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## THE VALUES UNDERLYING TEACHERS' AND EMPLOYERS' EXPECTATIONS

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### ABSTRACT

The authors present a grounded theory concerning teachers' expectations of students and employers' expectations of graduates. The analysis is based on empirical research while the interpretation of the results is based on critical theory. Employers' expectations turned out to be wide-ranging and impossible for candidates. Teachers' expectations, however, reproduced that part of employers' expectations that can be linked to conformity, devotion, and faithfulness. In light of the authors' interpretation, education fails to perform an emancipatory function, i.e. it fails to equip students with the critical competence necessary for active involvement in civil society. The labor market, on the other hand, is a dominating force that blocks the development of a discursive, open version of society. Graduates find themselves in a double-sided trap sprung on them, firstly, by education and later by employers.

### Key words:

Teachers' expectations, employers' expectations, reconstructive and emancipatory function of education, dialogic society, symbolic violence

This presentation is an empirical and theoretical analysis of the values hidden behind employers and teachers' expectations of students. In the first section, we will present the theoretical context of our examinations as well as the research questions

that guided them. In the second section, we will include information regarding the methodological basis of our study, including the methods used for collecting and analyzing the data. In the third section, we will deal with the analysis and interpretation of the acquired results and, with this in mind, attempt to look at the prospects for graduates on the European, neoliberal labor market. The interpretation of the findings will be taken up from the perspective of the critical theory of education.

## **1. The Problem and Its Theoretical Context**

The neoliberal European economic crisis is producing, among other things, an excess of supply over demand in the labor market. The labor market is a market of employers, who, relying on high unemployment rates, raise their expectations with respect to potential employees. What are these expectations? This question is one that guides graduate-candidates' activities aimed at discerning their own employment situation in the eyes of employers. Thus, we have two social systems: employers and employees, as well as the context of this relation in the form of an increase in the unemployment rate. We can also formulate questions about teachers' expectations with regard to students. As with Vroom's<sup>1</sup> Expectancy Theory, graduates will behave towards employers according to the expectations that they are familiar with from their experiences at school since they associate meeting expectations with positive effects, e.g. receiving a diploma. And, now, two questions arise: 1) What are teacher's expectations with regard to students? 2) Do these expectations differ from the expectations of employers? We would, therefore, like to check how the qualifications of graduates, shaped by expectations at school, relate to the expectations of employers.

What is the theoretical context of the problem being discussed? As a criterion for the theoretical interpretation of the study's results, we will utilize the critical theory of education derived directly from the Frankfurt School. Our interpretation will therefore be applied not only to the analyzed expectations of employers and teachers or the relation between them. They will also be based on – which is typical of critical theory – a vision of reality in the version desired. Moreover, we will treat the status of both employers and teachers' expectations as an indicator of the ideology and politics regarding young generations entering adult life.

Thus, in the overall picture analyzed, we will be looking for the underlying “interests” which constitute it, although we will take on the perspective of groups which

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<sup>1</sup> V.H. Vroom, *Work and Motivation*, New York 1964, p. 146.

are found to be discriminated against, exploited, and harmed. An approach based on the perspective of these groups specifically is indispensable for any understanding of the essence of the conflict that we observe within the sphere of contemporary capitalism. That conflict is between employers and the so-called “lost generation of people” entering the labor market. And, finally, our perspective will allow us, firstly, to define and then to empirically examine the role of education in the interaction between graduates and employers. Education is understood here as a tool of symbolic violence, yet, simultaneously, as a potential space for emancipation<sup>2</sup> for it performs a reconstructive and adaptive function, reproducing the dominating habitus that reflexively guarantee the continuity of culture and society. On the other hand, through the knowledge exhibiting the equivocality of the world and human fields, it opens up subjects participating in education to transformation. Therefore, on the presumption of critical theory, it is a tool of emancipation<sup>3</sup>.

## 2. The method

Our study was planned as a practical analysis and evaluative investigation set within an ethnographic framework. The data was collected with the help of a focused interview, ethnographic interview, and secondary sources<sup>4</sup>. The analysis of discourse, conversations, sources, and documents<sup>5</sup> helped to construct a grounded theory of the needs of employers and teachers, as well as the relationships between them. From the point of view of critical theory, it is important to examine the phenomena to be analyzed from the perspective of their accompanying contexts, something the above-mentioned parameters of the study ensure.

Teacher’s expectations were analyzed without the employment of the previously adopted categorical assumptions. Thus, the areas in which teachers’ expectations might arise, for instance, the cognitive, motivational, or active spheres, etc., were not defined beforehand. It was feared that the participants’ thinking could be un-

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<sup>2</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Form of Capital* [in:] *Sociology of Education*, S.J. Ball (ed.), London–New York 2005, p. 24; B. Bernstein, *A Response* [in:] *Knowledge and Pedagogy: The Sociology of Basil Bernstein*, A.R. Sadowsnik (ed.), Norwood–New Jersey 1995.

<sup>3</sup> H. Giroux, *Teoria krytyczna i racjonalność w edukacji obywatelskiej* [in:] H. Giroux, L. Witkowski, *Edukacja i sfera publiczna. Idee i doświadczenia pedagogiki radykalnej*, Kraków 2010, pp. 173–174.

<sup>4</sup> K. Rubacha, *Metodologia badań nad edukacją*, Warszawa 2008.

<sup>5</sup> T. Rapley, *Doing Conversation, Discourse and Document Analysis*, London–Los Angeles–New Delhi–Singapore–Washington D.C. 2007.

intentionally directed, prompting them to fill out prepared schematics even if there were actually no corresponding referents in the area of their experience. This is why the undirected focused interview turned out to be very useful. Teachers of primary school, middle school, high school, vocational school, technical school, and college were invited to take part in the study. Eight persons, all of whom had consented to the study, signed a contract, and received remunerations for their participation, attended the interview. The authors of this text conducted the interview. We asked participants to discuss which values and expectations are behind their actions toward students. This reconstruction of educational experiences was not accompanied by any detailed questions from the researchers, apart from remarks that guided the conversation back on track when it drifted significantly off topic. The whole conversation was recorded in the form of an audio file with the consent of the participants.

The analysis of employers' expectations was based on data collected from original sources, such as competitions announced in the press and materials taken from companies' personnel departments. The accuracy of this data was positively verified through the triangulation of sources, consisting of ethnographic interviews with the people responsible for recruiting and the job seekers who had participated in the competitions. The data from these surveys was used to construct a tool for assessing the accuracy of a grounded theory concerning teachers' expectations. The first step was to elicit the names for teachers and employers' expectations from the grounded theory. From these names, a questionnaire was constructed which examined 238 teachers. The teachers were asked to give weight to the listed expectations. Thus, the quality of the data from the focus group, and thereby a part of the grounded theory concerning teachers and employers' expectations, was subjected to verification. The data obtained also formed the basis for comparing employers and teachers' expectations.

### **3. Analysis and Interpretation of the Test Results**

#### **3.1. Constructing a Grounded Theory**

After transcribing the data from the sources described above, factual and selective coding was conducted. On the basis of this coding, theoretical coding was conducted. The theoretical coding was based on combining factual codes with their context. Prior to theoretical coding, we had at our disposal the employers and teachers' expectations given in Table 1.

**Table 1. Teachers' and Employers' Expectations**

Expectations common among teachers and employers collected from the interview and questionnaire	Employers' expectations chosen by teachers in the questionnaire	Employers' expectations distinct from teachers' expectations
Listening skills	Self-trust	Execution of complex objectives
Systematicity	Self-control in stressful situations	Loyalty
Fulfilling expectations	Honesty	Enterprise
Self-reliance	Tolerance	Inquisitiveness
Willingness to take on challenges	Creativity	Ability to solve problems
Willingness to learn	Orientation toward results	Strategic thinking
Teamwork		Analytical thinking
Responsibility		Ability to negotiate
Diligence		Ability to work independently
Effort given		Ability to utilize theory in practice
Decency		Ability to take risks
Respect for others (superiors)		Assertiveness
		Thinking in global terms
		Leadership skills
		Flexibility

Source: own research.

The first column of the table shows the overlapping expectations from the two groups – employers and teachers (these are, at the same time, all the expectations formulated by teachers in the interview). The second and third columns, in turn, show how teachers adapted to the employers' expectations that did not appear in the focused interview'. For the purpose of clarity, the second column includes employers' expectations that were also selected by teachers. The portion of employers' expectations that were not mentioned by teachers is supplied in the third column. In total, employers' expectations can be reconstructed from these three columns while teachers' expectations can be reconstructed from the first and second columns.

Theoretical coding<sup>6</sup>, linking the factual codes (names of expectations) with the context, has ultimately led to the construction of theoretical memos that form a grounded theory:

<sup>6</sup> The contexts that co-constitute the theoretical codes are in italics. However, we abandoned the idea of including the numbers from factual codes, which is why the names of expectations from table

1. Context: "The teacher's defense against students' low level of interest in the curriculum is to put an emphasis on motivating them to study", of which a direct indication is the expectation of (factual codes) diligence, self-reliance, and a way of formulating tasks so that their solution requires effort and systematic work.
2. Factual Codes: Expecting from students „respect for others”, „meeting expectations”, „decency”, as well as „listening skills” appears in the context of “their problems with disciplining and difficulty in enforcing students' obedience. These phenomena are the results of students' awareness of their rights and a lack of awareness of their duties. Parents' reinforce this disparity, so teachers end up feeling isolated in this situation”.
3. Context: “Students want to display their own individuality and gain an important position within the class. However, students do not strive to achieve a strong position within the group through studying, because studying isn't valued in peer groups. Teachers try to fight against this by giving the students group tasks”. This makes it easier for students to involve themselves in the didactic process without being exposed to criticism from others. This kind of activity stimulates the teacher's expectations (theoretical codes) that they will act responsibly, “which is easier to attain since the group, instead of by the teacher, activate sanctions in teamwork”.
4. Context: “Employers formulate a long list of expectations, because they are adapting to the market mechanisms that regulate their income. The high costs associated with keeping a worker results in employers wanting to employ one person for many tasks. Therefore, they expect that he or she will be (factual codes)”: creative; tolerant of consistent changes in the employer's expectations; capable of taking risks; self-trusting; a strategic, analytical, global and local thinker; as well as diligent and entrepreneurial.
5. Context: “The low level of trust from employers for the knowledge and skills graduates take away from school results in the fact that they want to mold them themselves”. That is precisely why they put an emphasis, with regards to their expectations, on (factual codes): the ease with which one adapts to new situations, flexibility, a willingness to learn and undertake challenges, as well as curiosity.
6. Context: “When employers conduct recruitment directly for managerial positions or positions which include the possibility of advancement, they expect from candidates (factual codes)”: assertiveness, leadership skills, the

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1 directly appear in the memos.

ability to work independently, self-reliance, and self-trust. “These expectations, however, constitute a risk for firms, because the people who fulfill them are thereby potential candidates for a job with the competitors”. That is why they also want candidates to be: loyal, honest, responsible, and to meet expectations. The context indicated here elucidates the discrepancy between the expectations of both groups.

7. All of the teachers’ expectations are included among employer’s expectations. That is to say, teachers do not form any expectations that do not appear on the side of employers nor any which would be contrasted with the latter. At the same time, teachers’ expectations constitute less than one-half of the expectations of employers. However, they refer to the portion that can be analyzed in the categories of adaptation, willingness to fulfill expectations, concentration on effort, loyalty, and dedication.

### 3.2. Interpretation

Firstly, looking at the expectations found in table 1, we can take note of the fact that they refer to two of the more general categories: motivation and action. Expectations concerning knowledge and intellectual level did not turn up in either of the two groups studied. It is also worthwhile to emphasize that data such as this appears under “knowledge society”, for the construction of which are invoked documents regulating the system of education on all levels. It seems that „knowledge society” performs the function of a category, justifying the popularization of higher education on an unprecedented scale. University regulations are adjusted to simulate real education by, among other things, allowing students to individualize the curriculum. Individual curriculum is evidently intended to allow for an independent „composing” of a study program with the possibility of studying several faculties, yet effectively encourages one to go through university without studying<sup>7</sup>. An observable effect of this change is the lowering of the quality of education among graduates, which, in our study, is so clearly noticed by employers that they no longer trust them. Young people are being misled on a large scale. They „receive” their diploma, but cannot find a job, because there are too many graduates for a given segment of the labor market. Moreover, they are only „ostensibly” educated.

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<sup>7</sup> An individual curriculum means, in practice, giving students consent not to attend classes, for instance, under the pretext of students taking classes for a second course. The possibility of students „composing” a program of studies, in turn, strips away the responsibility of academic teachers for the effects of education and the real qualifications that graduate obtain.

Rather, this is a mechanism that serves to conceal unemployment since students over 30 years of successive faculties are not included in unemployment statistics. The „knowledge society” in reality carries on without knowledge, because it is actually the creation of an ideology and politics directed against its „beneficiaries”. The latter do not have much to offer employers outside of often high expectations that consumer society and education, due to its emphasis on the reconstruction of neoliberal economic order, taught them. It is a kind of double-sided trap sprung on them by education and, as will soon become apparent, employers.

Secondly, teaching expectations, as the contexts of theoretical memos show, are not constructed through conscious analysis of the objectives of upbringing and education. Rather, they arise as a response to what from the perspective of the schools' adaptational interest are negative obstacles. These expectations resemble pedagogues' survival strategies rather than their conscious educational efforts. For this reason, teachers' efforts do not lead students to gain critical competence. They mainly demonstrate how one can adapt to the world in order to survive in it in any way possible.

The critical approach in educational studies, however, is based not only on analysis, but also formulates propositions regarding the ideal, desired state. It isn't a unilateral dictate of the neoliberal market that school also reproduces. It is rather a vision of a discursive<sup>8</sup> society in which individuals consciously negotiate the shape of reality, i.e. act in the open public space of dialogue. Such action requires critical competence, skills to evaluate reality from several perspectives, tolerance of cognitive discrepancies, and the employment of an advanced knowledge of society. However, the foundation, in the form of teacher's expectations, is missing for these competences. The problem is also based on the fact that education should not only prepare individuals for entering the labor market, but also for changing this reality<sup>9</sup>.

Thus, teacher's expectations should go beyond the expectations of the neoliberal market in order to protect that to which graduates are entitled. We do not note such differences in our research. A good example of an efficient, yet limited, activity of the neoliberal market are the protests of the „outraged”, for instance, those that were held at the Puerta del Sol square in Madrid. What prompted these young people to such a vehement display? An unjust economic system supported by social institutions, not to mention educational institutions. However, this occurred

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<sup>8</sup> T. Szkudlarek, *Pedagogika krytyczna* [in:] Z. Kwiecieński, B. Śliwerski, *Pedagogika. Podręcznik akademicki*, t.1, Warszawa 2006, s. 365.

<sup>9</sup> H. Giroux, *op.cit.*, p. 172.



only at the moment of a severe collapse in capitalism. This was a protest necessitated by an encroachment on basic needs, not, by contrast, a critical consciousness that appeared long before the collapse. Among other things, school prepared these people for „civil obedience” and did not teach them to anticipate the dangers and deal with them through discursive action, and not – as now – through street action. In any case, despite the large gathering of the „outraged”, they are still incapable of embarking on the road to a discursive transformation of reality. Our research suggests that this assessment is also pertinent to Poland, though we are still missing the element of economic collapse. In Poland, for example, schools conduct pseudo-classes centered on entrepreneurship, preparing students to compete on the labor market. This program of study is nevertheless more of a collection of directives for adapting to the labor market rather than a program which builds social and emancipatory<sup>10</sup> awareness.

Thirdly, employers’ expectations are constructed in such a way that work potentially interferes with other domains of life as well as a person’s self-realization. The accounts given by participants of the study, who several times took on the role of jobseekers and had acquired jobs, point to efforts to adapt family and social life to the expectations of employers. It could be claimed that a part of the responsibility for the demographic collapse falls to the labor market. As a matter of fact, the analysis of expectations for employees shows that parental roles come into conflict with employers’ expectations. A mortgage loan, which demands long-term, unilateral commitment and fulfillment of even the most obtrusive expectations from employers, is a factor that amplifies these tendencies. A kind of „consensual slavery” arises among young employees, who also become victims of a consumerist lifestyle that is based on the inability to postpone gratification. Banks and financial institutions are well aware of this since they created this mechanism.

In light of our data and the interpretation in the paper, graduates, who were first prepared by school to „misunderstand the invisible hand of the market” and were later exploited by the market, seem to make up the dominated and manipulated group. Graduates also make up the social side of the conflict sweeping through Europe while the other side consists of the creators of the labor market. The latter group does not act in the public and social interest, but for its own economic interest. And, for the moment, the latter group is in the winning position; that is, until the effects of a significantly declining birthrate bear no negative consequences for

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<sup>10</sup> See *Wokół nas. Wiedza o społeczeństwie. 2 klasa gimnazjum*, E. Kosińska (red.), Kraków 2000, pp. 51–72.

consumption. It is not unthinkable that the situation described here will lead to an escalation in the conflict and, ultimately, to a meaningful correction of the dominating neoliberal economic discourse.

Fourthly, the internal contradiction in employers' expectations deepens fabrications, the victims of which become graduates of higher education in Poland. When graduates receive a superficial education, they learn to feign their own competence as employees. It is difficult to believe that anyone would be in a position to cope with the often internally contradictory and self-exclusive<sup>11</sup> expectations of employers. We should not, however, believe that anyone could just ignore them. It is possible, then, to think that the way candidates present themselves is manipulative. Perhaps they even teach them how to lie or, in any case, how to create the appearance of conforming.

The grounded theory presented here does not claim universality. It is only a record of data that was collected in a specific place and time. However, critical interpretations of the above noted state of things undermine capitalistic truisms and shows that neither the market nor some kind of invisible force governs civil society. Rather, it is people who are critically prepared for its reception and correction. However, this does depend to a large extent on education performing its emancipatory function. The interpretation above shows that, according to our grounded theory, education has yet to unlock this potential.

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<sup>11</sup> For instance, respect for superiors, fulfilling expectations versus independence of action, assertiveness.

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