

**Renata Sikora**

Akademia Mazowiecka w Płocku

ORCID: 0000-0002-2238-7248

A case of covert school policy? High and low ability classrooms' educational outcomes

Legal and financial regulations were implemented by Polish authorities to provide equal opportunities for children and adolescents attending public schools. Despite these regulations covert unofficial enrolment procedure practiced by some public primary schools may seriously conflict with equal opportunity policy. Therefore the study aim was to compare school divisions' educational outcomes as to answer the question if recruitment procedures segregated pupils into more / less beneficial settings. The analyses conducted in the study demonstrate that there are different outcomes in divisions at the same educational level. The study is specifically dedicated to practitioners and educational authorities.

Keywords: school equity, primary education, covert policy

Przypadek tajnej polityki szkolnej? Wyniki edukacyjne klas o wysokich i niskich zdolnościach

Polskie władze wdrożyły regulacje prawno-finansowe, aby zapewnić równe szanse dzieciom i młodzieży uczęszczającym do szkół publicznych. Pomimo tych przepisów tajna, nieoficjalna procedura zapisów praktykowana przez niektóre publiczne szkoły podstawowe może poważnie stać w sprzeczności z polityką równych szans. Dlatego też celem badania było porównanie wyników edukacyjnych oddziałów szkół, aby odpowiedzieć na pytanie, czy procedury rekrutacyjne segregują uczniów do mniej lub bardziej korzystnych środowisk. Z przeprowadzonych w badaniu analiz wynika, że w oddziałach na tym samym poziomie kształcenia występują różne wyniki. Badanie jest adresowane w szczególności do praktyków i władz oświatowych.

Słowa kluczowe: równość szkolna, edukacja początkowa, tajna polityka

Introduction

Public primary school is an institution where students ought to have the same or at least very similar conditions to obtain knowledge and to develop their skills (Alanen, 2014). However, no one is able to guarantee identically qualified teachers, an equal number of students in each class, and the same conditions of school facilities in terms of space or equipment. What governments, parents and students expect is that the factors which constitute the public education offer should be approximately equivalent for each student (Bracken & Lamprecht, 2003; Strandler, 2016).

In Poland, the content of curricula, teachers' qualifications and the amount of time devoted to each compulsory subject are identical and regulated by law to provide equal opportunities to students. Also, school divisions' sizes and equal access to all types of public schools in terms of age, gender or disability are defined and observed. Textbooks and exercise books are free. The government and local authorities finance the obligatory tasks of public schools (Education Act of December 14, 2016). Despite these regulations, covert unofficial enrolment procedures practiced by some public primary schools may seriously conflict with equal opportunity policy. These practices are not overt, and the only way to bring them to light is to follow the educational outcomes of students within the same school so as to examine whether recruitment procedures segregate pupils into more or less beneficial settings.

Background and the definition of equity in education

The Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960) is a comprehensive and widely known UNESCO document that established a social, philosophical and legal framework for equity in education. It states that "discrimination in education is a violation of human rights enunciated in that Declaration" (preamble). It states also that governments should "ensure, by legislation where necessary that there is no discrimination in the admission of pupils to educational institutions" (Article 3, point 6). With reference to parents' and guardians' rights, the Declaration points out that it is "essential to respect the liberty of parents and/or legal guardians to provide education in conformity with their own convictions," and that the standard of education is not lower than the general standard laid down or approved by the competent authorities (Article 5, point b and c). According

to the Constitution of the Republic of Poland (1997), “[...] every person has the right to education, [...] and public authorities provide citizens with general and equal access to education” (Art. 70 of Polish Constitution).

There are several approaches to how we should understand equity in education. The most general definitions emphasise that equal opportunities mean giving all children the same educational opportunities to develop their diverse – not just intellectual – talents (Nilsson & Bunar, 2016). Egalitarian input-oriented definitions focus on giving all children an equal starting point in the labour market, and therefore on schools providing them with the same qualifications assured by the same school curriculum (Amsing & Bakker, 2014). Approaches that might be described as comprehensive invoke the necessity of the best possible education for all students which is free at least at the primary level (Cross & Cross, 2005). In the conceptual field there are more questions than the answers. A lively discussion is taking place as to the supreme goals of education (Velki, Ilieva-Trichkova & Topolska, 2018). Is preparing individuals for the job market more important than educating for democratic citizenship? Does the experience of the intrinsic goods of education give pupils opportunities for developing their individual resources, therefore providing tools for future life success and satisfaction?

However, there is broad consensus concerning the factors that are necessary for providing beneficial opportunities to children at school. In the macro scale, the economic welfare of a given country or region, clear and stable legal frameworks, and family conditions, such as socioeconomic status (SES) and parents' education, years of schooling, the absence of war or conflict, sufficient amount of fiscal resources dedicated to educational aims, and pro-equity solutions of governments and community organisations which protect age, gender, race, religion and ethnic rights are often listed (Miao, 2016; UNICEF, 2015). In the micro scale, teachers' qualifications, textbooks and food access at school (e.g. free lunches), the number of students in a division, the number of lessons per week, the length of instructional time, access to extracurricular activities, and to additional activities for gifted and learning-disabled children, are substantial components of a fair education offer (Amsing & Bakker, 2014; Verhaeghe & Vanobbergen, 2000). It is assumed that model equality of opportunity will be achieved when everyone with similar talents obtain the same results; this is a rather idealistic assumption (Shields, Newman & Satz, 2017).

Brief profile of public primary school in Poland

Obligatory education for students aged 6/7 to 18 years old in Poland is provided in two stages – elementary and secondary education. The national curriculum for primary schools encompasses composite teaching of Polish, math, science, art, physical education and English at years 1–3; teaching of Polish, math, English, music, art and crafts, history, biology, geography, physical education and ICT as separate subjects during years 4–6; and additionally physics, chemistry, a second modern foreign language, social studies and safety education during years 7–8. Religious education is not compulsory. The total number of lessons during one week is 20–23 for year 1–3 pupils and 31–34 for those who attend years 7 and 8. The difference between the number of lessons results from the national curriculum and school principals' decisions, as it is in their cognition to schedule some subjects. School principals may also set up additional group or individual lessons for learning-disabled or talented students. The maximum number of pupils in one division is usually 25–30. While in some cases this number may be smaller (sport divisions, small rural schools), it can only be exceeded with the consent of the school council (comprised of parents, teachers and administration). There are two school terms: the winter semester, which starts in September and finishes in January, and the summer term, which begins in January and ends in June. Winter holiday is a fortnight long, while summer break lasts roughly two months.

In all Polish public schools, the curricula of particular subjects, teachers' level of education, and gender equality in terms of open access to all types of schools and all types of school divisions is provided for by law. Textbooks and exercise books are free, and children from low SES families receive free school lunches and/or financial aid that enables them to cover some school expenditures (sport shoes, backpacks, stationary, etc.). Teachers and assistants provide care to children daily from 7:00am to 5:00pm and during gap days between national holidays, which enables their parents to work. Children with specific learning difficulties receive additional lessons; they may also have a personal assistant or the possibility to participate in school activities specially tailored to their needs. Some SEN pupils attend special schools. Parents can exercise influence over some school activities and educational matters through participation in school councils. The state and community financing systems facilitates the functioning of schools in terms of staff pay and facilities maintenance.

Except for public music schools („szkoły muzyczne”), other public school educate children based on the catchment area they cover. Parents or caregivers of children aged 6/7 years old enrol their children at the closest school in the area (school district). There is the possibility to place children in any public school

– for example, one close to a parent's workplace – but the default choice should be that of the school in the catchment area. If the group of children enrolled is large enough for more than one school division, the headmaster can decide how to place them into divisions. There is no recommended procedure for placing children in classes other than the random placement procedure.

Pedagogical supervision over public (and non-public) schools is the duty of the Educational Superintendents Bureaus (*kuratoria oświaty*). Organisational and fiscal supervision is the duty of municipalities.

These features of public schools are designed to ensure an equal educational offer at the primary and secondary levels of education.

When does the inequity start? Outcome disparities across divisions

There are various means of investigating whether these conditions secure equity at public schools. A common one is to study whether the law is being followed; however, analysis of students' educational outcomes may supply even more substantial information in this field of research (Çankaya & Dağ, 2017; Hobbs, 2016; Sullivan & Brown, 2015). The results can be analysed at the level of individual student, school division, or school as a whole. Internal "at-school" assessment is carried out by teachers, while external assessment is conducted by the Central Examination Board. The assessment is done through analysis of marks/grades and points that are given to students at various occasions.

Regardless of whether at the individual school or regional level, each analysed group of students' school outcomes (grades, standardized test results, etc.) followed the normal (Gaussian) distribution. Three groups of pupils: outstanding pupils, average ones and those who might be described as needing more care and support, appear in the reports. Differences between urban and rural pupils, older and younger pupils, and in some cases between girls and boys (e.g. math or foreign language attainments) are expected. There is general agreement that these differences are proof of inequalities beyond the control of school staff and authorities, as they are products of individual differences: intellectual, emotional, social (Haworth et al., 2009; Hobbs, 2016). However, similar results (i.e. absence of statistical difference) among divisions of the same year, obtained in measurements taken contemporaneously in one school, should demonstrate the success of equity/equality policy (Strandler, 2016). Substantial disparities found among the divisions may indicate purposeful – rather than random – placement of students in divisions. The objective of such a procedure could be to place a larger number of "promising" students in one of the divisions (if the school has enough pupils to establish more than one division).

Thus, the following questions were asked in the research study:

- (1) Are divisions' educational outcomes – measured at one time/occasion and among divisions of the same school year – similar?
- (2) Are divisions' educational outcomes – measured at one time/occasion and among the divisions of the same school year – different?

Materials and methods

To answer these questions, the educational results/outcomes of pupils were analysed. First, a request was sent to three randomly selected public primary schools in a medium-size city in the centre of Poland (with around 140,000 inhabitants) to provide data. Educational results were measured at 3 points: time 1 – January 2019 (mid-term); time 2 – April 2019 (finishing exam); time 3 – September 2019 (placement test). Altogether, the outcomes of 536 students were analysed. There was no statistical difference between the number of girls and boys both in schools and within divisions. All the students were between 10 to 15 years old. The data of pupils aged 7–9 years old were not analysed as they are not given marks/grades suitable for statistical analysis.

Three sets of data were received from schools. First, the winter semester report of divisions' outcomes, which gave insight into the educational, behavioural and disciplinary outcomes of students and divisions (e.g. number of awarded (skilled) students per division, attendance figures (absenteeism), the mean result of each division computed as a statistic mean of grades from all subjects taught, and the behaviour marks given to pupils). The second set of data consisted of the results of an external standardized test, prepared by the Central Examination Board. The test was administered as a part of final (finishing) primary school exams in April, and was intended to check how 15-year-old pupils handled several tasks in an examination of English as a foreign language. These tasks were as follows: listening, communication, reading, vocabulary/grammar and writing. The test was administered at school during a session lasting 90 minutes (or 120 minutes for students with pedagogical recommendation). The third set of data came from a diagnostic test which examined how year 4 children (10 years old) performed on an English test after they completed Key Stage 1 and a portion of Key Stage 2 education.

No approval from a board of ethics was sought, since the materials did not involve any personal data or required any personal participation. However, consent from schools' authorities to use the data was obtained. The schools that provided the study data have been positively assessed by the Educational Superin-

tendents Bureau. All the pupils whose grades/results were analysed were native Polish, raised by at least one Polish-speaking parent/guardian.

Results

The first part of study was focused on student's educational, behavioural and disciplinary outcomes as provided in the January mid-term (semester) report which was received from a primary school. Students' knowledge and progress in skills was assessed with marks (grades): 6 indicated the most satisfactory result, and 1 the most unsatisfactory result. In the school report, these results are presented as the division's mean, calculated using all marks received by students during the winter semester (term). Students' behaviour at school was described using six marks (adjectives): "excellent", "very good", "good", "proper", "improper" and "unacceptable". "Excellent" behaviour means friendliness and helpfulness, respect for fellow students and school staff, engagement in school activities such as volunteering, school choir, scouts or others. "Unacceptable" behaviour means disrespect for school staff and colleagues, truancy, smoking, bullying – reported in behavioural referrals. Discipline was expressed by the students' attendance at school activities (lessons) expressed in percentages. 100% attendance means that students of the division were always present at school activities and classes (lessons).

Table 1 presents the descriptive data received in the school semester report: the number of students in each division; divisions' mean results (computed as a mean of all students' marks in the division); the number of honor roll students (i.e. students with the highest marks); the number of pupils who did not receive any behavioural referrals and therefore were given an "excellent" conduct mark; and school attendance (absenteeism) of divisions expressed in per-cent.

Table 1.
Term report outcomes of students (year 4 – year 8)

YEAR 4 (10–11 years old)	4A	4B	4C	4D
Number of students in the division	24	24	26	26
Division's mean result	4,52	4,6	4,85	4,6
Number of honor roll students	7	9	16	15
Number of students with „excellent” conduct mark	12	9	12	14
School attendance	93%	94%	95%	94%

YEAR 5 (11–12 years old)	5A	5B	5C	5D
Number of students in the division	22	27	24	27
Division's mean result	4,47	4,76	4,14	4,47
Number of honor roll students	8	13	7	11
Number of students with „excellent” conduct mark	7	7	0	5
School attendance	92%	95%	96%	95%
YEAR 6 (12–13 years old)	6A	6B	6C	
Number of students in the division	28	28	28	
Division's mean result	4,58	4,28	4,12	
Number of honor roll students	12	3	6	
Number of students with „excellent” conduct mark	18	13	4	
School attendance	93%	89%	89%	
YEAR 7 (13–14 years old)	7A	7B		
Number of students in the division	17	20		
Division's mean result	3,95	4,23		
Number of honor roll students	3	6		
Number of students with „excellent” conduct mark	9	13		
School attendance	85%	94%		
YEAR 8 (14–15 years old)	8A	8B	8C	
Number of students in the division	27	24	25	
Division's mean result	3,87	3,44	4,17	
Number of honor roll students	4	0	6	
Number of students with „excellent” conduct mark	3	5	6	
School attendance	90%	87%	87%	

Note: the division mean mark (grade) can range from 1–6, which corresponds to the D/F – A grading scale used in the UK and the F–A scale used in the US.

Source: own research.

At each educational level (i.e. school year), the results of the division that had the best outcomes – the highest mean mark (grade), the largest number of honor roll students and the largest number of pupils without behavioural referrals (i.e. students who obtained ‘excellent’ behaviour) – were compared with the results of the division which obtained the lowest (the worst) results. The comparisons were done between divisions at the same educational level. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Differences between the divisions with the highest and the lowest results at the same educational level

Difference in divisions' marks (grades)		
	Top division	Bottom division
YEAR 4	4,85	4,33
YEAR 5	4,76	4,14
YEAR 6	4,58	4,12
YEAR 7	4,23	3,95
YEAR 8	4,17	3,44
$t = 3,75 (p < 0,03) df 4$		
Percentage of honor roll students per division		
	Top division	Bottom division
YEAR 4	70%	13%
YEAR 5	48%	29%
YEAR 6	43%	21%
YEAR 7	30%	18%
YEAR 8	24%	0%
$ch2 = 76,14 (p < 0,001) df 4$		
Percentage of students with "excellent" conduct mark		
	Top division	Bottom division
YEAR 4	46%	13%
YEAR 5	26%	0%
YEAR 6	64%	14%
YEAR 7	65%	53%
YEAR 8	44%	21%
$ch2 = 31,24 (p = 0,001) df 4$		
School attendance ratio in divisions		
	Top division	Bottom division
YEAR 4	95%	93%
YEAR 5	95%	96%
YEAR 6	93%	89%
YEAR 7	94%	85%
YEAR 8	90%	87%
$ch2 = 4,61 (p = n.i.) df 4$		

Note: Top and bottom results were compared between the following divisions: 4C and 4E; 5B and 5C; 6A and 6C; 7A and 7B; 8C and 8B, as the most and least efficient divisions at the same education level – see Table 1.

Source: own research.

The results show that at each educational level (i.e. school year) the division with the best outcomes had significantly different results than the division with the worst ones, except for absenteeism.

The second part of the study focused on the results that 15-year-old pupils obtained in an English as a foreign language exam administered by the Central Examination Board. The set of tasks consisted of (1) listening, (2) communication, (3) reading, (4) vocabulary plus grammar, and (5) writing. The test was taken at one time by all year 8 students (see section Materials and Methods). The results of the division that obtained the best results (8C) were compared with those of the division that obtained the worst results (8B). Table 3 shows the outcomes and differences between two school divisions which took part in this obligatory test. Altogether, three divisions took the exam: 8A, 8B and 8C.

Table 3.

Comparison of 8A and 8C students' outcomes from a finishing exam testing English as a foreign language

Tasks	8A		8C		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> <
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Listening	8,50	4,69	11,38	5,25	2,71	0,05
Communication	3,33	11,92	4,50	2,65	1,89	0,08
Reading	8,88	3,60	10,63	4,47	0,88	0,14
Vocab & Grammar	3,91	2,95	6,54	4,08	4,25	0,01
Writing	2,25	2,75	4,75	3,92	3,29	0,02
Composite	26,87	14,09	37,79	19,25	7,01	0,001

Note: There were several tasks in each category. The maximum number of points were as follows: listening: 17, communication: 7, reading: 15, vocabulary and grammar: 11, writing: 10. The composite maximum score on the test was 60 points.

Source: own research.

The results show statistical differences in (1) listening, (4) vocabulary & grammar, and (5) writing and in the composite result between the two compared divisions. Division 8C obtained statistically better results than Division 8B.

The third part of the study focused on analysing the results of a diagnostic test (prepared by the editor of a textbook) administered by two teachers who teach English at a primary school. This compulsory test was administered at the beginning of the school year to all 10–11-year-old year 4 students, who were grouped in two divisions: 4A and 4B. The number of girls and boys in the divisions were the same (ten boys and ten girls per division). The results obtained by the students are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.

Comparison of year 4 students' outcomes in a diagnostic test of English as a foreign language

Diagnostic test differences (Year 4)					
Tasks	4A		4B		<i>p</i> <
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Vocabulary	5,7	4,7	16,6	6,5	0,001
Communication	2,2	2,6	6,3	2,8	0,001
Grammar	2,9	2,9	7,8	2,5	0,001
Listening	2,6	2,9	4,4	1,7	0,84
Composite	13,4	10,9	35,1	12,3	0,001

Note: There were several tasks in each category and the maximum possible results were as follows: vocabulary: 30 points, communication: 10 points, grammar: 10 points, listening: 10 points. The composite maximum score on the test was 60 points.

Source: own research.

There were statistical differences between the outcomes of divisions 4A and 4B. 4A performed significantly less efficiently in all test competencies when compared with 4B, except for listening.

Discussion

Legal and financial regulations were implemented by Polish authorities to provide equal opportunities for children and adolescents attending public schools. Polish primary students have the same number of lessons, teachers who meet high education requirements, free books and materials reflecting the same school curriculum. They attend divisions of similar size and enjoy access to extracurricular and/or supportive classroom activities. Despite these legal regulations, the analyses conducted in the study demonstrate that there are different outcomes in divisions at the same educational level (same school year). Each analysed pair of divisions (i.e. the highest and lowest attaining groups) had significantly different numbers of honor roll (outstanding) students. There were also differences in the number of students with "excellent" behaviour. The results of external (finishing exam) and internal (school diagnostic) tests also provided evidence of differences in divisions' efficacy, as pupils of the compared divisions obtained different scores in most of the skills tested. Thus, discrepancies in divisions' educational outcomes were a fact.

In seeking to grasp the meaning of the study results for students, three questions come to mind. Does a large or small number of outstanding versus demand-

ing students impact the classroom's efficiency? Would it create different psychological contexts forming the background of classrooms? Are different teachers' attitudes and methods present in efficient versus demanding school settings?

Numerous studies have searched for factors creating a beneficial context (background) in terms of school completion or students' success (Allen & Higham, 2018; Miao, 2016–2017; Pirog & Magee, 1997). There is no doubt that skilled students are the “flywheels” of many beneficial activities in a classroom. They ask plenty of perceptive questions, work fast and efficiently, keep teachers on their toes, cause few behavioural interventions, provide colleagues with inspiration and are likely to be followed by peers (Cross & Cross, 2005; Wilkinson et al., 2000). Less skilled students work slower, are more prone to be recipients rather than educational leaders, they need a variety of teaching strategies and are characterised by low school motivation. (Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015; Lysniak et al., 2019). There is also a positive link between students who receive low marks and those who receive behaviour referrals (Sikora, 2016).

Classroom activities that are disrupted by aggressive or disobedient students and require intervention by teachers shorten the time available for work, and they are linked with a lower number of completed tasks. Previous research has shown that students who receive low marks are more likely than high-efficient pupils to suffer from depressive symptoms, somatisation, and are more prone to undertake risk behaviours (Sikora, 2016). Older students who are often truant are at high risk of dropping out of school and breaking the law. Exposure to rebellious behaviour put children at risk for further consequences: poorer psychological condition, low motivation to work hard and achieve at school, and sometimes social awkwardness or drug and alcohol abuse. It is clear that the larger the group of skilled and committed students, the more beneficial the classroom context is from an educational and psychological perspective (Wilkinson et al., 2000). This is not a novel observation, but it seems to be rarely applied to understanding phenomena related to school divisions, as the majority of psychological and pedagogical studies are conducted on large sets of data representing large numbers of students. Few – if any – address hypotheses or questions concerning group processes within school divisions.

Additionally, previous research has demonstrated that teachers' classroom behaviour depends on the convictions they hold about their students (for a review see: Wang et al., 2018). In a classic experiment, teachers who were told they would teach students whose recently measured intelligence would allow them to make significant developmental progress in the coming school year (in fact, the students had merely been randomly selected for the study) expended considerable effort (number of interactions, verbal stimuli, non-verbal friendly and warm attitude). This resulted in better educational outcomes, which were not found in

similar students who had not been described as “bloomers” (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968 as stated in Thorndike, 1968). Despite the fact that the Pygmalion in the Classroom experiment was sharply criticized in some studies, the positive results of other replications give us grounds to assume that teachers' behaviours depend on their knowledge of the students (Becker, 2010; Niari et al., 2016).

A beneficial school context is also connected with working rules in class. Each classroom is characterised by its own ways of doing things. The system is important to students for their school progress, well-being, social and cognitive development. The rules are predictable, activities are structured, and working time depends greatly on students' attitudes. Different principles are present in school divisions which consist of high- and low-skilled students. Again, there is more straightforward learning activity among those pupils who are success oriented, and a less efficient learning approach among low-skilled students (Costa & Araújo, 2018).

Covert school practices may hinder even the most proactive solutions being implemented and improved by authorities in order to provide equal opportunities to all students. One of these practices is the enrolment procedure. It was not possible to determine how the composition of divisions were constituted / formed in the study sample. In Poland, when parents/caregivers enrol their children in primary school, they provide the child's name and surname, date of birth, and parents' names and family address(es). There are no questions about parents' education level or family SES conditions in a school questionnaire. Thus far, we can only pose some questions without answers when we ask how children are selected in a procedure which – as the study results demonstrate – can be hardly considered random.

The practice of purposive – not random – placement of students may be a welcome practice (Chong, 2018). It is sometimes required for newly arriving emigrant/refugee students, SEN pupils, or as a temporary solution (Landgren et al., 2003). Generally, it does not provide equal opportunities to public primary students in terms of school context, and it weighs on authorities' attempts to provide equity at public schools.

Limitations

The study has several limitations. The research sample was not representative (mainly due to the refusals of schools approached for data). Therefore, the results of the analysis would benefit from future confirmation in larger samples. The assumptions addressed in the study should be followed by psychological research to examine if grouping students of different abilities creates psychosocially diverse

settings. Finally, this investigation was specifically dedicated to practitioners and educational authorities, but does not represent a contribution to the development of theory.

References

- Alanen L. (2014). Theorizing childhood. *Childhood*, 21(1), 3–6. DOI: 10.1177/0907568213513361.
- Allen R. & Higham R. (2018). Quasi-markets, school diversity and social selection: Analysing the case of free schools in England, five years on. *London Review of Education*, 16(2), 191–213. DOI: 10.18546/LRE.16.2.02.
- Amsing H.T.A. & Bakker N. (2014). Comprehensive education: lost in the mi(d)st of a debate. Dutch politicians on equal opportunity in secondary schooling (1965–1979). *History of Education*, 43(5), 657–675. DOI: 10.1080/0046760X.2014.953603.
- Becker D. (2010). *The impact of teachers' expectations on students' educational opportunities in the life course. An empirical test of subjective – expected – utility explanation*. Cologne: Cologne Graduate School in Management, Economics and Social Sciences, University of Cologne.
- Bracken B.A. & Lamprecht M.S. (2003). Positive self-concept: an equal opportunity construct. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 18(2), 103–121. DOI: 10.1521/scpq.18.2.103.21859.
- Çankaya I. & Dağ M. (2017). Comparison of academic achievement levels of students beginning the elementary school at different ages. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 8(3), 140–143.
- Chong P.W. (2018). The Finnish “recipe” towards inclusion: concocting educational equity, policy rigour, and proactive support structures. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 62(4), 501–518. DOI: 10.1080/00313831.2016.1258668.
- Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960). Retrieved 2019, July 17th. Site <https://en.unesco.org/themes/right-to-education/convention-against-discrimination>
- Costa P. & Araújo L. (2018). Skilled students and effective schools: reading achievement in Denmark, Sweden, and France. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 62(6), 850–864. DOI: 10.1080/00313831.2017.1307274.
- Cross J.R. & Cross T.L. (2005). Social dominance, moral politics and gifted education. *Roeper Review*, 28(1), 21–29.
- Haworth C., Dale P. & Plomin R. (2009). Sex differences and science: the etiology of science excellence. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 50(9), 1113–1120. DOI: 10.1111/j.1469-7610.2009.02087.

- Hobbs G. (2016). Explaining social class inequalities in educational achievement in the UK: quantifying the contribution of social class differences in school 'effectiveness'. *Oxford Review of Education*, 42(1), 16–35. DOI: 10.1080/03054985.2015.1128889.
- Hyry-Beihammer E.K & Hascher T. (2015). Multi-grade teaching practices in Austrian and Finnish primary schools. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 74, 104–113. DOI: 10.1016/j.ijer.2015.07.002.
- Landgren M., Kjellman B. & Gillberg C. (2003). "A school for all kinds of minds". The impact of neuropsychiatric disorders, gender and ethnicity on school related tasks administered to 9–10 year-old children. *European Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 12(4), 162–171. DOI: 10.1007/s00787-003-0336-0.
- Lysniak U., Gibbone A. & Silverman S. (2019). Effective teaching strategies for low-skilled students. *The Physical Educator*, 76, 701–725. DOI: 10.18666/TPE-2019-V76-13-8647.
- Miao J. (2016–2017). Birth weight, family socioeconomic status and cognitive skills among Chinese adolescents. *Chinese Sociological Review*, 49(4), 362–381. DOI: 10.1080/21620555.2017.1311206.
- Niari M., Manousou E. & Lionarakis A. (2016). The Pygmalion Effect in distance learning: a case study at the Hellenic Open University. *European Journal of Open, Distance and E-learning*, 19(1), 36–53. DOI: 10.1515/euroll-2016-0003.
- Nilsson J. & Bunar N. (2016). Educational responses to newly arrived students in Sweden: Understanding the structure and influence of post migration ecology. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 60(4), 399–416. DOI: 10.1080/00313831.2015.1024160.
- Pirog M. & Magee Ch. (1997). High school completion: the influence of schools, families and adolescent parenting. *Social Science Quarterly*, 78(3), 710–724.
- Shields L., Newman A. & Satz D. (2017). Equality of Educational Opportunity. *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved 2019, July 17th. Site <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/equal-ed-opportunity>.
- Sikora R. (2016). Risk behaviors at late childhood and early adolescence as predictors of depression symptoms. *Current Problems of Psychiatry*, 3, 173–177.
- Strandler O. (2016). Equity through assessment? Teachers' mediation of outcome-focused reform in socioeconomically different schools. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 60(5), 538–553.
- Sullivan A. & Brown M. (2015). Reading for pleasure and progress in vocabulary and mathematics. *British Educational Research Journal*, 41(6), 971–991. DOI: 10.1002/berj.3180.

- The Constitution of the Republic of Poland (1997). Dziennik Ustaw No. 78, item 483. Retrieved 2019, July 17th. Site <https://www.sejm.gov.pl/prawo/konst/angielski/kon1.htm>
- Thorndike R.L. (1968). Reviewed Work: Pygmalion in the Classroom by Robert Rosenthal, Lenore Jacobson. *American Educational Research Journal*, 5(4), 708–711. DOI: 10.2307/1162010.
- UNICEF (2015). The investment Case for Education and Equity. Executive Summary. Retrieved 2019, July 17th. Site www.unicef.org/reports
- Velki T., Ilieva-Trichkova P. & Topolska E. (2018). *Children Rights in Educational Settings*. Ombudsman for Children in Croatia: University of Osijek. Retrieved 2019, July 17th. Site <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:141:213492>
- Verhaeghe J.P. & Vanobbergen B. (2000). Classroom management, social participation structures and required social competence in kindergarten. American Educational Research Association conference: New Orleans. Retrieved 2019, July 17th. Site https://www.academia.edu/26626937/Classroom_Management_Social_Participation_Structures_and_Required_Social_Competence_in_Kindergarten
- Wang S., Rubie-Davies Ch. & Meissel K. (2018). A systematic review of the teacher expectation literature over the past 30 years. *Education Research and Evaluation*, 24(3), 124–179.
- Wilkinson I.A.G., Hattie J.A., Parr J.M. et al. (2000). *Influence of peer effects on learning outcomes: A review of the literature*. Auckland: The University of Auckland. Retrieved 2019, July 17th. Site <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED478708.pdf>