

RENATA WAWRZYNIAK-BESZTERDA<sup>1</sup>

## “Project: My Class”: Neoliberal Vision of the Teaching Profession

### ABSTRACT

The subject of the article covers issues related to the presence of neoliberal educational messages in school practice. The study contains an analysis of the teacher’s narrative, the purpose of which was to identify and describe elements that fit into neoliberal assumptions of education. The reconstruction of everyday school life (micro level) enabled the manifestations of instrumentalisation of education, rivalry and competitive aspects in the teacher’s work and the practice of forming homo oeconomicus at school. Commodification of an individual in free market conditions is reflected in a profit-maximizing school, i.e., achieving high results in external examinations owing to an educational process organized effectively, and minimizing costs by, for example, selecting students and by eliminating the “maladjusted” from schools. In the text, I outline a portrait of a teacher functioning professionally, who builds his profession on the foundation of neoliberal assumptions about education. I analyze the teacher’s understanding of school education, which is present in the teacher’s narratives, as a space for a specific market game and competition, defining the effectiveness of school work by high level of students’ examination results and the original concept of working with a supervised class reduced to the implementation of a business project.

### Keywords:

school, teacher, student, neoliberalism in education, reanalysis.

---

<sup>1</sup> School Pedagogy Laboratory, Faculty of Educational Studies, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland.

E-MAIL: rwb@amu.edu.pl ORCID: 0000-0001-5640-1784

## ABOUT WHAT?

Critical reflection on neoliberal contexts of education functioning has been strongly represented in research and analysis conducted in the pedagogical discourse for the last twenty years (Hejwosz-Gromkowska, 2010)<sup>2</sup>. The perspectives of viewing the educational reality, used by the authors, are strongly diversified. They are manifested in identifying the ideological entanglements of education policies and systems, analysing the structural conditions and manifestations of neoliberal “offensive” in education, revealing the processes of recreating and strengthening neoliberal ideological messages, recognizing the mechanisms of neoliberal changes. Educational reforms (their assumptions and implementation) are the objects of research as well as the educational system, neoliberal ideas and goals, syllabuses and the effectiveness of educational institutions at subsequent levels of education. In the latter dimension, studies on dynamically changing conditions and requirements for practising learning and academic education are particularly prominent. It seems that the micro and meso levels are the most frequently implemented reference in works on neoliberal contexts of education. In the present text, I will focus on the micro perspective: I will refer to everyday school life, and more precisely, the work of a teacher with the class. I assume these school relationships reflect the educational priorities implemented by the teacher, their beliefs about the conditions for the effectiveness of actions taken, expectations regarding students and understanding oneself as a teacher. Therefore, it is worth focusing on this most basic dimension of school practice because it is where “school takes place”.

The thesis that is close to me about the change in the ethos of contemporary school, which is taking place as a consequence of neoliberal transformations, is presented in the monograph by Danuta Anna Michałowska (2013). The author strongly emphasizes the need to recognize the school microworld: “Understanding and explaining how the school reality reflects these neoliberal tendencies can be a significant step towards increasing the conscious commitment of those who

---

2 The so called ‘neoliberal turn’ in Poland coincided with the transformational changes after 1989. As part of the Polish pedagogical discourse, from the beginning of the 1990s, critical reconstructions and analysis of the assumptions and practices of neoliberal education were conducted by: Z. Kwieciński, E. Potulicka, J. Rutkowiak, Z. Melosik, and T. Szkudlarek. Nevertheless, a significant increase in research critically recognizing the ideas, mechanisms and consequences of neoliberal educational policy and practice can be found at the turn of the 21st century. In Poland, it is necessary to mention the following works (in chronological order): Kwieciński (2002a, 2002b), Szkudlarek (2002), Domalewski (2003), Domalewski & Mikiewicz (2004), Dolata (2008), Hejwosz-Gromkowska (2010), Lewartowska-Zychowicz (2010), Męczkowska-Christiansen (2010), Niezgodą & Długosz (2010), Potulicka & Rutkowiak (2010), Michałowska (2013), Gromkowska-Melosik & Szymański (2014), Smolińska-Theiss (2014), Sadura (2017), Śliwerski (2017), Potulicka (2019).

are responsible for the quality of the education process and those who care about clear delineating meaningful development goals (both for the individual and the society) and effective pursuit of them” (Michałowska, 2013, p. 18). It is, therefore, worth trying to sketch a portrait of a teacher who builds his/her pedagogical work on the foundation of neoliberal values/ideas/messages. Such an approach, focused on an individual case, will reveal the “everyday” face of teacher’s behaviour/actions/beliefs/expectations, arising from neoliberal assumptions about education. Therefore, it will allow to characterize the messages present in the social space of school and reconstruct their neoliberal meanings.

## **ON WHAT BASIS?**

In the paper, I will carry out a reanalysis of the empirical material collected as a part of a research project completed with a monograph (Wawrzyniak-Beszterda, 2019)<sup>3</sup>. In these studies, I conducted a collective case study (Stake, 2009), i.e., an instrumental study, involving several cases<sup>4</sup>. The applied tool for collecting empirical data was a nondirective interview which allowed for capturing the subjective meaning of events/processes/phenomena/behaviours, constructing professional biographies of teachers. As Krzysztof Konecki (2000) emphasizes, free interview may take various forms due to the degree of structuring (standardization). Free-form interview is also known as an in-depth ethnographic interview.

The choice of the tool resulted from the way the research was conceptualized and embedded in the biographical approach: “non-standardized (unstructured) interviews seem to be actually more appropriate for grasping the ‘subjective’ meaning of events and processes, than standardized questionnaires. A non-standardized (unstructured) interview allows the respondent to use his own concepts, put these concepts into context, expand or shorten answers to certain questions or evaluate others as inappropriate” (Helling, 1990, p. 23). The interview scenario included general instructions, and the formulated questions were focused around several pivotal issues: the reasons for a decision about the teaching profession, the course of academic preparation for school work, circumstances of admission to work, experience related to the beginning of professional career, and self-reflection on

---

3 The subject of the research presented in the mentioned monograph was the social capital of the school, reconstructed from the biographical professional experiences of teachers in the first year of their work at school.

4 The instrumentality of the collective study was expressed in the fact that the analysed cases were a tool to gain insight into social capital phenomenon.

being a teacher. In their narratives about teaching life at school, the respondents provided many examples, described the episodes which were crucial for them, formulated assessments of their behaviour and the environment, quoted their own or other people's words, reactions, opinions and their feelings related to professional functioning at school.

The present disquisition is an original study, in which I re-examined the record of one of the interviews. The selection of the interview transcript for the re-qualitative analysis of the concept is deliberate. Only one of the teachers from the research sample group at the time<sup>5</sup> used the metaphor of a school as a well-managed company. He called his work as a class teacher – a project<sup>6</sup>. This way of defining school and one's teaching profession can be interpreted as a kind of ideological declaration. Therefore, the material from this interview is currently the body of the analysed data.

The issue of reusing data from completed qualitative research is developed around the archiving initiatives of various research communities<sup>7</sup>. And although these activities were initially related to the desire to reintroduce valuable materials into the research circuit, the methodological issues of the re-analyses, which are possible thanks to this, are currently the most discussed. The rationale behind my proposed approach is based on the characteristics of the “induced” data. The data obtained in the ethnographic interview are usually “redundant”, contain “numerous contents added to the current, every-time interpretation, and too multi-layered to be subject to comprehensive, strict formatting by the researcher. Therefore, they are perfect for asking them various research questions and analyzing them in various methodological workshops, referring to various theoretical assumptions and disciplinary traditions” (Filipkowski et al., 2019). They are characterized by a specific (re)interpretive openness<sup>8</sup>. In this understanding of re-analysis, the key is to pose new research questions when working with the data corpus, and not the

---

5 I conducted the interviews in 2015.

6 At that time, these themes were only signalled, because they went beyond the research issues (the sensitizing categories used in the qualitative analysis of the context were derived from the concept of social capital). The teacher (given the pseudonym Tomasz), whose narratives are currently being analysed, taught in secondary school (junior high school and general secondary school), had a five year professional experience, the interview lasted 2.5 hours.

7 For a discussion on various archiving projects aimed at “collecting, preserving and researching materials concerning social life, everyday life, and various social and cultural practices carried out in the past”, see: *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, 2019, 1.

8 An excellent example of such a re-analysis is, in Poland, the return of Kaja Kaźmierska to one of the biographical and narrative interviews and a re-analysis of her own research material (see: Kaźmierska, 2014).

person of the (same or different) researcher. The issues related to the reuse of data from completed qualitative studies are developed in the text by Marta Karkowska and Magdalena Bielińska (2019). The authors outline the benefits of “reverting” to “old data” and the potential of different ways of implementing duplicate approaches. In my case, it will be the reuse of research data and its analysis (cf. Karkowska & Bielińska, 2019).

In the submitted text my goal is to identify and describe elements (opinions/expectations/beliefs/descriptions/behaviours) present in the teacher’s narratives that fit in with neoliberal assumptions about education. It is, therefore, the answer to the question of what neoliberal messages are present in the analysed teacher’s narratives? What professional activities of the teacher are manifested? The analysis around these pivotal questions will help to identify neoliberal implications for the social world of a school and its educational quality.

I worked out with data corpus using the workshop proposed by Graham Gibbs (2011). The analysis of the content of the transcript with the use of sensitizing categories derived from neoliberal assumptions about education allowed me to identify the networks of converging thematic categories. At this stage, in the course of the analysis, specific thematic clusters were distinguished in each of the selected networks of codes. They included characteristic phenomena/episodes/descriptions/behaviours/assessments, concerning various manifestations of the neoliberal ideas/assumptions in the respondent’s narratives about his being a teacher. At the same time, the codes building these clusters were modified and supplemented in the course of successive analysis. Dynamic work with empirical material gives a chance to select such a configuration of the identified categories that will reflect the complexity and specificity of the phenomenon under study. However, the legibility of the argument requires the use of certain simplifications and arbitrary solutions in categorizing the phenomena revealed in the analysis. Therefore, I will present the results of the analysis carried out by characterizing sequentially the thematic code networks built around the selected categories. The discussion about the results of the qualitative analysis carried out in this way carries the risk of being lengthy, on the one hand<sup>9</sup>. On the other hand, it may lead to the construction of an argument without sufficient embedding in the collected empirical material<sup>10</sup>.

---

9 S. Kvale aptly emphasizes in this context that “interviews can be boring to read, banal, repetitive, have little internal consistency or are meaningless. It is the researcher who is required to show the perspective and contexts that will make the interviews readable or engaging for the reader” (Kvale, 2004, p. 266).

10 In this case, Kvale (2004) points out the danger of fragmenting the interview into short quotes that do not reflect the context or justifications/explanations of the respondents.

Therefore, the quotes from the respondent's statements, reflecting the analysed thematic categories (individual or their entire groups/clusters) are recalled without excessive interference with their content. Sometimes the statement is only condensed, but each time I mark such a procedure with a sign (ellipsis, i.e., dots in brackets; additional context in the square brackets also comes from the author). In this case, the idiographic approach makes it possible to capture the specificity of the recognized phenomenon, by understanding and reading the meanings in the context of the teacher's individual (professional) experiences. It allows not to lose their uniqueness and specificity, but also limits the field of drawing conclusions. Therefore, I do not use generalizations in the article. I only draw illustration of a certain, specific school practice revealed in the teacher's narrative. A practise that is a specific exemplification of the implementation of neoliberal assumptions in the school space of education.

## WHAT?

The analysis of the teacher's narrative led to the emergence of three basic networks of codes focused around ideas that fit into the assumptions of neoliberal education. Two of them include the characteristic thematic clusters distinguished within them. I will conduct the discussion in the order resulting from their development in the respondent's statements. I will use the teacher's pseudonym: Tomasz.

The key reference present in the analysed narratives is **school education understood as a space of a specific market game and competition**. The network of codes emerging around this category is made up of threads of different contents, which fit into two fields: the self-characteristics of Tomasz as a teacher and his perception of relations in the pedagogical group. Individual thematic clusters are embedded within them<sup>11</sup>. In Tomasz's statements, his **task as a teacher is to prepare students to participate in the world of competition**. Therefore, in working with the class, he creates conditions in which students undergo training in exposing individual resources in the form of knowledge, skills, sports, or artistic achievements. He treats this experience as an important element of his educational work, aimed at motivating the class to be active:

“The point is to make them feel they are good at something. Once you find one item, things go a little easier. For example, we had such a table with achievements in the class where students could enter their sports or scientific achievements, or participa-

---

11 I mark networks of codes in bold type, emphasize thematic clusters.

tion in events. It worked well. Especially for those who did not usually get involved. It was a bit of a shame if there was nothing written next to a given name. So in order not to look bad, they had to get involved in something” (37 min.);

“Knowing them I divided them into teams so that they could carry out the tasks in which they are best. People who, let’s say, did not necessarily like to learn, were given tasks related to the preparation of the technical side, i.e., preparation of equipment, whether for an interview or a presentation, taking care of technical facilities, developing techniques to deal with a crisis situation, i.e., react if the presentation will not start, what to do if there is no spare laptop” (22 min.).

The way of perception of students as competitors, revealed in Tomasz’s narratives, is strongly rooted in defining the differences between them, with particular emphasis on the perceived deficits or barriers in “being a good student”. The solution is either students’ hard work which will allow them to overcome the limitations, or the exclusion of those who do not want to adapt to the expectations. The theme of so called “region” (district) appears, where a class, due to the regionalization of lower secondary school, did not have to meet high recruitment requirements. Characteristics of the students from the “region” focus on marking the difference and the need to deal with shortages. Their success is to “catch up” with those who are better: becoming like those who they are not, anyway, because they carry the stigma of the “region”:

“The biggest fears were that the students would not be disciplined. They would not be able to behave properly, when they had to behave. They would not learn. I had these two main fears at the beginning, and I managed to cope with them, so I am most pleased with that. The students themselves also saw it after the lower secondary school tests. For example: although they were in a non-bilingual class, they achieved results comparable to such classes” (20 min.);

“[...] it was not my first ‘region’ class that I had to teach. I knew how such classes behave in lessons and what their approach to learning is [...]. Let’s say they are not the people who like to learn and because of that, they do not often have the opportunity to achieve any success in terms of studying. They were not motivated to develop [...]” (30 min.);

“I had various cases, there were two female students who repeated the year another time. Unfortunately, in the second grade they did not succeed with the task and they changed schools, as they were approaching eighteen. They went to an extramural school for adults. They also spoiled the atmosphere in the class, a bit, because they did not attend classes or they were given only 1s [the lowest grade in Polish school], so the students saw it. It was necessary to make other students be aware that the two girls were not necessarily a role model and that is worth focusing on what has been done so far” (36 min.).

The second field of reference to school competition is the pedagogical group. Tomasz also applies **the effectiveness of management by starting rivalry in this environment**. His acceptance of competitive practices is based on their effectiveness, which is manifested in the high quality of the final results of teacher competition. The atmosphere of constant competition for a position in the team, the headmaster's recognition, the place of the class in the school rank, in Tomasz's narrative, builds conditions for effective work:

“We like to have a little bit of competition between teams when it comes to what students do. I think it is a healthy competition. We like it when it comes to such general school events, cooperation is ok. However, when it comes to the final exams or high school tests, we like to compete. I think it is also beneficial for students” (43 min.); “If they are successful, it is also reflected. For example: last year we had [a great success] and we had a party on this occasion, a ball for the whole group. We could feel appreciated as a whole team and this relationship is also better then. I know that, despite competing, from the broader perspective, we all work for one success” (47 min.).

In a competitive work environment, **external instruments**: punishment and rewards applied by the headmaster, **play a motivating role**. At the same time, in the light of Tomasz's narrative, the key to receiving them is the fact of meeting (or not) the expectations of the supervisor (and not, for example, clear procedures for distinguishing and disciplining). Again, the source of the assessment is outside the subject. Evaluation is the tool for monitoring the quality of teachers' work as well as their awareness of possible surveillance. In Tomasz's opinion, it is something justified and “safe” for teacher's fulfilling his/her professional tasks obligatorily and conscientiously. Tomasz somehow justifies the headmaster's behaviour, which is a manifestation of distrust and a kind of celebration of his power:

“[...] it was also said privately in the office as well as on the forum in teachers' room. This verbal praise is clearly visible here and, I think, it gives the greatest satisfaction as we can see that we meet the expectations and it is even better than expected” (42 min.);

“The situation with us is that whoever gets involved, whoever puts effort, gets a reward. Whoever does not want to work, does not develop” (1 hour 20 min.);

“And I also heard that the headmaster likes to walk down the corridor sometimes, listen to what is happening behind the door, in the classroom, without entering them. On this basis he also develops an opinion [...] if a person does his job well. It is no problem. Therefore, any form of checking our work, such as evaluation, which we had this year, or inspection or observations, is not a problem. If we know that we work in accordance with the standards, or even [...] we go beyond them, there is no problem” (52 min.).



The next network of codes identified in the analysis is formed around the idea of **school efficiency understood as a high level of examination results achieved by students**. Orientation towards the goal of educational activities outlined in this way defines Tomasz as a teacher. In his statements, there are expressions that testify to the internalization of this kind of pedagogical message. During the interview, it was exactly those moments when Tomasz showed the greatest emotional commitment. **The fulfilment of the requirements for obtaining the highest possible test results by students** is the source of pride for him. The results achieved motivate him to further work. It should be emphasized that the achievements of weaker students (“region”) he defines as his own success:

“Here you have to look at this [achievements in teacher’s work] in two ways. On the one hand, these are the achievements of the best students, who become finalists, laureates of English language competitions. And on the other hand, for example, my supervised class, it was a region class, so not everyone was super talented. In the past, the region class was usually treated as inferior, because not everyone was at the same level. Thanks to my efforts, this year my class achieved a great result on the junior high school test. Even though most of them did not want to go to high school, they got to the schools they had chosen, without any problems. So at this point I can say, as the recruitment process is already over, that it was also a success for me. Both the successes, the best results and the weaker ones, are what drives me [...]” (20 min.);

“It is best seen at the end of a given educational stage, when a student completing our school can choose where he/she wants to go and he/she will get wherever they want to go to realise their plans. We, of course, encourage students to continue their education with us after lower secondary school. Well, if someone does not want to, he/she goes elsewhere and usually he/she gets wherever they want. Similarly, after graduating from high school, good results of the matura exam guarantee the possibility of development at university. If someone wants to be a doctor, our school gives a very good chance to become a doctor in the future. Someone wants to go to the polytechnic, no problem. Law is also a typical faculty that our students choose. Medicine, law, international law, university of technology” (1 hour 27 min.);

“Motivation comes with success. When our leaders, whether in the German language, physics or mathematics, had good results in high school exams, they had competition winners, it fuelled them. Yes, it is also happening to me now. I have results so I want to work” (18 min.);

“Yes, it is the result of a really large amount of work. From the students who are theoretically worse, looking at the results after lower high school, we are able to get such a result, give our students the opportunity, show how much they are able to do” (1 hour 30 min.);

Orientation of the school work towards achieving high results is also a priority of the headmaster: “the headmaster makes sure that the school maintains its level”

(42 min.). But the key factor enabling the achievement of such goal is, in the light of Tomasz's statement, **the school management style preferred by the headmaster**: systemic solutions, effective division of tasks, enforcement of requirements, delegating tasks, indirect degrees of power, building a teaching team by eliminating people who are not adapted to such a mode of work. This corporate style of management is admired by Tomasz because it is not, as he himself put it, "typical school" (1 hour 26 min.):

"But here this school works more like a company, like [...] a well-functioning corporation. There is a manager who cares about development. No, it is not like the decisions are made out of the blue. All is thought out, developed. Good practices are remembered and duplicated. What is bad is analysed as well as how to avoid mistakes in the future. It is all systemic" (1 hour 27 min.);

"Usually, it [i.e., teacher's dismissal] was about skills, level of commitment, teacher's commitment at first. If the teacher did not want to work, he/she ignored their duties, he/she used to drop work on others, the supervisor saw it" (50 min.);

"That is why it is very important to organize a team well in a given subject. The team leaders ensure that they are well-organized, and the headmaster consults with them. It is easier to consult fifteen people than ninety-something" (51 min.);

"[...] It can be seen, for example, in the approach to the organization of events. It is not that everyone looks at others to see what and who is doing something. A person gets a certain range of tasks. We know it will be done. It is trust. Obviously, gaining that trust takes some work. A new person usually gets a simple task first. If it is done well, he/she gets more difficult tasks, and thus gradually gains the appropriate level of trust" (1 hour 15 min.);

"Looking from the perspective of these five years, I can say that this management is effective and people who, even at the beginning, do not show their best side, because they are just adapting to the situation, they usually get a second chance. I find it difficult to find any dangers here" (1 hour 19 min.);

"This school is a sensation" (1 hour 20 min.).

In Tomasz's narratives, it is possible to reconstruct a specific understanding of the development of an individual perceived as meeting the requirements of the environment. In this approach, adaptive pressure is strongly emphasized. Efficient adaptation is the evidence of development. The source of changes is the centre of authority that formulates requirements, thus managing the development of the individual. Progressive changes of the individual are always controlled (managed) from the outside:

"Because it [the subject taught by Tomasz] was a priority for this school, we had to get used to the system that is in force there, to the rules. It took me, let's say, even

a few months. I think you could say that everything was organized and I adapted. This development was already quite dynamic” (8 min.);

“Looking at our leaders or team leaders, I think it would be hard to find someone who is not developing further, who is not active, who is not working on himself. So hence my conclusion is that it all depends on how the development will be guided” (1 hour 25 min.).

The next and last network of codes are Tomasz’s narratives containing descriptions/episodes/behaviours/evaluations related to his **original concept of working with the supervised class**. According to Tomasz, it is a kind of a **business project** divided into individual stages of operation, with systematic monitoring of goals achieved, with immediate correction of undesirable behaviours and with powers that give him a privileged position and a wide range of power. Tomasz emphasizes that the students participated in setting goals and signed the document. This kind of “involvement” is usually façade, simulated. When reporting his three-year work with the class, Tomasz does not mention any episode in which the students would realize their subjective rights of co-creators of the “project”:

“Well, it was a challenge, that is true. I tried to approach it in this way due to the fact that apart from school, I am interested in areas related to business, with project management. I tried to approach it in such a way as if I was a project manager. The project was entitled ‘My Class’ and I was just trying to implement various phases of the project. As it happens in business, I started with a plan that we developed together. We set goals to achieve. Later, I also wrote this plan for them. They saw it all. It was signed by them. Initial motivation was quite big right from the start. And then the implementation of the plan, discussions during our homeroom lessons about current situation – similarly to weekly meetings in a company: What are the results? What are the successes and failures? How to change it? What to focus on at the moment? What can be left for now? Assessing potential dangerous situations with events [...]” (29 min.).

To a large extent, the success of the project depends on the efficiency and regularity of Tomasz’s activities. He himself emphasizes the role of immediate reaction to any deviations from the assumed programme, the practice of penalties/consequences leading to the correction of undesirable students’ behaviour:

“[...] in my plan, I primarily wanted to base my teaching on the fact that students would be able to develop a positive approach to learning. They were to do this by either getting certain methods and techniques that help them to learn from me or learning them by themselves. One of the priorities was also appropriate behaviour during the lesson, which was monitored by me on a regular basis. I went to individual teachers, but they also came to me, if there were any signals of disturbing, bad behaviour. The student got a rebuke then. There had to be an immediate response,

especially in the first grade. So that the students know that they have to behave properly, otherwise, unfortunately...” (31 min.).

**The autocratic style of managing “subordinates”** is reflected in the description of the situation of appointing the so called “class three board” during the first meeting with parents:

“My team leader told me that it is worth approaching parents at the beginning to develop a suitable position as for students in the class. You need to build authority, dynamic action, which is easier at the beginning of the school year, you have to make another ‘class three’ parents’ board. You make some decisions that will affect the whole year. It is known that parents are not very... positive to perform a function. This was also the case in the first grade when we elected the board. No one volunteered, so I entered and said: ‘you are in class board’. I wrote ‘thank you very much’ and then I think that they felt that you mean something, that it is not so lengthy and nothing will happen. There will actually be action, I think” (33 min.).

## CONCLUSIONS

The meanings revealed in Tomasz’s narratives provide an insight into the practice of school life that fits in with neoliberal assumptions of education. The school everyday life reconstructed from them proves the characteristics of Danuta Anna Michałowska (2013, p. 20): “In schools, market mechanisms, rivalry and competition are promoted, which is specifically manifested in the testing of educational results and ranking the best achievements, both individual and inter-school. Responsibility and efficiency understood in this way in the ‘school career’ implies the way of explaining the idea of social justice. It justifies the inequalities between students in their socialization process to the appropriate school and later professional and social position”.

The specific consequence of embedding learning processes in neoliberal culture in the form of instrumentalisation of education is also clear in this analysis (Rutkowiak, 2010b, p. 165). It is expressed in directing education to the role of a tool in building the career of an individual: orientation towards achieving a result that opens the way for the student to success in life eliminates questions about the autotelic sense of searching for knowledge, the need to develop critical and reflective thinking. The cult of entrepreneurship, resourcefulness and efficiency directs the activity of both the teacher and the student to the achievement of quantified goals: “What counts in school education is its result, that is, the level of student’s knowledge and skills, tested through testability and external exams. The

better the result and the ‘better’ (according to the inter-school ranking of teaching results) the school achieved, the more a young person can pride himself/herself on the effectiveness, entrepreneurship in managing their own ‘human capital’” (Michałowska, 2013, p. 19).

The analysis of Tomasz’s narrative allows us to outline a portrait of the school which is the space where *homo oeconomicus* is formed<sup>12</sup>. In the context of my considerations, I will refer to the neoliberal approach to this construct in a radical portrait outlined by Michałowska (2013, p. 71): “the capitalistic system requires an individual to strive for maximum self-interest and treat various goods as goods to buy, as well as profit from own services. *Homo oeconomicus* is **egoistic and antisocial, indifferent to others, cynical, manipulative and exploiting people for their own aims**. We can talk here about **the disappearance of interpersonal bonds and moral principles**. The cult of money and the dependence on the consumption and multiplication of goods result in an objective, materialistic relationship with oneself and other people”. Commodification of an individual in free market conditions is reflected in a profit-maximizing school, i.e., achieving high results in external examinations thanks to efficiently organized educational processes and minimizing costs through, for example, selecting students by eliminating “maladjusted” schools.

Corporate school management strategy redefines the existing roles of the teacher and the student. It leads to the formation of people (both teachers and students) corresponding to the neoliberal demand for productive units in the form of “zealous producers”, “passionate consumers” and unproductive “waste people” (Michałowska, 2013, p. 138; Rutkowiak, 2010a, p. 302). Hence in Tomasz’s narratives we find appreciation for gifted students and pride in the results of those who have adapted to the requirements, but also the presence of a stigmatizing construct in the form of a “region” and the postulate of eliminating students who are unable/unwilling to meet the expectations. And the language of objectification: “We are able to make such a result out of students who are theoretically inferior [...]”.

It seems that the school seen from Tomasz’s perspective, and also Tomasz’s placement in this school, are aptly characterized by the remark of Astrid Męczkowska-Christiansen (2010, p. 88):

“the school ceases to aim at ‘revealing the world’, but its efforts focus solely on fulfilling the self-reproductive and allocative function, which, from a practical point

---

12 The construction of *homo oeconomicus* derives in its original form from classical economy of Adam Smith. It was defined as a theoretical model by John Stuart Mill. However, in subsequent economic concepts it was subject to changes and modifications (Grzesiuk, 2014; Lewartowska-Zychowicz, 2010).

of view, employs ‘recommending and enforcing’ messages. The messages are, on the one hand, important for the survival of the school as an ‘educational’ institution, and on the other hand, to allocate individuals to specific places in the social structure functioning in the neoliberal order”.

The presented portrait of the school seen from the perspective of a teacher who strongly identifies with the neoliberal model of education is, of course, fragmentary. It has a mosaic composition, revealing only those practices and ideas that could be captured in the interlocutor’s narrative. Undoubtedly, however, it can be another impulse for reflection on the ideological entanglements of education. Especially neoliberal ones.

Considering the limitations in formulating generalizations (resulting from the idiographic nature of my research, from which empirical corpus, re-analyzed in the submitted text, originates), I will recall another path of teacher’s functioning that I identified (Wawrzyniak-Beszterda, 2019). As a kind of counterpoint to the presented narrative, I would like to juxtapose the phenomenon of “being a teacher”, that I characterized, with the image of the teacher’s profession that stems from the culture of cooperation at school. In this way, I will outline the educational potential of a school which is not embedded in a culture of competition, but which is built on collaboration and cooperation.

Briefly speaking, in the approach of M. Fullan and A. Hargreaves (1992), the culture of cooperation is determined by the atmosphere of trust, strong interpersonal ties, the practice of effective communication, high involvement of participants, coordination of activities, effective and fair division of labour, rich and diverse resources of support (organizational and individual), credible and competent leadership. The social space of school constructed in this way is conducive to shaping the sense of commitment and competence of the participants (students, teachers and parents). It is focused on development and not on the effect only. The analysis of the narrative of one of the research participants (Jagoda)<sup>13</sup> revealed the unique characteristics of her school environment as a culture of cooperation (Wawrzyniak-Beszterda, 2019). I will focus on what is the key in her understanding of the teacher’s profession: a sense of personal responsibility for the development of the children entrusted to her care, understanding and acceptance of individual students’ differences, orientation on the individualization of work, authentic cooperation with parents, students’ subjectivity, educational work focused on developing

---

13 The participant mentioned is a primary school teacher named Jagoda (for a vertical analysis of Jagoda’s professional biography, see: Wawrzyniak-Beszterda, 2019, 2021, in print).

children’s moral sensitivity, respect and empathy for others, as well as social skills enabling cooperation in a group. Jagoda’s individual beliefs and ideas, regarding teaching duties as well as a catalogue of her moral principles built around values such as honesty, responsibility and respect for others, were the foundation of such an approach to the teacher’s profession.

But the process of becoming a teacher, which took place in a specific environment, conducive to teacher’s development, was also the key process. Her professional biography was structured by experiences of authentic cooperation with other teachers, strong social ties, built on trust and understanding, a sense of security in relations with superiors, recognition of their achievements, competences and genuine commitment, joint problem solving and sharing knowledge, mutual support. Such a context strengthens the readiness of individuals to take on new challenges, to experiment, to deal with problems creatively and to overcome limitations. It is a school focused on the development process, and not (only) the result, on cooperative collaboration rather than competition, on values and not on strategic effectiveness.

## References

- Dolata, R. (2008). *Szkoła – segregacje – nierówności*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.
- Domalewski, J. (2003). Syndrom „placówki” i „wyścig szczurów”. Ukryte funkcje egzaminów zewnętrznych. *Acta Universitatis Nicolai Copernici. Socjologia Wychowania*, 15(360), 157–183.
- Domalewski, J., & Mikiewicz, P. (2004). *Młodzież w zreformowanym systemie szkolnym*. Warszawa–Toruń: IRWiR PAN.
- Domalewski, J., Wasielewski, K., & Mikiewicz, P. (2008). Segmentacja społeczna na wyjściu ze szkoły średniej. In: K. Szafraniec (Ed.), *Młodzież i oświata za burtą przemian* (pp. 220–233). Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek.
- Filipkowski, P., Karkowska, M., Straczuk, J., & Życzyńska-Ciołek, D. (2019). Wokół rewizyt badawczych i reinterpretacji socjologicznych danych jakościowych. *Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej*, 15(1), 6–13. DOI: 10.18778/1733-8069.15.1.01.
- Fullan, M. & Hargreaves, A. (Eds.) (1992). *Teacher Development and Educational Change*. London: Falmer Press.
- Gibb, G. (2011). *Analizowanie danych jakościowych*. Transl. M. Brzozowska-Brywczyńska. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Gromkowska-Melosik, A. (2017). *Testy edukacyjne. Studium dynamiki selekcji i socjalizacji*. Poznań : Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM.
- Gromkowska-Melosik, A., & Szymański, M.J. (Eds.) (2014). *Edukacja i nierówność. Trajektorie sukcesu i marginalizacji*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM.
- Grzesiuk, K. (2014). Powstanie i ewolucja modelu homo economicus. *Roczniki ekonomii i zarządzania*, 6(42) 2, 253–288.



- Hejwosz-Gromkowska, D. (2010). *Edukacja uniwersytecka i kreowanie elit społecznych*. Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”.
- Helling, I.K. (1990). Metoda badań biograficznych. In: J. Włodarek, & M. Ziółkowski (Eds.), *Metoda biograficzna w socjologii* (pp. 13–31). Transl. K. Drożdżał, & J. Włodarek. Warszawa–Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Karkowska, M., & Bielińska, K. (2019). Po co nam „stare wywiady”? O ponownym wykorzystaniu danych z badań jakościowych (rewizytach, reanalizach i nie tylko). *Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej*, 15(2), 12–39. DOI: 10.18778/1733-8069.15.2.02.
- Kaźmierska, K. (2014). Biografia opowiadana, doświadczana i rekonstruowana w perspektywie narracji o wojnie. Analiza przypadku. *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, 3, 3–21.
- Konecki, K. (2000). *Studia z metodologii badań jakościowych. Teoria ugruntowana*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Kultura i Społeczeństwo* (2019). Społeczne w archiwach, 1.
- Kvale, S. (2004). *InterViews. Wprowadzenie do jakościowego wywiadu badawczego*. Transl. S. Zabielski. Białystok: Trans Humana.
- Kwieciński, Z. (2002a). *Bezbronni. Odpad szkolny na wsi*. Toruń: „Edytor”.
- Kwieciński, Z. (2002b). *Wykluczanie: badania dynamiczne i porównawcze nad selekcjami społecznymi na pierwszym progu szkolnictwa*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo UMK.
- Lewartowska-Zychowicz, M. (2010). *Homo liberalis jako projekt edukacyjny. Od emancypacji do funkcjonalności*. Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”.
- Męczkowska-Christiansen, A. (2010). Neoliberalizm i edukacja ku nieodpowiedzialności. In: M. Szczepka-Pustkowska, A. Lewartowska-Zychowicz, & A. Kozyczkowska (Eds.), *Przestrzenie teraźniejszości i ich społeczno-edukacyjne sensy* (pp. 79–95). Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek.
- Michałowska, D.A. (2013). *Neoliberalizm i jego (nie)etyczne implikacje edukacyjne*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM.
- Nieżgoda, M., & Długosz, P. (2010). *Nierówności edukacyjne wśród młodzieży Małopolski i Podkarpacia*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.
- Potulicka, E. (2019). *Dwa paradygmaty myślenia o edukacji i jej reformach: pedagogiczny i globalny-neoliberalny*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM.
- Potulicka, E., & Rutkowiak, J. (2010). *Neoliberalne uwikłania edukacji*. Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”.
- Rutkowiak, J. (2010a). Neoliberalny kontekst rozwoju szkolnictwa wyższego we współczesnej Polsce. In: E. Potulicka, & J. Rutkowiak, *Neoliberalne uwikłania edukacji* (pp. 297–310). Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”.
- Rutkowiak, J. (2010b). Uczenie się w warunkach kultury neoliberalnej: kontestowanie jako wyzwanie dla teorii kształcenia. In: E. Potulicka, & J. Rutkowiak, *Neoliberalne uwikłania edukacji* (pp. 163–176). Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”.
- Sadura, P. (2017). *Państwo, szkoła, klasy*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej.
- Smolińska-Theiss, B. (2014). *Dzieciństwo jako status społeczny. Edukacyjne przywileje dzieci klasy średniej*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademii Pedagogiki Specjalnej.
- Stake, R.E. (2009). Jakościowe studium przypadku. Transl. M. Sałkowska. In: N.K. Denzin, & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Metody badań jakościowych. Vol. 1* (pp. 623–654). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.



- Szkudlarek, T. (2001). Ekonomia i etyka – przemieszczenia dyskursu edukacyjnego. *Teraźniejszość – Człowiek – Edukacja*, Special Issue, 165–191.
- Szkudlarek, T. (2002). Globalizacja, ekonomia i edukacja: o metaforze ludzkiego kapitału w polityce oświatowej. In: E. Malewska, & B. Śliwerski (Eds.), *Pedagogika i edukacja wobec nowych wspólnot i różnic w jednoczącej się Europie. Materiały z IV Ogólnopolskiego Zjazdu Pedagogicznego*. Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”.
- Śliwerski, B. (2017). *Meblowanie szkolnej demokracji*. Warszawa: Wolters Kluwer Polska SA.
- Wawrzyniak-Beszterda, R. (2019). *Kapitał społeczny szkoły. Z doświadczeń biograficznych nauczycieli*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM.
- Wawrzyniak-Beszterda, R. (2021 in print). Wsparcie na starcie? Z doświadczeń biograficznych początkujących nauczycieli. *Biografistyka Pedagogiczna*.