

Piotr Długosz*

EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES IN THE VIEW OF POLISH SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

The paper presents the output of Polish sociology of education. The author shows research projects and thematic fields present in the work of Polish scientists. The conducted research focuses on old educational inequalities (the impact of status on educational achievements and aspirations) as well as the new ones (the impact of status on private lessons and additional classes). In the article the consequences of socio-economic transformation and their impact on educational inequalities is shown as well. At the end, the theoretical concepts of cultural capital, human capital and credentialism, helpful with the analysis and explanation of social inequalities in Poland are shown as well.

Keywords: Educational inequalities, Poland, transformation, private tutoring, human capital, cultural capital.

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1990s, we have been witnessing an increase in the number of post-secondary schools in Poland. The highest increase in the number of pupils was reported in high schools. In the 1980s, only 20% of the population studied in high schools, while in the 2009/2010 school year, 44% of pupils attended high schools. The popularization of secondary level education is still more noticeable if we consider the number of students who pass the high school leaving examination (*Matura*), which gives them an opportunity to start education at the academic level (80%). A still higher increase in the access to higher education was observed in the case of students. From 1990 to 2010, the number of students increased by 370%. Poland has a high index of net enrolment rate of 41.2%, which is higher than the average in the EU and OECD states (Szafraniec, 2011). Observations of high school leavers confirm the trend. Based on the 2010 research which was carried out among upper secondary school pupils, 71% of high school leavers plan to start university studies (Szcucka i Jelonek, 2011). On the one hand, the data can be treated as evidence of the egalitarianism of the educational system and its answer to challenges posed by knowledge and risk societies. Education becomes the foundation of the

* **Piotr Długosz** – PhD, sociologist, University of Rzeszow and East European State Higher School in Przemyśl.

Scientific interests: sociology of education and youth, youth of the Polish-Ukrainian borderland.

E-mail: ptc@wp.pl

social status of an individual and it determines life opportunities in contemporary society. Insufficient education is one of social marginalization factors. At the times of risk society, education reduces unemployment, poverty and low life quality risks. It also functions as a personal insurance policy for changing and uncertain times. Among people holding an academic degree, the unemployment rate is still lower; such individuals find it easier to get jobs and have higher remuneration. It can be concluded that education does not guarantee success; however, the lack of education guarantees failure.

On the other hand, we can still observe clear educational inequalities. In spite of changes introduced in the educational system which were to reduce the impact of family, social and background status on educational achievements, the situation has not changed considerably in this aspect. School results in Poland are still determined by the family status and culture capital and not by the work of teachers at school (Szafranec, 2011). The correlation in Poland is higher than the average value for OECD states. Therefore, we can ask questions about the reasons for this situation. The second problem that arises here is connected with the identification of factors generating educational inequalities in the wake of the 1999 reform.

A REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The problem of educational inequalities is not new and it is broadly covered by scientific research. The research on educational inequalities carried out in Poland and in the world has rich tradition and dates back to the interwar period. It is enough to mention works by Józef Chałasiński (1969), Stanisław Rychliński (1976), Jan Bystroń (1939), Helena Radlińska (1937) and Marian Falski (1937). In the post-war period, the social functions of schools, selection processes, aspirations and conditioning of school results were analyzed. The research was carried out by the centre in Toruń: Zbigniew Kwieciński (1972, 1972a, 1975, 2002), Ryszard Borowicz (1976, 1980, 2000), and their students. Moreover, the research on educational inequalities was carried out by Mikołaj Kozakiewicz (1974), Mirosław J. Szymański (1973, 1988), Marian Niezgoda (1993), Piotr Długosz i Marian Niezgoda (2010) and others. Educational issues were also addressed by researchers from the University of Warsaw (UW) (Sawińska, 1985), the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IFiS PAN) (Domański, 2004, 2008, Domański i Tomescu-Dubrow, 2010), and the Institute of Applied Social Science of the University of Warsaw (ISNS UW) (Bialecki, 1982, 2009). The effects of the educational reform were monitored by the Institute of Public Affairs (ISP) (Zahorska, 2003, 2009, Zahorska ed., 2012), Elżbieta Putkiewicz i Anna

Wołkomirska (2004), Elżbieta Putkiewicz i Marta Zahorska (2001), Elżbieta Putkiewicz (2005), Krzysztof Konarzewski (2004). Research on educational issues is carried out by the Institute of Educational Research (IBE) (<http://www.ibe.edu.pl>) and its goal is to integrate the existing research and increase the application of scientific research results in the educational policy and practice as well as education management.

While designing the research, the analyses and the state of knowledge currently achieved in special units and institutions founded for studying education and various educational aspects will be considered. We can mention the following centres: the Centre for Educational Development (ORE) (<http://www.ore.edu.pl/>) and the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IFiS PAN) (Longitudinal studies: youth educational development paths) (Badanie podłużne, 2013). The first centre focuses on educational processes in macro scale, carries out research on the educational strategies of communes/municipalities, expenditures on education and social infrastructure in the vicinity of schools. On the other hand, research carried out at IFiS PAN by Roman Dolata is focused on improving the indices of educational added value (EAV). It takes into account the analyses of students' knowledge growth in the context of family environment impact, individual character and the school environment.

The knowledge of domestic budget expenditures on educational purposes and educational aspirations of children and parents is provided in the outcomes of "Social Diagnosis 2013" research and its previous editions (www.diagnoza.com). The above-mentioned studies are of practical nature, their main goal is to determine the conditions for the educational system functioning and the diagnosis of educational reform dysfunctions or tools and methods for the evaluation of the introduced reform. Naturally, we should also remember about the reports that have been prepared this year, visualizing the challenges to be faced by the educational system, "Society progress towards knowledge." (Raport o stanie edukacji 2010, 2011). Another important document is a report edited by Krystyna Szafraniec "The youth 2011" (Szafraniec, 2011). It pictures the conditions of Polish youth as compared with other nations and presents transformations that have occurred in the Polish educational system in recent years. It also indicates the fact of differentiating educational chances among the youth with various social statuses. Unfortunately, the report does not deal with the issues of the educational system anomaly and its dysfunctions in the current state. The third important document that we should refer to is "Human Capital Balance" and two reports that resulted from the research: "Who are graduates of Polish schools?" and "Students – future human resources of Polish economy." (Jelonek, 2011; Szczucka i Jelonek, 2011).

Admittedly, the research constituting the base for the above reports was large-scale (several thousand respondents); however, the theoretical framework of human capital and an analysis of the results within the framework of the concept is highly controversial. In such comprehensive research, one should consider the segmentation of schools and their quality as well as a more comprehensive structural context of creating human capital. The designed research on old and new inequalities is to explain the “blank spots” on the map of knowledge on the educational inequalities and the analysis of the actions undertaken by social parties.

Apart from the trend focused on the studies applied within the area of the analyzed problem there are also numerous theoretical works presenting a new approach to the issues of educational inequalities and using theoretical constructs in empirical analyses. We should mention here the book edited by Marian Niezgoda, which presents an in-depth analysis of the social effects of educational changes in Poland (Niezgoda, ed., 2011). In the research, qualitative methodology and institutional analyses prevail in order to reveal the impact of the reform on changes in school organizational cultures and transformations in the lifestyle of the pupils’ families. There are also works by Henryk Domański and Zbigniew Sawiński taking into consideration an analysis of educational inequalities in a long-term prospective. The researchers focus on selective and allocative functions of the educational system and they study the intensity of social mobility after the 1989 political transformation. Generally, the results of the studies reveal the sustainable nature of educational inequalities (Putkiewicz i Zahorska, 1998, 2001), Jarosław Domalewski i Piotr Mikiewicz (2004), Ryszard Dolata (2008), Zbigniew Sawiński (2008). There are also works that indicate horizontal educational inequalities (Niezawistowska, 2012, Długosz, 2012) and works analyzing school results of pupils from the perspective of human capital (Hebrst, 2012).

Some analyses in the sociology of education start with the educational reform introduced in 1999. The reform triggered a whole range of various changes. One of the unintended effects of the reform may be a decrease in the teaching quality (Walczak i Zahorska, 2008).

From the research it can also be concluded that the educational reform contributed rather to the elitarianism of the educational system and that certain horizontal inequalities appeared. As reported by Raymond Boudon (2008), it can be concluded that we witness a reverse effect in education. Such unintended effects of the reform can include the inflation of diplomas, the so-called effect of St. Mathew (Zahorska, 2009) which can be observed in Polish education at the moment or the segmentation of upper secondary and higher education systems (Długosz, 2009). There are

theoretical analyses that are to explain the inequalities in the educational system (Sawiński, 2009).

In recent years there have also appeared theoretical analyses of Zbigniew Sawiński, Alicja Zawistowska, including a review of theories and models used for explaining educational inequalities in the world.

Based on the literature on the subject matter in question, we can distinguish the following areas of interest referring to educational inequalities:

- conditioning for the selection of schools by the youth and social selections to schools;
- segregation, segmentation of the school system and its impact on determining life opportunities for the youth;
- impact of the socio-economic status of psycho-social variables on school results and educational success;
- evaluation of school work quality and its efficiency based on the results of external examinations;
- impact of the reform of education on mitigating educational inequalities;
- effects of the work of schools (learners' competence) in the context of the employment market demand, and
- application of theoretical models for the explanation of educational inequalities.

It can be assumed that the research is of a bipolar nature. On the one hand, the research is focused on old educational inequalities whose indicator is the correlation of the social status with the school results and the level of educational aspirations. On the other hand, there appear studies concerning new educational inequalities which reveal a qualitative differentiation of schools of the same educational level (horizontal inequalities) and analyze the impact of status features (economic, social and cultural capital) on undertaking studies by individuals in the best schools of a given level (school selections).

From the analyses of the phenomenon of private tutoring, we know that private tutoring is more frequently used by pupils with a higher status in order to gain a competitive advantage over their peers and to enrol for a better educational establishment (Długosz, 2009, 2012a, Bray 2012).

As the above-mentioned studies reveal, the use of private tutoring is more frequently an offensive action – a strategy to gain an educational advantage over peers. The youth from the middle class can afford to seek this advantage. The youth with a lower status cannot afford extra lessons and typically they also do not have too high aspirations to get admitted to a prestigious school. Private tutoring is an indicator of the educational system dysfunction and fits into the reactions of learners' families to risks resulting

from the development of risk and knowledge societies. Private tutoring also undermines the principles of a social system based on meritocracy. The use of private tutoring by high status families in order to build an educational position interferes with the principle of equal opportunities. Therefore, the selective function of the educational system is disturbed.

CURRENT RESEARCH CHALLENGES

Until now, it has been the dominant approach to test the degree to which the educational reform has fulfilled its functions related to the removal of inequalities, improvement of the quality of education, changing the school functioning model and the adaptation of the educational system to the changing conditions on the labour market.

Given the present social and economic conditions, new phenomena arise, which affect the form of and the speed at which changes in the educational system take place. Furthermore, unintended effects of the changes made to the educational system are revealed: the reverse effect (Boudon, 2008) and the boomerang effect (Beck, 2002).

This means above all the birth of information society which is changing the logic of thinking about the operation of social systems (Drucker, 1999). As of today, knowledge is gaining its importance and it is the main factor conditioning social development. The importance of specialist and general competence as well as the ability to manage information is on the increase.

The winners are those with the highest qualifications and specialist competence. These will be able to compete on the global employment market. The losers will be those who will drop out at the lower levels of education or whose knowledge will be incomplete and of low quality (poor universities and schools vs renown educational institutions).

Also, a society is emerging in which education acts as a security in case of unstable and changeable future. And it is not so that all schools or universities can equally well equip youth with knowledge which will be useful and which will help them achieve a high status. Some schools and higher education institutions enable their participants to achieve a professional status, while others are a “storeroom” and, in the words of Beck, “constitute phantom stations.” The question remains whether young people are aware of the fact that some schools sell a “ticket to nowhere”, and that very few of them are a lift to higher social positions.

The next element which should be taken into consideration when we discuss the current problem is the market facilitation of education. In a free market economy, knowledge as well as other qualities become a good, as evidenced by the comprehensive development of the higher education market in Poland. The number of non-state higher education schools is

three times that of their state counterparts, and in 2009 the latter educated about 600,000 students. Non-state education at lower levels of the educational system has developed to a much lesser extent. The presence of market elements in education means competition and an effort to win “clients” undertaken by higher education institutions and lower level schools. A client (student) will choose a place with the best educational offer. Therefore, schools take such great care to have high scores in rankings, competitions, examination results (Educational Added Value). On the one hand, a school's high rank makes it more attractive and desired, since it increases the life chances of youth. On the other hand, schools – wishing to maintain their high ranks – recruit the best pupils and force them to study harder with the help of private tutoring (Putkiewicz, 2005). Anyway, as shown by the poor results of the high school final examination (*Matura*), 2011 lower-secondary school examination and those of 2012 primary school test, school is not coping well with the task of preparing pupils for external examinations. Following the poor *Matura* results, the frequency of third grade pupils looking for private tutors increased. It can be assumed that the market of private educational services will continue to develop, since demand for this kind of services is increasing.¹ However, it may also be the case that in local communities with high saturation of this kind of offers, schools will fare better with respect to examination results, and where the educational and cultural infrastructure is underdeveloped (peripheries), the results of pupils and schools will be worse.

This situation reveals, with high probability, an anomaly of the educational system. The changes made to the educational system and the resultant dysfunctions consisting in the inability of the school to prepare pupils, as part of its course of study, for external examination standards, the lowered ability to teach resulting from the teachers’ unwillingness to accept changes, their low incomes, lack of competence and the gradual disappearance of the teaching ethos lead to an anomaly. A possible reaction to this situation on the part of young people and their parents will be the commissioning of private tutors, which may be regarded as an innovative behaviour in the face of an anomaly (Merton, 2002).

The preliminary results of research on private tutoring in the sub-region of Przemyśl in the period 2007-2011 show that the problem applies to about 50% of high school leavers and already one year prior to the introduction of the obligatory mathematics examination the number of

¹ Recently, the European Commission released a report from which it follows that parents more and more frequently pay for private tutoring for their children. About half the pupils in the EU member states have private tutoring and several billion euros are spent on private tutors every year. *The challenge of shadow education. European Commission, 2011.* <http://www.nesse.fr/nesse/activities/reports/activities/reports/the-challenge-of-shadow-education-1> [Access: 1.08.2013].

pupils who have private mathematics tutors has doubled (from 30% to 60%). A question arises then what activities are undertaken by local governments in this situation and whether they are trying to look for solutions to this problem at all, or whether it is the problem of young people themselves and their parents².

When we look for the theoretical background revealing mechanisms behind the strategies of young people, we should look at the theories of cultural capital, human capital and credentialism.

In a situation where secondary and higher education become popularized, education and diplomas are subject to inflation. In connection with the above, individuals aim to obtain a better credential, that is they start third level studies or they study at several departments. In a situation where there is an excess of diplomas on the market, young people from higher social classes try to maintain their high ranking by maximising their educational efforts. Such a phenomenon occurred in the UK. In connection with the egalitarianism of the educational system, there arose internal mechanisms which differentiated educational needs. As reported by **Phillip Brown**, in the UK, following the popularisation of education, the parents of children from higher social classes mobilised all financial and cultural resources in order to gain an advantage. Education based on private education, tutors, advisors and specialists designing career paths has become a necessity (Brow, 2006).

In connection with the fact that the concept of cultural capital is so commonly used in analyses of educational inequalities, we will narrow down the scope of the discussion here to two issues. Namely, in the analyses they typically describe the influence of cultural capital on school results, while indirect variables are rarely indicated. From the research carried out it follows that cultural capital affects school results in as far as it stimulates pupils to use private tutoring and to attend extra classes. This can be well observed in the project "Human Capital Balance" showing that additional classes were attended by 50% of high school pupils whose fathers had primary education and 80% by those whose parents were university degree holders (Szczucka i Jelonek, 2011).

The question remains how individual local governments cope with the replenishing of this capital among the youth with its deficit. We can assume that the youth with a high level of cultural capital will seek to maximise it in order to possibly convert it into economic capital.

Education is seen as an investment in human capital, which, as a consequence, will result in economic growth and the development of

² Among lower secondary school pupils 30% had private tutors. The author's analyses are based on the paper "Social effects of the educational reform in Poland".

society. Expenditure and devotion related to upgrading one's knowledge and qualifications pay off in the long run and bring profits. Therefore, it is worth investing in human capital and this is what the state should deal with. However, more and more frequently, families themselves take over these functions.

According to Zbigniew Sawiński, following the reform, the position of the child in the educational system is more dependent on the family than on the school (Sawiński 2008). At the same time, one should remember that these problems may be dealt with differently in rich and poor local communities as well as different family types.

Finally, it must be observed that the processes of changes in the educational system and its functioning depend, to a large extent, on local contexts. Historical heritage, cultural patterns, educational and industrial traditions, effect of transformation and European integration, local labour markets, the opening up to the world, social capital, saturation with cultural infrastructure, homogeneity of the environment and many other factors may substantially affect the functioning of the educational subsystem and the adaptation strategies parties in the educational system. In large-scale research, these imponderabilia cannot be identified, as a result of which material information is lost. Yet, it has been known for a long time that global educational tasks must be performed in regional, local and school contexts. In the directives set out in the White Book, local educational systems have been assigned the role of implementing the goal of building knowledge society, i.e. encouraging pupils to pursue lifelong education, approximation of the school and the economic environment, and fighting against marginalisation. Only appropriate cooperation of local governments and central authorities may lead to an educational success, as is the case with Finland (Ślusarczyk, 2010).

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