim Peteers

ABSTRACT

Recent changes in the scholastic system in Poland, i.e cutting the secondary upper school from 4 to 3 years, show how such "reforms" can influence in a non-desired way teaching curricula, in particularly in exact and sequential sciences like Physics. As far as the basis, i.e. Newton's laws remained unchanged, the most dramatic cuts touched more advanced courses, like Electromagnetism. Some textbooks treat this subject in a very formal way, introducing vector algebra and integrals, other are much detailed in graphical explanations. In some books the whole magnetism is treated as a kind of "apparent phenomenon", using Einstein's special relativity theory and shrinkage of electrical charges in movement, with no mentioning magnets, electromagnets, Faraday's induction law and so on. We try to numerate "the minimum" notions – necessary steps which *can not* be removed if a secondary school curricula on electromagnetism should remain a valid didactical unit.

KEYWORDS

Curricula, building curricula, electromagnetism, physics education, superconductivity.

POLISH STANDARDS IN PHYSICS EDUCATION FOR SECONDARY UPPER SCHOOLS

The Polish education standards in Physics for the secondary upper school, issued by the Ministry of Education describes as the contents of teaching the following issues: Interactions in the nature, Type of interactions in micro and macroworld, Fields of forces and their influence on the motion.

In the process of teaching Physics in the secondary upper school the teachers have to relate strictly the new contents to the knowledge already acquired by pupils in the gymnasium. It is absolutely necessary, because the students learn Physics only four hours over the whole lyceum cycle. The standards in Physics education list, for example, the following student achievements:

1. The observations and descriptions of Physics and Astronomy phenomena.
2. Planning and demonstrations of Physics experiments and simple astronomical observations, writing and analyzing the results.
3. Plotting and interpreting graphs.
4. Adaptation of Physics knowledge to explaining the functioning of technical devices and machines.

To get these achievements it is necessary to do many experiments during the physics lessons. The best way is if the students prepare everything alone or with help of teacher and then present the experiments.

SHORT REVIEW OF POLISH TEXTBOOK FOR PHYSICS IN UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL

International comparative studies, like PISA place Polish pupils in upper - middle class in mathematical and science abilities. In spite of this, only 4% of lyceum students choose physics for the maturity exam

and in common judgment, the level of students entering science faculties is simply disastrous, with significant gaps in reasoning and conceptual reasoning. Intense courses of basic mathematics and physics for university matriculates become a common practice in Poland.

Similar situation were noticed previously in Dutch educational practice with students well performing in PISA and TIMMS tests but failing in implementing curricula requirements (Kuiper, Boersma and van der Akker, 2005). The authors conclude that this bivalency comes from too restrictive understanding curricula as 1) contents to be taught and learned and 2) goals and objectives to be achieved. Van der Akker points out that a more correct understanding of curricula should include also, among others, well defined teacher role, students activities, material and resources for teaching and learning, time allocation and so on (van der Akker, 2003). Here below we compare how these requirements are faced by some Polish textbooks. However, first fix some standards, from other EU textbooks.

In German and Belgium textbooks we can find the information what is magnet, what is magnetic field, description of natural magnetic phenomena and technical applications of magnets. There are many color photos, schemes and pictures very useful for students.

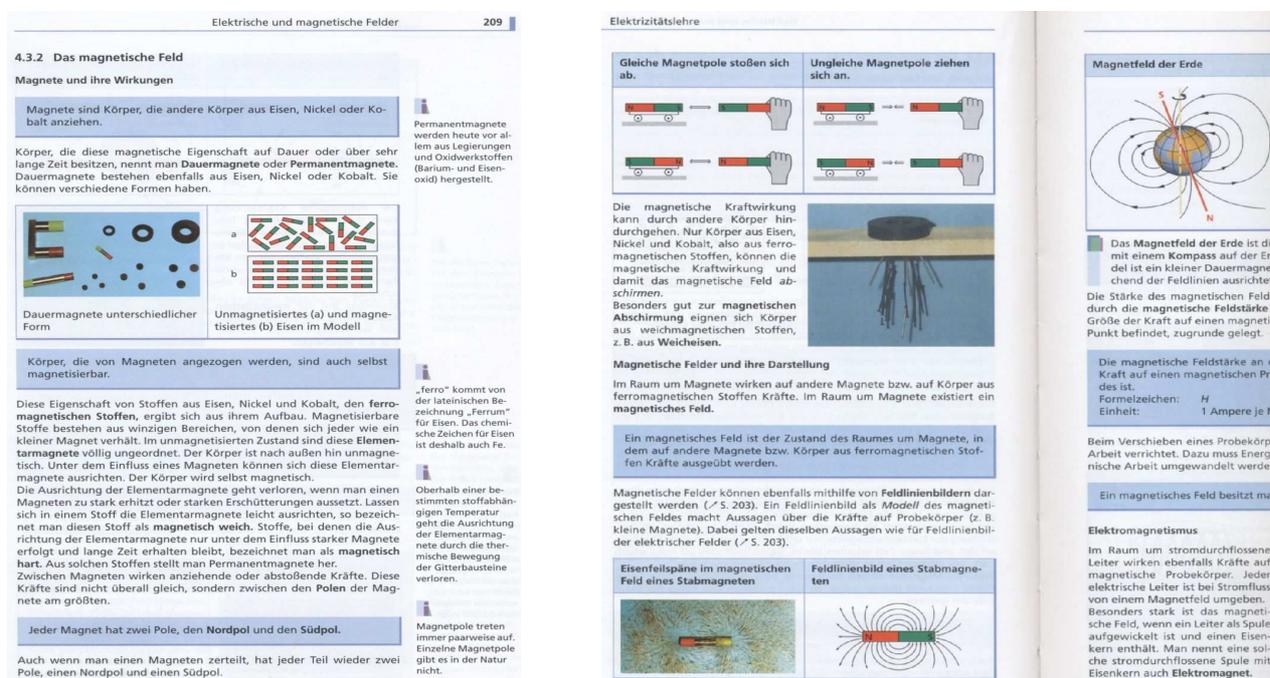


Figure 1. The review of German textbook (Meyer, Schmidt, 2005).

1 LES AIMANTS

1.1. Des roches magnétiques

Depuis les temps les plus reculés, les hommes ont remarqué que certaines pierres « magnétiques » ont la propriété de s'attirer entre elles en certaines zones, leurs **pôles**. Ces corps, appelés **aimants**, sont constitués par de l'oxyde magnétique de fer Fe_3O_4 (fig. 1).

1.2. Un instrument utile : la boussole

Les pierres « magnétiques » possèdent une autre propriété : libres de s'orienter, elles prennent toujours la même direction. Selon certains auteurs, deux siècles avant notre ère, les Chinois ont utilisé ce phénomène pour construire les premières boussoles (fig. 2). Les boussoles actuelles (une aiguille aimantée mobile sur un pivot vertical au-dessus de la rose des vents) proviennent d'un lent perfectionnement de ces premières boussoles.

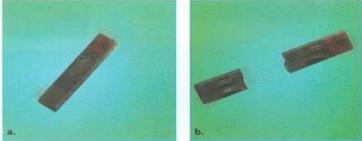
1.3. Les aimants artificiels

De nos jours, les aimants artificiels sont en acier ou en alliages et ils ont des formes variées (fig. 3) : barreau droit, aimant en U, aiguille aimantée...

1.4. Pôle nord, pôle sud

- Les pôles d'un aimant ne sont pas identiques ; on distingue le **pôle nord** du **pôle sud**. Deux pôles de même nom se repoussent, alors que deux pôles de noms différents s'attirent.
- Il est impossible d'isoler le pôle nord du pôle sud d'un aimant. En effet, chaque fragment obtenu après avoir brisé un aimant en deux se comporte comme un nouvel aimant possédant un pôle nord et un pôle sud (fig. 4).



184 Partie 3 - Électrodynamique

2 NOTION DE CHAMP MAGNÉTIQUE

2.1. Action sur une aiguille aimantée

expérience

- Poser sur une table une petite aiguille aimantée mobile autour d'un axe fixe vertical. La direction prise par l'aiguille est matérialisée par un fil.
- Approcher successivement de l'aiguille un aimant (fig. 5a), puis un circuit parcouru par un courant : fil ou bobine (fig. 5b).
- Renouveler l'expérience en inversant les pôles de l'aimant, le sens du courant, la forme de l'aimant...

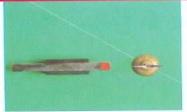



Fig. 5a. Action d'un aimant : l'aiguille change de direction. Fig. 5b. Action d'un courant électrique.

Observations

L'aiguille aimantée indique spontanément le nord magnétique. Elle change d'orientation quand on approche un aimant (fig. 5a) ou une bobine parcourue par un courant électrique (fig. 5b). Sa nouvelle orientation dépend de nombreux facteurs :

- la position de l'aimant, notamment de ses pôles ;
- la position du circuit, sa forme, le sens et l'intensité du courant.

Interprétation

L'orientation particulière prise par la petite aiguille aimantée met en évidence la modification des propriétés magnétiques au point de l'espace où elle est placée.

L'espace autour des aimants et des circuits électriques parcourus par des courants a des propriétés magnétiques particulières qui peuvent être détectées par une aiguille aimantée.

2.2. L'espace champ magnétique

expérience

- Placer au voisinage d'un aimant plusieurs petites aiguilles aimantées mobiles autour d'un axe fixe vertical (fig. 6).

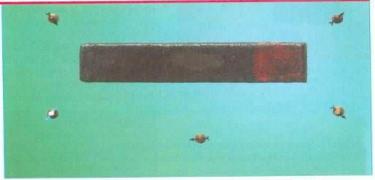


Fig. 6. Quelques aiguilles aimantées disposées autour d'un aimant droit.

Chapitre 13 - Le champ magnétique 185

Figure 2. The review of Belgium textbook (Tomasino, Chappuis, Meur, Montangerand, Parent, 2001).

Now, let us present a typical Polish textbook for Physics, which is very often used in upper secondary school (Fialkowska, Fialkowski, Sagnowska, 2004). The subject of the lesson is macroscopic electromagnetic interactions. At the beginning the theoretical repetition from gymnasium is presented and a short description of Oersted's experiment with the explanation.

Then the author of the book discusses the case a coil and the shape of magnetic field lines inside and outside the coil. The magnetic field is similar to that from a bar magnet, and there are magnetic poles at the ends of the coil. Students should know where the North magnetic pole is using the right-hand grip rule learned in gymnasium a few years ago. Next we can read about what an electromagnet is and where it is applied in technics, what electrodynamic force is and how to use Fleming's left-handle rule. All this is summarized on two pages. The book shows schemes but not real examples or photos.

2.5.2. Makroskopowe oddziaływania elektromagnetyczne

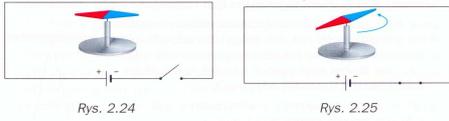
POWTÓRKA

Równie dawno jak zjawiska elektrostatyczne znane były zjawiska magnetyczne – przyciąganie opiłków żelaza przez kawałki rudy (wydobywanej w Azji Mniejszej w okolicy miasta Magnesia, od którego pochodzi nazwa zjawiska).

Już we wczesnym średniowieczu ustalono, że zjawiska elektrostatyczne i magnetyczne są „rozłączne” – bursztyn nie przyciągał żelaza, a ruda skrawków materii. Do XIX wieku wydawało się, że elektryczność i magnetyzm to dwa nie związane ze sobą typy oddziaływań.

Zmianę tego poglądu przyniosły doświadczenia duńskiego fizyka Hansa Christiana Oersteda i angielskiego fizyka Michała Faradaya. Pierwszy z nich stwierdził w 1820 roku, że prąd płynący przez przewodnik wytwarza pole magnetyczne. Drugi, jedenaście lat później wykazał, że zmiany tego pola powodują przepływ prądu elektrycznego.

Przypomnijmy krótko te sławne doświadczenia i wnioski, które z nich wyciągnięto. Wiemy, że namagnesowana igła ustawia się w kierunku wyznaczonym przez pole magnetyczne Ziemi: jeden jej koniec wskazuje północ, a drugi południe. Co się stanie, gdy nad igłą zamocujemy równoległe do niej proste przewody miedziany? Jeśli prąd przez przewód nie płynie (rys. 2.24), nie się nie zmieni, bo miedź nie oddziałuje z igłą magnetyczną (w przeciwieństwie do żelaza lub niklu). Jeśli jednak końce przewodu połączymy z biegunami baterii i przez przewód popłynie prąd, tak jak w doświadczeniu Oersteda, igła wychyli się (rys. 2.25)!

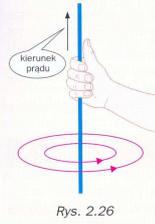


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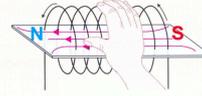
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Rys. 2.26

bieguny magnetyczne zwojniczy można wyznaczyć ze znanych ci z gimnazjum reguł „prawej ręki”. Sposób postępowania w każdym przypadku ilustrują rysunki 2.26 i 2.27.

Pole magnetyczne każdego przewodnika z prądem jest tym silniejsze, im większe jest natężenie prądu, który płynie przez przewodnik, a w zwojniczy dodatkowo, im większa jest liczba zwojów. Pole magnetyczne zwojniczy staje się jeszcze silniejsze, gdy włożymy do niej żelazny rdzeń. Tak skonstruowane elektromagnesy są powszechnie używane w technice, od prostych dzwonków elektrycznych, głośników i przełączników do potężnych dźwignów przenoszących żelazo w hutach.



Rys. 2.27

Skoro przewodnik z prądem działa na magnes, jakim jest igła magnetyczna, to zgodnie z trzecią zasadą dynamiki na przewodnik z prądem znajdujący się w polu magnetycznym także powinna działać siła. Istotnie, siła taka działa i nazywa się siłą elektrodynamiczną (rys. 2.28). Kierunek siły elektrodynamicznej jest prostopadły do linii pola magnetycznego i do przewodnika, a zwrot zależy



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Fig. 3. The sequence on magnetic interaction from one recent Polish textbook.

Another example is even worse: the magnetism is reduced to the Einstein's reactivity idea. This is scientifically correct, but little appealing to the practical experience of pupils.

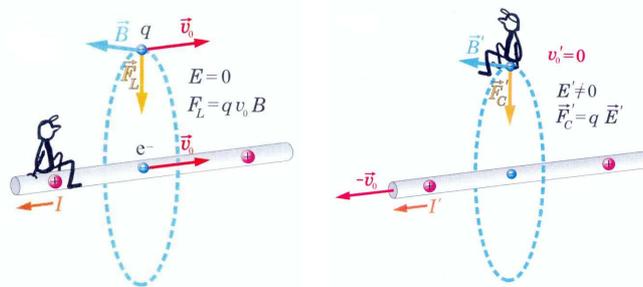


Fig. 4. The scheme on magnetism (Einstein's interpretation) from another Polish textbook (Chyla, Warczak, 2003).

A similar approach on teaching magnetism was presented, among others (Galili, Tseitlin, 2003). They made Maxwell equations the nucleus contents of teaching and Lorentz force the only interaction between the charge and the field. Again, this approach is scientifically correct, follows the lectures of Feynman and the book of Einstein and Infeld, gives a new insight into physics on the university level, but we find it highly unpedagogical at the early stage of school teaching. The Lorentz force, we agree, come from the relativistic contraction, but two macroscopic magnets interact also, and quite visibly!

The general impression is that in typical Polish textbook we can find much theory and not enough experimental Physics, which is very important in 21st century. The textbook does not discuss the interaction between magnets and treats immediately the interactions between currents and magnets. Obviously, the equivalence between currents and magnets is scientifically correct, but from the didactical point of view two phenomena are introduced at once. The traditional way of teaching: interaction between two magnets (Gilbert 1600) → the current influences the magnetic needle

(Romagnosi 1802, Oersted 1817) → the current generates the field → two currents interact (Ampere) is much more appropriate.

Taking this into account and working in European project MOSEM “Minds-On experimental equipment kits in Superconductivity and ElectroMagnetism for the continuing vocational training of upper secondary school physics teachers” (<http://www.mosem.no>) we propose to change the Polish secondary school curricula on electromagnetism.

NECESSARY STEPS IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULA ON ELECTROMAGNETISM

Models and analogies are essential to the teaching of electromagnetism, because in this conceptual area some phenomena cannot be observed directly, but only the consequences of these phenomena can (Michelini, Mossenta, Testa, Viola, Testa, 2007). Based on classroom experience, which reflected students’ difficulties with the understanding of particular electromagnetism concepts, when presented in the traditional way, we first planned the selected topics in secondary school curricula on electromagnetism. We propose to use the active and effective methods of teaching, in which simple experiments on magnetism and superconductivity can be introduced at a secondary school level, in a European dimension. The set of experiments is a result of the exchange of ideas within “Supercomet 2” and MOSEM Leonardo da Vinci EU projects.

The MOSEM project offers participating schools and teachers a collection of simple, thought-provoking (minds-on) physics experiments. Electronic and printed support materials use text, videos and animations to raise the user’s curiosity. Investigating the encountered phenomenon and doing own research with the provided materials and other sources is expected to improve motivation and learning.

The SUPERCOMET CD (Superconductivity Multimedia Educational Tool, online.supercomet.no) consists of six modules. The list of developed modules is as follows:

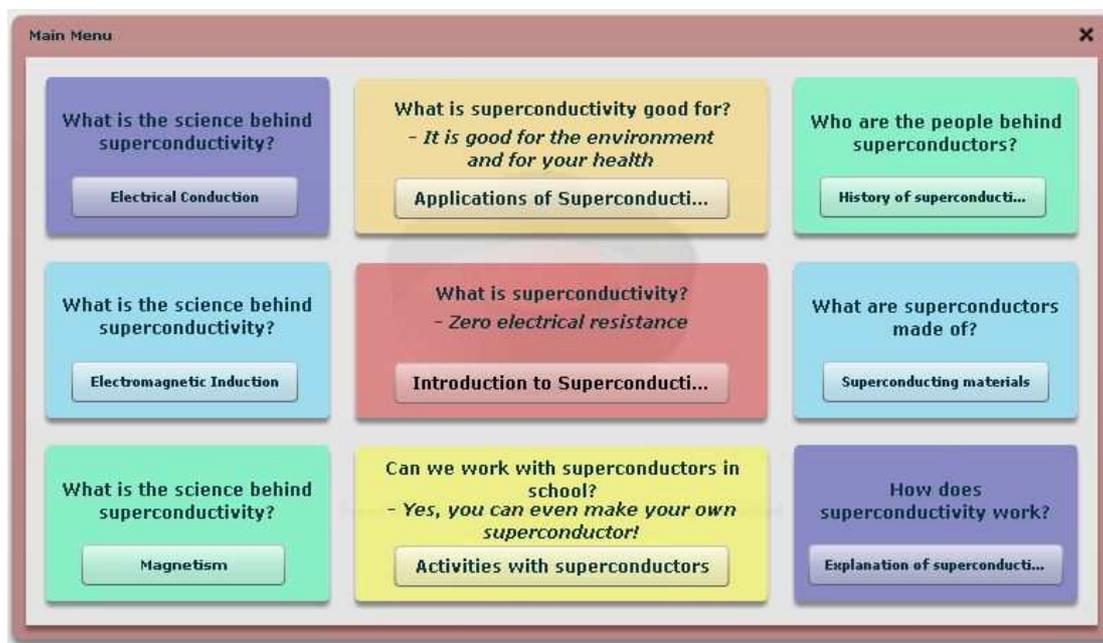


Fig. 5. The main menu of SUPERCOMET CD.

List of key experiments in MOSEM proposal:

1. Cartesius experiments with floating magnets.

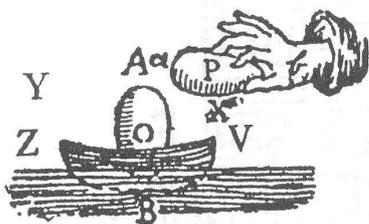


Fig. 6. The floating magnets in Cartesius experiment (Descartes, 2001).

2. Interaction of magnets.

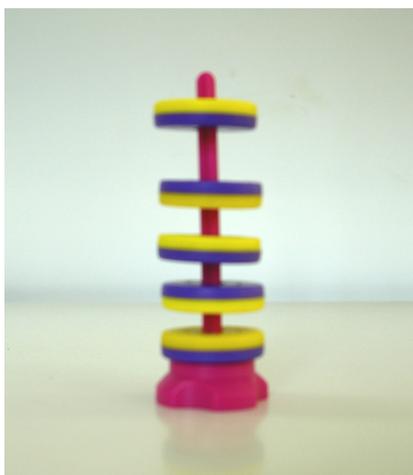


Fig. 7. Interaction of 5 magnets on a stick.



Fig. 8. Interaction of 2 magnets in a plexi tube.

3. Line forces.
4. Compass as indicator of line forces.
5. Current as the source of magnetic interaction (Oersted experiment).
6. Forces on currents (Pohl's experiment).
7. EM engines.
8. Induction with moving magnets.
9. Induction with rotating coils – AC current generators.

The materials comprise a teacher seminar with hands-on activities combined with the use of interactive animations, text and video presenting electromagnetism and superconductivity with an accompanying teacher guide. The materials are translated/adapted and tried out at schools in 15 European countries.

CONCLUSIONS

Combining hands-on investigative experiments with critical questioning, interactive animations, videos and theoretical explanations allows for minds-on learning of electromagnetism and superconductivity at the level of upper secondary school. The real experiments are very useful for pupils in secondary school. This contribution compares learning outcomes of real or computer aided experiments with outcomes of animations and simulations about electricity and magnetism and electrical conductivity (Konicek, Mechlova, 2006).

In conclusion, present construction of curricula in Poland persists in reductive understanding of them as “students should know”, “student should be able”, without giving the material means for teaching and education pathways.

Finally, this study gives also another national insight into the discussion if the curricula should be “top-down”, i.e. imposed by experts or “bottom-up”, created from the practice of best teachers (Galili, Tseitlin, 2003). The present disastrous situation in teaching Physics in Poland is largely caused by an excessive “bottom-up” scenarios, in which every single editor can register its own curriculum as approved for the national level. This makes difficult to find “a common denominator” for student entering university and creates significant difficulties at the university level. However, as shown by the most recent (June 2008) practice from the Polish Ministry of Education (MEN), this is again not the case – the new platform (<http://www1.reformaprogramowa.men.gov.pl>) is completely abstract, even if in theory prepared by experts. In gymnasium no electromagnetic induction is taught, in the lyceum – no electromagnetism at all!

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