

Transforming the educational style of the working class in Poland

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The article presents the impact of the introduction of lower secondary schools on the educational style of the working classes in Poland. This particular reform is seen as one of the elements of change to the education system adapting it to the general parameters of post-Fordism. The author supports the theory of Pierre Bourdieu, which states that society is divided into three social classes (upper, middle and popular) and each of them produces a specific lifestyle and style of education. The education style of a class provides individuals with certain dispositions to educational institutions and school careers, which are realised in the form of social practices (selection of specific type of schools, learning techniques, ways of spending time, etc.). The changes taking place in the education system in Poland over the last 15 years, i.e. since the 1999 reform, are similar to processes that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s in western countries. They include the economisation of education, the parameterisation and quantification of educational results, as well as the introduction of market mechanisms for managing and financing state-owned schools. The article is based on individual in-depth interviews conducted during two field studies organised in 2013–2014: Cultural practices of the working class (120 IDIs) and Class differences in cultural practices in the North-Eastern Poland (60 IDIs). The findings become the basis of formulating new theoretical and research proposals for the field of education.

KEYWORDS: educational style; social classes; Bourdieu; Willis; post-Fordism.

One of the fundamental functions attributed to the education system of the Fordist era is the allocation of the workforce (Parsons, 1959). According to functionally-oriented authors, the education system, due to selection processes, chooses persons from subsequent generations to work in the occupations needed for society to function (Davis and Moore, 1945). This starting point provided the basis for post-war research programmes of the education system in the West. Only in the beginning, the conclusions seemed optimistic (Cremin, 1964). A critical look at the processes of selection led to the creation of

theories referenced to neo-Weberian and neo-Marxist traditions, whose authors attempted to prove that meritocracy fails to work. According to these authors: diplomas did not reflect possessed knowledge, but provided evidence for the position of individuals in a society (Collins, 1979); education served the capitalist economy by accepting class-assigned roles (Bowles and Gintis, 1976); and, thanks to symbolic violence and auto-selection processes, education became a tool for the legitimatisation and reproduction of social hierarchies (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

The common denominator of the aforementioned theories was the tendency to

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use macro analyses on the systemic level and to avoid the individual-behaviour level. Analysts who were quite critical of the operation of education systems lacked the tools to describe what was taking place at the classroom level (ethnography), to undertake an in-depth anthropological analysis of teacher–student relationships, group self-organisation processes and functioning in peer groups. On their cognitive horizons, there was no room for something that could be referred to as the “cultural school level”, which is (at best) a dependant variable subjected to the reproductive functions of school in a society (Aronowitz, 1981).

This level has been comprehensively analysed by Paul Willis in *Learning to labor* (1981). He assumed that to explain why children of middle-class parents obtain middle-class jobs upon graduation, one should understand why others agree to this. And to explain why children of workers end up in factories, one should understand why they consent to this (Willis, 1981). Willis developed methodological and theoretical principles of radical pedagogy. He showed the meaning of counterculture amongst those perceiving the school system as an element of social manipulation, as a phenomenon being a tool designed to restore the working class due to personal activity and ideological development. By rejecting power (authority) and the diploma-based principles of mobility personified by submissive “ear’oles”, the rebellious “lads” become disobedient labourers whose occupational perspectives are limited to performing high- or low-skilled manual labour. According to Willis – and this is new – school is a battlefield and its role in social stratification is restored through conflicts and contradictions. It is not just that working class children are the cannon fodder for capitalist factories (as shown in earlier analyses), but it is that, through the culture of school resistance, these children become industrial labourers and, as time passes, also union

or political activists (Aronowitz, 1981). As a solution, he recommended that schools should be created where teachers would be able to show appreciation for “working class” culture by transforming it into a well-developed criticism of capitalism that is in line with Paulo Freire’s postulates of the “pedagogy of the oppressed” (2007). In both cases, the change of education is just a prelude to social structure changes introduced as a result of political struggle. However, while Freire was calling for non-formal education, Willis believed that the education system could be transformed to provide a tool for deep changes.

Transforming capitalism and the birth of education markets

Over the past decades, fundamental transformations of capitalism have taken place, modifying the operation of the education system and the reproduction mechanisms of class structure. Since the late 1970s, the post-war paradigm based on massive production, maintaining high employment rates, negotiating employment relationships and funding high-level public services through high taxation, was being abandoned due to the pressures of the financial crisis. All of this was defined as a shift from Fordism (organised industrialism or capitalism) to post-Fordism (disorganised post-industrialism or capitalism; see Gardawski, 2009). The essence of post-Fordism lies, inter alia, in small-scale series manufacturing for fast-changing niche markets (Harvey, 1989). Consequently, the flexibility matching the need to compete with diverse offers and frequent and dynamic changes in production plans is the key expectation towards the labour force. The higher the number of job positions reduced by post-Fordism in the manufacturing sector, leading to the creation of numerous low-paid and low-skilled jobs in the service industry, the higher the need for flexibility (telemarketing, sales; see Wright, 1997). The

abandonment of Fordism and Keynesianism is related not only to the deregulation of the economy and shifting production to countries offering cheaper labour forces, but also to cuts in social spending and new administration principles (compare the new market-based paradigm for new public management).

These changes have had considerable consequences for education systems. The reproduction of the social structure through the straightforward allocation of working youth for the production sector ceased to be functional. In addition, deregulation and the introduction of market principles into the organisation of the education system changed its way of operation. The creation of so-called education markets was initiated first in Anglo-Saxon countries and then on the global scale. This method of organising education assigns individuals with broader responsibility for educational choices (relating to both type of school and specific educational facility) and for shaping educational careers. The relationships existing at the intersection of class structure and education system have been distorted. There has been a decrease in the significance of the collective strategies of schools in reproducing social classes, as well as in the significance of the institutions themselves in appropriately distributing individuals to the labour market. Contrary to this, an increase has been observed in the significance of inter-school thresholds and their associated tests, examinations, recruitments and individual decisions. The aim was to improve the effectiveness of the system's operation by introducing principles of inter-school competitiveness and to create measures of quality (examination results, educational added value) to give "education service purchasers" an option to assess and choose. The results of these processes included improved inter- and inner-school selection, segregation on various levels of the education system, a high level of uncertainty, and an "episodic character" of the school career.

Research studies conducted in Anglo-Saxon countries have shown the impact of these transformations on shaping educational-class strategies, e.g. through class differentiation of the criteria taken into consideration by parents when choosing a school. The working class¹ refers to issues of pragmatism and logistics, and selects a school that is easy to access (located in the vicinity of one's home or en route to work) – the one attended by other children from the neighbourhood. The middle class is guided by a school's position in rankings, subjective assessments of its offer and – first and foremost – by: by ambiguous, general opinions about the school environment (Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz, 1995).

In Poland and post-communist countries, changes to the system were associated with the shift from the socialistic model of Fordism to post-Fordist capitalism (see Dunn, 2008). Transformations of the education system were also in line with this direction and meant changes to the spirit of New Public Management in the public sector: pluralism of ownership, decentralisation of management and division of education process into shorter stages. This was achieved by allowing non-public and private schools, six-grade primary schools and three-year lower secondary schools to be established and by transferring the management authority of schools to local governments. Moreover, external examinations were introduced on each level of education, allowing measurable indicators (rankings) of the quality of educational services to be generated. An option to evade the catchment rule was also provided. Consequently, today we can observe an increasing percentage of students attending out-of-region lower secondary schools in large cities due to the pressure of middle-class parents (see Dolata, 2009; 2013).

¹ The term working class used here includes farmers, skilled and unskilled labourers as well as persons employed in the service sector but performing low-skilled and physical labour.

The relatively limited access to pre-school education and creation of “lower secondary school education markets” in large cities make attending the regional primary school the only “obvious” element of an educational career, i.e. the one that requires neither the student’s nor the parents’ decision. But this is not exactly so, because in 2012–2014, the excessively extended reform lowering the school starting age forced parents to make a decision regarding their children’s school entry age. In addition to this, one should bear in mind the second selection threshold (upper secondary school admission) and the emergence of the non-public school sector. Moreover, the introduction of the Bologna Process divided higher education studies into two stages and the poor financial condition of universities changed the status of doctoral studies from the first stage of scientific careers to third cycle studies. For individuals, such a structure of the system means that there is a continuous need to select, be tested and adapt to new conditions. How does this affect the situation of the working class?

Looking for an answer to this question in national literature is fruitless. In Poland, we have no problem in finding good, detailed and up-to-date diagnoses of educational inequalities and the reproduction of social structures in the education system. Inequalities have been addressed in one of the annual reports of the Educational Research Institute (Federowicz and Sitek, 2011). The phenomenon has been analysed by Roman Dolata (2009; 2013), Henryk Domański (2002), Alicja Zawistowska (2012) and many other researchers. As a result, we possess rich empirical material indicating that in post-1989 Poland – next to higher income disparities and a wider range of poverty – an increase in educational inequalities was also observed in some areas. Quality studies emerged on the impact of changes in the education system on issues of social

inequality (Szkudlarek, 2007; Zahorska, 2011; 2012). It was the “youth study” specialists, such as Barbara Fatyga (1999) or Krystyna Szafranec (2011), who committed themselves to analysing the cultural dimension of school operations and the attitudes of young people, indicating, e.g., the processes of forming specific cultures of resistance in upper secondary vocational schools or the phenomenon of school violence. However, these analyses fail to include the class nature of such phenomena, and if it is included, “class character” tends to be defined as social and occupational status and is marginalised (e.g. Bilińska-Suchanek, 2003). Krzysztof Wasielewski (2006) has demonstrated how spatially mismatched opportunities affect attitudes toward education

However, his research includes quantitative analyses of place of residence impact on educational styles. Therefore, a research programme on the education style of social classes in Poland is still to be developed.

The education style of a class is nothing more than an element of the lifestyle of a specific social class relating to education. A style understood in this way translates the dispositions that individuals develop during their initial socialisation into social practices carried out within educational institutions and during a school career (attitudes towards socially legitimated practices, selection of specific types of schools, learning techniques, ways of spending time at school and developing an educational career). The following part of this article will be devoted to a reconstruction of the educational style of the working class, but it will also describe the changes in this process invoked by the reform of the school system that introduced lower secondary schools and a broadly understood reorganisation of the education system in the post-Fordist era.

The reconstruction of the educational style of the working class and its transformation will be provided on the basis of material

from the following two research projects: *Praktyki kulturowe klasy ludowej* [*Cultural practices of the working class*]; 120 individual in-depth interviews with working class representatives from four voivodships) and *Klasowe zróżnicowanie praktyk kulturalnych w województwie warmińsko-mazurskim* [*Class differences in cultural practices in the North-Eastern Poland*]; 60 individual in-depth interviews with residents of the Warmia and Mazury regions: 20 interviews per working, middle and upper class residents). Several biographical interviews with labourers of various generations were also used in the analysis as part of a seminar entitled „Klasy i biografie: trzy pokolenia robotników” [“Classes and biographies: three generations of labourers”] held at the Institute of Sociology of the University of Warsaw and presented by Maciej Gdula, whom I would like to thank at this point for making the material available. The author’s previous studies and theoretical concept of Pierre Bourdieu (1984) served as principal points of reference for the differentiation of social classes (Gdula and Sadura 2012; Gdula, Lewicki and Sadura, 2015). Class was defined by dispositions and criteria referring to economic, social, and cultural capital, defined primarily on the basis of such variables as: income, type of work, level of education. In accordance with the aforementioned perspectives, the working class includes not only labourers and farmers, but also service sector employees who perform work not requiring high level skills. The middle class includes specialists in non-managerial positions employed in private companies and public administration, teachers, nurses, small-size entrepreneurs, and artisans. The upper class includes company or institutional CEOs and directors with earnings totalling at least four times the average national wage, freelancers, professors, university lecturers and independent workers in the cultural sector, e.g. directors

and set designers. Interviewee designations are located under the citations². The citations are provided in their original form.

The education styles of classes in contemporary Poland

Interpretation of the research material presented in this section is based on the conclusions from previous analyses of the Polish class system (Gdula and Sadura, 2012). This can significantly reinforce the theses that would otherwise have to remain as hypotheses. To anticipate the possible doubts of readers relating to the laconic yet conclusive nature of the description of class-oriented lifestyles, I would like to expressly clarify that what I am presenting here are certain generalisations concerning the characteristics of ideal types. These generalisations comprise the context of a more comprehensive analysis of the changes of the working class vs school that will be presented in the latter part of this text.

The specific class dispositions shaping the educational practices of the individuals studied emerged most frequently in the responses to questions of how the respondents remember their school, the educational approach used by their parents towards them, and the educational approach of the respondents towards their children.

The upper class

The upper class has ambivalent memories of school. It has not caused them any problems in terms of achieving good grades.

² In the case of participants of the *Cultural practices of the working class* study, the initial letters stand for the voivodships (SLA, MAZ, LUB, WMA), the next letters indicate sex (K – female, M – male), and the number preceding the name of the position refers to the age of the respondent. The interviews conducted as part of the *Class differences of cultural practices in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship* project begin with the acronym CEIK (Centre of Education and Cultural Initiatives, for which the studies were conducted), the following letters indicate the interviewer’s class membership (KW – upper class, KŚ – middle class, KL – working class), sex (K – female, M – male) and job position.

However, it was not always associated with the need to greatly exert oneself and more frequently linked to the use of knowledge gained at home.

P: And... did you enjoy your school? Do you have good or bad memories?

R: They're good. I mean, I've always been a good kid, so I've kind of slipped through it on my politeness and then, I quickly learned that in the education system, it's easy to go through things using your own reputation and that it has nothing to do with your knowledge, skills, the way you work to pass a subject and so on, and that it's mainly based on how much the teacher either likes or dislikes you. In the majority of cases, this has worked, so I think, it's been easy for me to go through the school.

[17.CEIK.KW.K.33.NGO activist]

For the respondents with the highest cultural capital, personal development is of great importance: they expect school to be their space for intensive intellectual work. Knowledge does not have to be useful, but the process of obtaining it should be pleasant. They distance themselves from an instrumental approach to education and fail to assign specific objectives to their behaviour. However, while ensuring full freedom of action, the majority of the persons have followed in the footsteps of their parents (professors, journalists, physicians, lawyers).

P: Did your parents emphasise learning? Was the need to study a big issue at home?

R: No, I studied myself. [...]

P: And did they talk to you about, I don't know, the profession or studies you should choose?

R: They did. They insisted on medicine [they were physicians – author's note] and I wasn't quite sure, but I also wanted that, too. It's not that I made that decision solely under my parents' influence. I just thought it suited me best.

[5.CEIK.KW.K.43.physician]

P: And your parents, did they emphasise learning?

R: They never had to because, it sort of happened quite naturally. I think that the mental pressure coming from the fact that my father is a professor did its job.

[17.CEIK.KW.K.33.NGO activist]

From the point of view of being motivated to work, the example set by parents was of utmost significance. The respondents had bad memories of the discipline and the need to function as ordered, i.e. "suppression of personality" which is a function of the education system [14.CEIK.KW.K.57.journalist]. It was not until they started university that they found their natural environment, where they were forced to work hard, but they also had the opportunity to develop their interests.

The middle class

Middle class respondents had very pleasant memories of school: it turned out to be an institution perfectly complementing the dispositions taken from home, i.e. a systematic work ethos, striving to compete and be successful, improving chances of being promoted in the social structure.

I never had problems at school and probably that's why I never showed up at school under stress. Some people think of school in negative terms because of stress. I enjoyed it, I don't know if it's OK or not, but I always enjoyed being successful in the sense that I was working, well, let's say hard and not hard ... I studied. [...] I also thought that after graduating with good grades, I would attend a good university and end up having a good job.

[9.CEIK.KŚ.M.30.bank employee]

The functioning of the school was supported by the attitudes of parents who provided their children with a great deal of support, emphasising learning, helping children with their homework and talking them into following a specific educational path or selecting a certain

occupation. However, learning was not an aim in itself. It was rather the result of calculation and the need to follow one's life plan.

We discussed... spent millions of hours on discussions; the conversations were about things of interest to me, but also about things that would provide me with a decent life, so I chose between law and sociology. I was thinking of sociology, also applied for English philology, but it was Polish philology that finally won. My mother also studied Polish philology, so, perhaps, this was the path for me too; however, they never put any pressure on me to make a choice.

[16.CEIK.KŚ.K.27.teacher]

The middle-class respondents value school for honesty and transparent rules. They transfer this vision to other levels of education, such as academic development. They want their attendance lists checked, the so-called entry passes made and examination rules clearly defined. In their opinion, universities should be selective and groups should be homogeneous (there is no place for individuals lowering the level)³.

The working class

For children of rural and working class backgrounds, school was quite often the first place of contact with the world of educational institutions, as none of them had attended a day care centre or a kindergarten. This magnified their reluctance towards the system, whose operation was based on previously unknown institutionalised coercion and discipline. This, to a great extent, refers specifically to men, as women in this group are easier to dominate.

P: Did you like school?

R: Nope, I didn't.

P: Why?

R: It stole my free time and forced me to study.

[24.CEIK.KL.M.26.construction]

P: I wanted to ask you if you liked your school.

R: The basic rule was that if you don't like it, you should start to like it.

P: And what about good or bad memories from school? What was or wasn't fun?

R: Well, there were ups and downs like in any other school.

[SLA_13_M_60_butcher]

School memories of people belonging to this group of respondents establish such virtues as informality and sociability. First and foremost, they tend to recall their peer relations, games played on the school playground, physical education (in some cases), shop classes, etc.

P: And did you like school at all?

R: Did like school. Not learning, but enjoyed school.

P: What did you like?

R: Phys ed! [Laughing.] Everything they don't enjoy now. With us, it was unthinkable. Fat or crippled, everybody had to exercise.

[SLA_03_M_65_turner]

Parents usually did not know how or did not want to support their child's learning and gave him/her the freedom to choose a school or profession. However, to the extent that for the middle class, this freedom was supplemented with "thousands of hours of talk", this group of respondents was truly left on its own (and, as in the case of other social classes, they usually followed the path chosen by their parents). If parents valued education and attempted to persuade the child to learn, rarely would they provide positive reinforcement based on promoting internal motivation. The coercion and penalties they used strengthened their children's negative image of school.

R: [...] Don't like reading and didn't enjoy school. I was forced to attend school or I'd get belted.

P: Was there anything in particular you either enjoyed or didn't like about school?

³ For a detailed analysis of the style of studying by class, see Murawska (2013). The analysis covers over 30 in-depth interviews with students of the University of Warsaw of various class background.

R: Ah, it's not about liking or disliking it. You had to study or you'd get belted and that's it. It was unlike now, one licking from the teacher and two at home.

[WMA_28_M_59_blue-collar worker]

Schools are institutions organised by values that are important to the middle class such as love for order attained through assessments and comparisons. Moreover, they are dominated by middle class personnel with all of its prejudices. The respondents acutely felt the differences in how they were treated, which took the form of class discrimination.

It bothered me that students were not treated equally and that there were the chosen ones and the others, the worse part. And simply put, they were always considered to be something worse ... That's what I didn't like.

[WMA_22_M_57_farmer]

Along with its programme, the school – particularly primary school – contrasted with the practiciness of working class respondents. It seemed abstract, far from everyday experiences and detached from life. This is why respondents gave positive opinions about vocational schools (basic or upper secondary), focused on providing the practical learning of an occupation:

It has its purpose! [...] The older you get, the more often you think about your profession, you want to learn something, get something out of school.

[WMA_34_M_21_driver]

P: Did you like school?

R: Not so much. I'm not saying I was like going under the knife. I mean, looking back, primary school is pretty vague to me and then, once I went to high school, I, sort of, enjoyed it more. Yeah, that's the way I'd put it.

[WMA_22_KS_M_57_farmer]

The constancy and variability of dispositions: an inter-generational comparison

The young generation of peasants in the Second Polish Republic

The educational style of the working class reconstructed above seems to be of a moderately constant and timeless nature. It will be very interesting to see the comparison of the presented results and those of Poland's classic, biographical studies of the rural population conducted as early as in the 1930s by Józef Chałasiński's team. In *Memoirs of the Polish peasants*, volume IV, the author – on the basis of collected material – weaves a “peasant's vision of school”, where a critical diagnosis of the status quo forms the basis for a project of an “ideal school” in response to the class dispositions of the participants. The analysis of the memoirs shows the need for a school that prepares individuals to reconstruct the social roles assigned to parents through the acquisition of skills and cultivation of local identity. However, an institution of this type, which lays the foundation for class solidarity, may also serve as an emancipative project, preparing students to define themselves collectively in terms of the key political disputes.

Numerous common points throughout both studies are easy to discern at the level of institutional descriptions and school experiences. Over eighty years ago – just like today – the institution of school, together with its personnel, had an intellectual nature and therefore was foreign to the working and rural classpeople as a class. It was becoming a reason for class discrimination, fomenting opposition among the peasant population. One of the respondents in his twenties told Chałasiński: “A teacher teaching peasant children must unconditionally come from a village. The way things are going nowadays, that is to say a teacher from a city calling peasant children boors, will no longer be tolerated by the villagers,” (Chałasiński, 1984, p. 402).

Public primary school was an entirely new experience for the rural population and was not very popular among the older generation, whose representatives actively discouraged children and young people from studying. The highly abstractive educational programme designed primarily to prepare individuals for learning and functioning in separation from the daily experiences of village residents was also very significant. This practiciness of the peasants was reflected in the responses of those interviewed: in science, books should be adapted through the possible use of examples from rural life, “[...] More emphasis should be placed on the cultivation of various crops (Chafasiński, 1984, p. 403); [care should be taken] “so that there are more excursions [...], when peasant children spend too much time at school, they get bored with learning and fail to learn enough”; “more rural-related subjects in the programme” (Chafasiński, 1984, pp. 404–414).

The calls for school education to take on a more practical approach are also associated with the need to introduce changes into the programme and to adapt the school to the requirements of rural life in social and cultural terms. This means that better emphasis should be placed on community, i.e. on preparing young people to cooperate, participate in the peasant movement, take pride in being part of the peasant class: “It’s time to change the learning of history in the teaching process. In the 20th century, a peasant should learn the history of peasants, not the history of magnates, kings and bishops” (Chafasiński, 1984, p. 414).

However, because school in the 1930s had each of the above-described disadvantages and failed to fulfil any of the submitted postulates, the majority of rural children – just as today – would graduate thinking, “I’m finally out of this prison and I’m now free to do what I want and it should be none of any teacher’s business” (Chafasiński, 1984, p. 421).

It is easy to see that in Chafasiński’s research, the educational style of the young generation of peasants is only superficially analogous to the one described many years later by Bourdieu in *Distinction* (1984) – comprising a “choice of necessity” and including practices designed to complete such dispositions as informality, practiciness and fatalism. On the basis of these practices and dispositions, Chafasiński’s respondents were outlining a positive vision of the organisation of teaching and social life, giving it the status of a universal right. How was this possible? The answer may be found in the prose of one of the peasant movement’s leading representatives. Pre-war Poland was not only a country of peasants in terms of their proportion in the social structure:

All of that time – the era of the Second Polish Republic – was a period of the greatest potential opportunities for peasantry as a class. The historical apogee of this class, if you will [...]. The generation of peasants, particularly the generation of young peasants, becomes the only real alternative; it’s the peasant class that is predestined to take responsibility for the country – not just political responsibility. [...] the peasant strikes, impressive in their magnitude, the actions of young peasant movements, were the most spectacular signs of a great movement, a deep and creative ferment in all areas, from the economy to religion (Pilot, 2011, p. 30–35).

How does the educational style of the young generation of the working class in the Third Polish Republic compare to this view? Could the introduction of lower secondary schools and the post-Fordist transformation of the education system influence the education style of this class? The answer to this question may be obtained by juxtaposing the statements of working class members born in 1986 and later, who – after six years of primary school education – entered the lower secondary school introduced under the reform of 1999, with the statements of older respondents.

The young generation of the working class in the Third Polish Republic

What has changed in the narratives of young workers and farmers in terms of school? At first glance, not much. The age of students entering lower secondary school overlaps with the age of puberty, which accumulates in the sociability of this class. Testimony of this is seen in the stories about parties and social drinking, which appear very frequently in memories of this educational stage. Despite this, school remains an oppressive place, disliked by the respondents.

P: In general, did you like school?

R: I did, but I didn't like going to school. I would attend the midday classes only, not the first and last classes.

P: Why?

R: Don't know. In the morning, it was hard for me to get up. Once I went to school, I would just sit around and then I felt hungry. I didn't like taking food to school and then, on my way back home, I was starving.

[7.CEIK.KL.K.28.wholeseller]

The respondents' statements confirm the presence of such dispositions as informality, practiciness and a reluctance to submit to discipline in the educational style of the working class. Higher levels of education (basic or upper secondary vocational schools), practical subjects and physical education ("I really enjoyed my hairdressing school. Particularly, the vocational subjects," [MAZ_07_ _DO_K_27_poultry worker]) were spoken of in positive terms. If the interviewees liked the school, this was due to a well-integrated class and good relations with the peer group. However, it was hard for them to recall positive aspects related to the period of their education. Negative memories prevail and the long catalogue of unpopular elements of the education system begins with teachers ("Like everyone, I don't like teachers," [LUB_03_MG_M_24_ _driver]). The reform, which divided schooling into several

stages (in some cases, even into six multiple-year levels⁴), hindered the ability to establish longstanding friendships and weakened the process of self-identification with the institution. Only a few young working class respondents declared that they maintained good social relationships with their peers (most often from primary school). Family members, playground friends and sometimes colleagues dominated. Shorter periods of time spent at a specific school influenced a change in the strategy of resisting it. Instead of putting up a fight, it was better to wait out the two or three years and, possibly, limit oneself to passive resistance and evasion. As shown in the responses to the questions on cooperation in the workplace and attitudes towards trade unions, this episodic school career accustoms one to operate in an unstable, precarious occupational environment and weakens the ties of solidarity felt by working class youth. Contrary to older interviewees, some of whom had worked with trade unions at one point in their lives and recalled that episode nostalgically, the majority of young respondents knew literally nothing about trade unions:

P: I'd also like to ask you about your opinion of trade unions?

R: Can you explain to me exactly what that is?

P: Uhm. It's an organisation in which workers organise to address the level of wages, work safety and to establish working conditions with the employer.

R: I wouldn't know. I'm not interested in things like trade unions or other organisations.

[WMA_32_K_23_blue-collar worker]

R: Trade unions? Don't know what to say about them.

P: Do you have any idea, what they do?

⁴ This would occur if a respondent attended a basic vocational school and then supplemented that with schooling in a vocational upper secondary school to be able to take the completion exam, enabling him/her to attend a higher education institution.

R: Not really, I've heard something about them once, but I've no idea, I haven't been very interested in this.

[WMA_23_M_24_unemployed]

The 1999 education reform lengthened the time spent by young people in a uniform school system. It also extended the stage of education based on an abstract programme lacking practical references to everyday life, thus making it a most hated system by working class students. The introduction of external tests allowed various school rankings to be established (on the basis of test results or educational value added – EVA), thus increasing the pressure on schools to achieve results. This also negatively impacted the atmosphere at school, to which young representatives of the working class are very sensitive. In their responses, interviewees focused on emotions, such as stress and fear, which are harder to find in the narratives of older respondents:

I've never liked school. Fear of being able to pass, mostly in vocational upper secondary school. Problems with English. I've never really been good at English. Never really wanted to learn it. And it has always, it's always been... I've never liked school. Never.

[SLA_17_M_21_miner]

In subsequent years, school career is becoming beset with tests and trials⁵ and the stakes are becoming increasingly higher. The respondent quoted above attended a vocational upper secondary school of mining which, upon graduation, guaranteed employment at the Jastrzębska Spółka Węglowa [Jastrzębska Coal Company – JSW]. The first classes had no problem in becoming employed at the coalmines. Later, however, a requirement to pass psychological tests was introduced. With each passing year, the criteria

were becoming ever more stringent. When it was his turn, fifty percent of the candidates passed the tests. He passed on the second attempt. However, the rules had changed by that time. He was not employed at JSW but in an external company outsourcing for JSW, which meant much lower remuneration and worse terms of employment.

In stories told by older respondents, education and job market entry are collective experiences. A defined course of school career, attitudes towards learning and occupational choices were all part of the social role of a worker or farmer typical for the entire social environment surrounding them. The respondents took their parents', siblings' or neighbours' advice and followed the path leading to the reproduction of their social standing. Even if they were disappointed with what they had encountered in school or the job market, they felt the mutual character of their fate. They might have committed personal mistakes, but ultimately, they would still become labourers.

Childhood, school, our school was about two kilometres away, so we took shortcuts through the fields. We would always go in a group from our homes, first to primary school and then, uuuhm, to secondary school. You know, people, siblings, me, we all would go to basic vocational school. Not many from our area would go to university. You had to start working as soon as possible to help our parents and also to have your own money, to move somewhere else, get out. [...] Yep, that was the time when everybody wanted to finish school as quickly as possible or not even finish it, because there was work. Everybody could find a job right away and they were paying good money too.

[Bio interview, 45-year-old labourer]

The education system and job market of today have been modified so extensively that the problem is not the children's reproduction of their parents working class status, but the possibility that they may not even

⁵ Within the meaning that Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thevenot (2006) assign to the term "trial" or within the meaning that Boltanski and Ève Chiapello (2005) use the term "test".

reach that status as adults. The risk of failure is directly proportional to the length of the educational career, which has been extended with the transformation of the education system, with increased educational aspirations and greater availability of higher levels of education.

The results showed that the young generation of labourers from Upper Silesian cities had experienced specific and paradoxical processes, such as the inversion of the value of a diploma (the risk of unemployment and marginalisation was affecting those who had earned their high school diploma, while basic vocational school graduates were doing better in the job market; see Gdula et al., 2015).

All young people study nowadays, but I don't know why. If you don't have a head for it, why bother taking all those classes? There's a shortage of jobs anyway. My neighbours' son went to basic vocational school and some people were laughing at him, but he became an electrician and quickly found a job, because people like him were in demand. Because he was smart, he quickly became a foreman. Didn't have a head for studying, he was just plain smart. Now, he's got the kind of money university graduates dream of.

[Bio interview, 45-year-old labourer]

The strategy that will work in specific situations remains unknown. The majority of young respondents were persons who had either gotten lost at one of the stages of a prolonged school career or failed to pass one of the numerous "trials." In addition to the above-mentioned coalminer having psychology test-related problems, another example is an artistically talented 18-year-old warehouse trainee. Her parents recommended that she go to a basic vocational school instead of an upper secondary school of the arts ("so that I would get a job and take it from there" [8.CEIK.KL.K.18. warehouse trainee]). She is now thinking about a general upper secondary school, but she is stuck between the basic vocational school

and the warehouse. A similar case is the one of a 20-year-old unemployed male interested mainly in cooking. While submitting basic vocational school documentation, he enrolled in the gastronomy class. However, due to full enrolment lists, he was admitted to the carpentry class which – he stated – caused him to leave school [WMA_13_M_21_ _unemployed male].

Another respondent was a female poultry-carcass packager dreaming of becoming a hairstylist. Having finished the specialised school with A+, her allergy tests conducted as part of the employment-related tests showed a strong allergy to the products used in the hairdressing business [MAZ_07_K_27_ _female poultry-product packer]. There were two 25-year-olds among the biographical test participants. One of them never finished vocational upper secondary school, but – thanks to his connections – he got a job where he became interested in electrical work and obtained the skills allowing him (despite the lack of stable employment) to earn well above the national average [Bio interview, 25-year-old electrician]. The second person graduated from lower secondary school and then went on to pursue a career as a journalist, which he abandoned after a year. Ever since then, he's been earning his living doing temporary work (moving, call centres, retail chains, and farm-related jobs abroad) [Bio interview, 25-year-old labourer].

It seems that insecurity in employment and social status, as well as the unpredictable effects of educational decisions are shaping the new common fate of the working class. However, it now appears that this fate is being experienced individually and perceived as intentional. Increasingly fewer people are choosing the old strategy of relying on their parents and social environment as the source of knowledge about how to function at school ("Some people don't know either. They go to school without knowing what they really want to study, what to choose.

It's true, parents may have been through a lot more, they understand more, so it's really worth talking about it," [MAZ_07_ emale poultry-product packer]). For the majority of respondents, decisions such as choosing a school or an occupation are an individual choice for which they take responsibility.

P: Have they talked with you about work? You job plans after graduation? About your future plans?

R: When it comes to lower secondary school, I have the choice of schools and they gave me a free hand, and I think this is good, because if I had chosen the wrong path, then I'd have blamed them. And if I wasn't satisfied, I would only have myself to blame. That's why it's better that they didn't choose the school for me.

[WMA_08_K_24_female shop assistant]

The process of recognising what has been collectively assigned as individually earned forms the basic difference between the generations of the rural class. It is discernible in statements pointing to the valorisation of physical labour and the tendency to postulate "equal opportunities." We asked our respondents to consider the statement that "blue-collar workers are the ones who didn't want to study." This was an intended provocation to emphasise the meritocracy thesis and deprecate physical labour. The vast majority of our respondents rejected this type of an explanation of the dependence between educational effort and physical labour, either by questioning the applicability of meritocratic principles at school and in the job market or by valuing physical labour and treating it as a choice, not a necessity. The source of respondents' aversion to the proposed thesis may be a type of positive identity uniting "working people".

So, like you said, I'm from the working class [laughing – author's note] and not ashamed of it. It's just the way my life turned out, somebody has to do the work anyway [long pause].

[Bio interview, 45-year-old labourer]

Only among the youngest of the surveyed farmers and labourers was there a large group inclined to unconditionally accept the proposed interpretation of a relation between educational effort and physical labour. This agreement could be conditional, as in the case of a coalminer who tried to adapt the thesis to the folk wisdom inherited from home ("Maybe there's something to it ... That's what my mom used to say." [SLA_17_ML_M_21_coalminer]), or total surrender ("I agree. I think, it's a mistake in one's life, they will never achieve anything in their lives, it's hard on them at work" [48.CEIK.KL.M.24.village administrator]). In extreme cases, the answer was silent resignation, as in the case of a 26-year-old rolling mill worker who, after hearing the question, just hung his head down without saying anything, or of self-incrimination, as in the case of an unemployed twenty-year-old lower secondary school graduate from the Mazury region:

P: But are the blue-collar workers the ones who didn't want to study?

R: In my case, yes, but, generally speaking, I can't really say anything about this. But generally, I think that a person who has no schooling is a sort of sly. I don't know. Someone willing to punch somebody in the face, stir things up in the classroom, that kind of thing, you know, I think that it's his fault. [Pause.] I've described myself pretty well.

[WMA_13_M_21_unemployed male]

Summary

The reconstruction of the educational style of the young generation of the working class indicates that – despite the fact that it upholds numerous attitudes and practices typical for other generations of labourers and peasants (not only in Poland) – it tends to reveal significant differences relating to the ever-changing institutional environment and the conditions of life, education and work. The change that was symbolised by the education reform of 1999 introducing

lower secondary schools is not limited to the education system. The radical reorganisation of the education system was only an element of the processes forming the transformation of the entire socioeconomic system, which involved the abandonment of the socialistic version of Fordism and implementation of the post-Fordist principles of organising social relationship. Culture and tradition, economy and market, nation and public administration as well as the social structure itself were also undergoing dynamic changes. The habitus of rural persons, reproducing itself as part of the primary-socialisation process, failed in numerous areas to fulfil the expectations of the changing system, thus losing its effectiveness in playing the role of a sort of “remote control”, guiding an individual of lower socioeconomic status through life.

A similar inconsistency in educational style was observed in the research material while reviewing the interviews with the upper-class representatives of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship. Nearly half of the interviewed high-ranking politicians, university professors and lawyers advanced to the regional elite from the working class, and their educational style, particularly at the initial stages of schooling, was characterised by informality, practicalism and a reluctance towards authority. Almost all respondents advancing from the working class after primary school graduation chose a school that would prepare them for a job in practical terms (some picked a basic vocational school, others favoured a vocational upper secondary school as their first choice). The university studies pursued were also more practical – our respondents usually chose technical or agricultural universities and fields of study. Throughout their occupational lives, whenever conditions permitted, they were happy to run a business. When asked to recall their time in school, they would be sceptical about primary school and positive about vocational school.

P: One more question about the past: did you like your school? I mean, the primary school.

R: Well, when it comes to primary school, to be quite honest, I think, I wasn't crazy about it. Maybe that was partially because... I'm thinking about the reason, because later, in vocational upper secondary school, it was my passion.

[12.CEIK.KW.M.58.professor]

Along with the progress of their school careers, the rebellious “lads” shed the values and attitudes of their class and became “ear'oles” (Willis, 1981) through the growing acceptance of dominant-culture standards. Although the change they experienced while advancing from the working class to the elite meant undergoing a transformation just as rapid as the one occurring in the entire Polish socioeconomic system since the 1980s, many elements of their lifestyle followed the paths developed in childhood. The generation of their children is the first one to feature a habitus harmonised with the achieved social position (this is confirmed in an interview with a professor's daughter [17.CEIK.KW.K.33.NGO activist]). This, however, is where any analogy ends. The peasant origin of persons advancing to the social elite may, in the worst case, have left evidence of this in their habitus, making full assimilation with the new social environment difficult, or – in cases of successful lifestyle transformations – jeopardize personal relations with their family and friends. In the case of the lifestyle transformation of the young working class generation in contemporary Poland, failure is associated with a threat of falling into *underclass*, whereas success means the need for full acculturation to the dominant culture without any guarantee of compensation in occupational and material terms.

To some degree, the situation resembles the change described earlier in western countries. The apparent classless character of British youth culture turned out to be

the result of modernisation based on the model of the middle-class nuclear family, destroying the foundations of working class local community and transforming the school career into an open process oriented towards achievement. This prompted parents to invest in their children's education, was perceived as a means to the success which the parents had been deprived of, and resulted in the individualisation of responsibility for failure in education. However, according to studies of the changes in education, it only had a slight impact on school experiences of the working class, which had continuously perceived school as an institution where it had been forced by foreign and external authority figures (the traditional "they" of the working class culture) to internalise useless knowledge (Clarke and Jefferson, 1973, see also: Hoggart, 1957).

In the West, however, this process extended over decades. In post-communist countries such as Poland, the processes of de-collectivisation and deindustrialisation and the forced increase of geographic mobility led to the erosion of local rural communities over a few years. Concurrent changes taking place in education and at the cusp of the education system and the labour market have led, for example, to an unprecedented increase in the educational aspirations of Polish society. In the case of the members of the working class, this was not accompanied by the development of competences required in making choices related to education.

The friction between the new order expressed in the institutional system and the old order expressed in the habitus of the young rural class generation in Poland are much stronger than those described, for example, in Great Britain (Ball, 2003), and the internal conflict will be resolved in the values and attitudes assumed by next generation. The shift in educational style, catalysed by the introduction of lower secondary schools, is a long-term process, interacting with the

evolution of the school system and its environment. Not only do these processes require an appropriate theoretical approach, but they also have practical consequences in formulating plans to research the processes of class composition in post-Fordist societies and reform programmes for educational policies.

Just as the education system described by Stephen J. Ball (2003) differs from the one criticised by Bourdieu, Passeron or Willis, schools attended by the young generation of the working class in Poland differ from the schools of the pre-reform or communist era.

At the end of the 1980s in the West, and over a decade later in Poland, the processes of selection and segregation strengthened, and thus the paths of children from various classes ceased to cross. At the same time, however, processes are occurring that seem to reduce class differences in educational styles. Resistance to education (Giroux, 1983) has lost its function in the process of reproducing the position of the working class: deindustrialisation has destroyed the factory culture of resistance, which usually accompanied this process. The culture of opposition was assumed by middle-class students, becoming a way for them to express individualism and nonconformity. Concurrently, working class children began – in a way typical of the middle class – to internalise responsibility for educational choices and achievements (in their case, these were most frequently mistakes and failures). These conclusions are based on qualitative research. Validating these conclusions on the basis of large-group analysis is quite a challenge, which should be undertaken in continuing work on this topic.

It is a theoretical challenge to combine the reflections on contemporary transformations of capitalism and the education system (autonomisation of specific systems, triumph of design logistics, individualisation of lifestyles, etc.) with an examination of social-class issues and to recommend an educational research programme on this basis. In typical analyses

of the reproduction of the social structure through the education system, the level of feasibility in reconstructing parents' level of education (including the change in the structure of education) and the allocation of individuals in a changing labour market are the subjects of measurement and criticism. Instead, analyses of contemporary capitalism and the education system (Tomlinson, 2013), particularly those referring to post-constructivist theories (Boltanski and Thevenot, 2006; Cherryholmes, 1988), tend to distance themselves from interest in the issues of social class, focusing rather on analyses of the isolated order of actions, social networks, discourse-related changes, and logic behind the operations of institutions. The combination of both trends may lead to a reformulation of the way class is understood, which would depart from thinking in the categories of a structural matrix, towards an understanding of class and individuals having dispositions formed by their class membership as actors functioning within a specific area of social reality, such as the education system.

The education system is losing the functions it used to provide in post-Fordism and is becoming an episodic simulator of life in the post-Fordism era. However, school has never ceased to be the place where capital is accumulated, as are the resources used by individuals in the process of building self-identity and developing values. The examination of behaviours, actions and reflexes set into motion, for example, during school trials may allow us to review the links between class dispositions and the specific ways individuals live at the stage of the school career, which are otherwise unexplainable just by setting them in the social structure. Such an approach may allow an analysis to be made on the relation of different types of capital and class dispositions with specific areas of practice. It may also help in discovering the effects that appear when they meet, both in terms of the reproduction of class distances, as in

the possibility of crossing them⁶. In defining the value of a person, shifting the point of balance from the institution to the individual (and the moment when this occurs) requires abandoning the perspective of researching institutions and populations and focusing on more individualistic methods, such as biographical studies (biographical interviews).

Critics of the education policy of the Third Polish Republic (III RP) willing to reform it along progressive lines face similar challenges. As shown in the research described above, the contemporary young generation of the working class, contrary to the peasants living in the Second Polish Republic (II RP) or workers of the Polish People's Republic (PRL), is not capable of articulating its own vision of school. The intense changes in educational style that this group has undergone mean that their criticism of the status-quo of school is weak and not realistic, not allowing them to develop universal demands. Therefore, in the field of education, we are rather dealing with a conflict of middle and upper class visions of school. Numerous theories describing the processes of reproduction have lost their significance, which also means the need to revise the postulated directions of change. By rejecting the pessimism of Bourdieu and Passeron, we cannot simultaneously reach out for the solutions of "pedagogical populists" that they criticise themselves (Freire, 2007; Willis, 1981), as they also are not useful today.

The idea to transform educational institutions in a way that would better reflect the life experiences of students and apply a more practical character (in both formal and non-formal education) is also seized upon by other social classes. In Poland, this can be seen, for example, by the opening of a "real school" (essentially, a new type of vocational school) by the oldest and most popular

⁶ I owe this observation to discussions conducted with Maciej Gdula and Mikołaj Lewicki.

non-public school established by an association on Bednarska Street, mainly targeted to children of the middle class. It is also seen in the popularity of extracurricular classes and the development of the non-formal and informal sectors of education. The introduction of lower secondary school and other elements of the educational reform package introduced after 1999 have not served their purpose in providing equal opportunities. However, the demand to eliminate lower secondary schools is populism not only in pedagogical but also in political terms. The withdrawal of the reform of 1999 will not change capitalism back to its Fordism phase. It is against the backdrop of post-Fordism that an understanding and acknowledgement is required of the culture of the working class and its style of education. It is on this basis that new ideas of reforming educational institutions, whose old solutions are juxtaposed next to new realities – both in terms of institutions, as well as individuals.

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