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SCHOOL REFORMS AND EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES IN POST-COMMUNIST POLAND¹

The paper is devoted to the presentation of the results of a study about stratification in the school system in Poland. The research was conducted in Krakow, the former capital of Poland, in 2011-2012. The data come from statistics on local education system, individual in-depth interviews with school masters and teachers from lower secondary schools as well as politicians representing the local government. Special attention was paid to school recruitment policies, unequal access to education for students from different backgrounds, and the local government strategy for education. As a result, three types of lower secondary schools were identified: 1) elite non-public schools; 2) the best public lower secondary schools and 3) schools for students from poor families, facing enormous problems and substantial educational needs. We concluded that the education policy of the local authorities of Krakow is not effective in terms of equalization of opportunities of the children and youth from socially neglected and marginalized communities.

Key words: education, educational reform, social inequalities, lower secondary schools, education policy, Poland



Introduction

One of the most significant reasons for the modern democratic states to maintain education systems is fulfillment of the postulate of equal chances. The idea of equal opportunity means that individuals are to be chosen for certain roles and rewarded on the basis of achieved, rather than ascribed characteristics (Feinberg, Soltis 1998). In recognition of this idea, the authorities assume that access to schools should not depend upon the social background of the students.

International research on education has shown for many years that the results achieved by students and the level of education earned are significantly

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correlated with their social background (OECD 2007). The problem of equal access to education is a result of many factors including following:

- selection in primary and secondary schools,
- additional fees for parents paying at schools,
- the location of schools, especially in poor and urban areas,
- social status of parents and the economic situation of the family.

Absolute equalization of education opportunities is not possible. Therefore, to respect the democratic principles of social equality and cohesion, it is necessary to make all possible efforts to limit the impact of social background of the students upon their choice of schools and education levels earned. The important tasks of the education policy include elimination of barriers that hinder education, to limit selection upon recruitment and within schools and counteracting social stratification in educational institutions. Educational system must not contribute to grouping of students with different social backgrounds, because it lead to reproduction of social inequalities (Mayor, 1999).

Ensuring equal opportunities is an important effort of many international organizations. UNESCO, the OECD and the European Union conduct many research in order to better understand the problem and present practical recommendations. The OECD (2007) study suggest that equity in education is a fundamental issue in every democratic society. There are two dimensions of that equity:

1. Fairness, which means every citizen has fair and equal access to education regardless where he or she is living, what language he or she is speaking, how rich or poor he or she is, and what the parents' level of education, etc.
2. Inclusion which means every citizen has a chance to gain an elementary level of education necessary to live in democratic society.

The OECD suggests some recommendations would be introduced by state and local authorities in the process of educational reforms. In order to ensure equity in education it suggests: limiting early tracking and early academic selection, manage the school choice programs, reducing and preventing the drop-out of school system and giving a second chance to people who gave up schools.

The aim of this article is to present problem of educational inequalities in Poland. The new type of school – lower secondary schools – is taken into account. Many research indicates that lower secondary schools undergo quick diversification, which, in turn, leads to their polarization. This process contributes to reproduction of social inequalities. We take into account three types of lower secondary schools, differ in terms of achievements and social background of their students: non-public and public schools with the highest final results and schools with low results in external results. The analysis was conducted on the basis of research carried out in Krakow (the former capital of

Poland) in years 2011 – 2012. My intention is to present the attractiveness of the schools examined, the social composition of the students and the problems encountered by these schools in their educational activity.

3. Educational inequalities in Poland before 1989

The problem of links between students' background and their school education existed in Poland before the Second World War as well as after the war in the communist system. Despite many efforts of the communist regime for increasing the level of education among the working class and peasants (for example giving them some additional points for their backgrounds in the process of recruitment for universities) the number of students from working class and rural areas has not been increased in communist system. Educational inequalities existed in communist Poland and they were a serious problem. Sociological research conducted in the 80's showed that children from well-educated families, whose parents had a tertiary education usually followed-up their parents' paths, while children from non-educated families usually graduated from basic vocational schools and taking blue-collar job in the Polish society (Wisniewski, 1984).

Additionally, the education system in Poland made difficulties for children from unprivileged families to achieve high level of education. There were many barriers: the lack of preschool institutions in rural areas causing the lower number of preschool enrolment rate in those areas, the low number of educated teachers, the disproportion between rural and urban areas in quality of education. Eventually, about 80% of primary school graduates continued their education in basic vocational schools and worked in the industrial sector later on. Usually they were born in the working class families. Despite the proclamation of egalitarian ideas by the communist regime the problem of unequal opportunities existed and the communist regime did not eliminate it. The low level of parental education, poverty, and the lack of aspirations in many working-class families were barriers impossible to overcome by their children usually (Jarosz, 2004).

Objectives of the educational reforms after the communist system collapsed

The communist system collapsed in 1989 in Poland. The centrally planned economy and socialism were replaced by the free market economy and democracy. Today, Poland differs from the communist system absolutely. Economic, social, and educational reforms have been introduced. The new generation that had never seen a communist system has grown up. Poland became a member of the OECD in 1996, NATO in 1997, and the European Union in 2003. The economic and social reforms that have been introduced and the democratic institutions have taken roots in Polish society.

The first period of the transformation called “shock therapy” was very important for the Polish economy but very painful for the society. The first democratic government started the process of reform by introducing a free market economy, reducing hyperinflation, and gaining economic stability (Balcerowicz, 1997). Generally speaking the Polish government in the first period of democratic transformation was going to achieve economic stability and introducing democratic institutions. The situation was similar in many other Eastern European countries in transition from communism to capitalism system.

At the same time, the educational system has been reformed in Poland. The objective of the government was to decentralize the system (increasing the autonomy of local authorities responsible for running schools), while maintaining state responsibility for quality (for example external exams in primary, and secondary schools) (OECD, 1996). The educational system was reformed in terms of its structure and curriculum. Changes introduced upon transformation were associated with elimination of the state monopoly, devolution and democratization of education.

In 1997 the second “wave of reforms” was introduced by the Polish government in four sectors: insurance, education, medical care, and administration. There were three key objectives of education reform:

- To increase the level of secondary and higher education;
- To ensure equal opportunities for children and young people, especially for those from poor families, and living in rural areas, by giving them an easier access to different schools; and
- Improvement of the quality of education, by equipping students with knowledge and skills necessary for adult life and lifelong learning (Ministry of National Education, 1998).

The education reform, introduced in 1999, was supposed to make up for the civilization gap between Poland and member states of the European Union. The reform changed the general structure of the education system. Primary education was shortened from 8 to 6 years, and the new element, a three-year lower secondary school (gymnasium) for graduates of 6 years primary schools appeared. It was expected that lower secondary schools would contribute to raising of the intellectual level of the youth, particularly in the rural areas, and facilitate access to upper-secondary schools. There was an assumption they would employ the best and highly qualified teachers in order to ensure equal opportunities and improve education quality. The authors of the reform believed that lower secondary schools would become well-equipped schools, hiring highly qualified teachers to warrant a high level of education and to encourage the students to pursue further studies. It was assumed that all schools would offer a similar standard, accommodation conditions and equipment, sports

facilities and IT equipment. Lower secondary schools were considered to have no less than 150 students, with at least two classes of students of the same age (Reforma systemu edukacji. Projekt, 1998).

At the same time, the system of national examinations was introduced, obligatory for all students at the end of primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary education. The exams are run and supervised by an institution called the Central Examination Commission established in 2002. The new curricular standards at the state level were introduced. It was decided that there would be no entrance examinations for lower secondary schools. Every primary school graduate was entitled to study at the local lower secondary school. Students willing to attend lower secondary schools outside their area were allowed to enroll as long as there were vacant places available.

Diversification of lower secondary schools as a sign of growing stratification in education

The first period of educational reform was difficult for local authorities, school masters, teachers and parents. The lower secondary schools were organized from scratch. Creation of the new network of schools was accompanied by local conflicts. Although the authors of the reform recommended creation of one lower secondary schools in every community the local authorities established twice as many. More than one half of all lower secondary schools were located in the same building with primary schools (Levitas, Herczyński, 2012).

A problem that the researchers found was the great scale of undesirable and pathological behaviors of the students (aggression, use of abusive substances, breaking of norms, skipping classes). In the opinion of teachers, these behaviors result from excessively high demands faced by lower secondary school pupils, too many rights granted to them and lack of severe punishments for delinquents (Konarzewski, 2004).

Research conducted in lower secondary schools located in four different communities (Tarkowska, 2008) showed that the principals and teachers were not prepared to counteract poverty, they were either unable to recognize this phenomenon or they tended to underestimate its significance or scale or they denied its existence. The research results showed that didactics prevailed over upbringing and care, cooperation between schools and the parents is insufficient, pupils from poor families are not getting support, which results in emergence of behaviors that could be classified as typical for counter-culture (skipping classes, dropping out of school).

On the other hand, research conducted by Roman Dolata has revealed the processes of selection of lower secondary school candidates, as well as internal segregation, associated with the manner of dividing students among the first grade

classes. It turned out that many lower secondary schools, particularly those located in cities, were „picky” in recruitment; at the same time, many other schools, mostly those in the rural areas, engage in anti-segregation practices. Segregation takes place mainly as the students are placed in units. This leads to creation of homogeneous units consisting of pupils characterized by similar status. In the research summary, the author wrote that „... the Polish education system contributes to unjustified diversification of students. Polish lower secondary schools are actively involved in reproduction of social inequalities” (Dolata, 2002: 181).

In the recent years, a phenomenon, which has caused discussion in Poland, has been the growing diversification of lower secondary schools in terms of results achieved by the pupils. Research concerning this problem has been conducted since 2008 (initially at the Central Examination Board, and since 2012 – at the Education Research Institute). This phenomenon was particularly well visible in large cities and it has been labeled „a quiet revolution in the Polish education system” (Dolata, 2010). The process of polarization of schools took place in the context of the continuous decrease in the number of students, increase in the number of non-public schools, liberalization of the principles of selection of schools outside the assigned administrative areas and increase in popularity of free-market solutions in education (Dolata, Jasińska, Modzelewski, 2012). What are the reasons for the growing diversification of lower secondary schools? The most important factor contributing to their polarization is the preliminary selection. Spatial segregation and differences in the quality of teaching have little impact on this phenomenon.

The objectives of the research

The results of empirical research, presented further below, presents three types of lower secondary schools in Krakow: non-public schools with the best results in the final exams, public lower secondary schools with the best results and public lower secondary schools with poor results. The main objective of this text is an attempt to assess the attractiveness of the schools examined, social composition of their students and the problems faced in their educational activity.

The paper refers to research conducted under my supervision in Krakow in years 2011-2012. The research project consisted of two stages. The objective of the first one (May 2011) was to get familiar with the rules of functioning of the school vouchers, introduced in Krakow in year 2007. This part of the project included interviews conducted with principals of five lower secondary schools (three public and two non-public schools), which had attained the highest results in external exams since 2002. These were complemented by an interview with a member of the municipal council of Krakow, representing the governing party – the Civic Platform. The results of this research have been presented in

separate publications (Pawlak, 2012a; Pawlak, 2012b). Interviews in December 2012 were conducted in schools that had recorded the biggest drops in student numbers in the recent years¹ (above 35% in years 2008-2010). The aim was to discover the cause of such substantial outflow of students from schools and to find out whether it was associated with a search for better school outside one's administrative area under the conditions of educational competition. Among the six public lower secondary schools selected for research, we managed to reach two. Interviews were conducted with the principals, school counselors, teachers and students (in total, eight interviews were conducted, including six individual in-depth interviews with the staff and two group interviews with the students).

The research material used for the purpose of this publication consisted of twelve individual in-depth interviews, including seven with lower secondary school principals, two with school counselors, two with teachers and one with a municipal council representative. I personally conducted eight of these.

Educational problems in Krakow

In the recent years, the local authorities of Krakow have faced some serious challenges, similar to those encountered by other local self-governments, associated with a sudden decrease in the number of students, accompanied by an increase in the educational expenditures per student. In the face of the growing problems, some reforms were implemented to limit the educational expenditures. These included liquidation or restructuring of some of the schools (e.g. establishment of school complexes, size reduction), introduction of educational standards (such as a minimum number of students at schools and in individual units), privatization of school cafeterias, and introduction of the school vouchers schemes (Pawlak, 2012a).

Research conducted under my supervision in years 2011-2012 showed that schools competed strongly on the education market of Krakow. Such competition, under the conditions of demographic low, contributes to flow of the students to the best schools and to emergence of a group of „elite lower secondary schools”. At the same time, the category of „poor” schools has emerged, with poor results and reputation. In effect, lower secondary schools have become a place of strict selection and strengthening of social segregation. The school system gave priority access to the best public and non-public schools to the children from middle-class families. The „lower secondary schools for elites”

¹ I conducted this research with Ms. Amanda Krzywdzińska, M.A., graduate of special education, psychology and sociology of the Academy of Special Education and Ms. Sylwia Bauer, M.A., graduate of sociology and psychology of the Academy of Special Education. The research was financed from the research project no. BSTP 5/11-II, implemented in years 2011-2012.

are located in the city center of Krakow and not in the areas occupied by blue-collar workers, far from the city downtown, where the inhabitants are characterized by a lower education level. The strong competition between schools leads to selection of the candidates – students with the highest grades are enrolled, while those with the poorest grades are rejected. Research conducted by the District Examination Commission in Krakow shows that students attending the best public lower secondary schools outside their administrative areas are characterized by a high intellectual potential (Rappe, 2008).

Non-public lower secondary schools with the best results

Non-public schools constitute a small percentage of all educational institutions in Poland. At the elementary level, they are attended by 1.3% students, and at the lower secondary school level – by 4.3% (Central Statistical Office 2012). Research conducted in the period of systemic transformation after 1989 shows that non-public schools, unlike public schools:

- are located mainly in cities and most are small (units of 15 to 20 students) (Zahorska-Bugaj, 1994);
- are attended by the elite – mainly by children of parents with tertiary education, frequently running their own businesses (Sawiński, 1994; Jung-Miklaszewska, Rusakowska, 1995; Putkiewicz, Wiłkomirska, 2004);
- their students achieve better results in six-grader exams and lower secondary school exams (Central Examination Board, 2013);
- their students earn better grades in Polish language and math six months before the end of their education, throughout all stages of learning; grades of students of non-public schools are much less diversified than grades in public schools (Putkiewicz, Wiłkomirska, 2004);
- are safer – characterized by smaller scale of undesirable behaviors (e.g. aggression against teachers and peers, acts of vandalism, theft) (Putkiewicz, Wiłkomirska, 2004)
- are cheaper – as entities operating on their own account, they painstakingly calculate the profits and losses associated with the activity undertaken (Putkiewicz, Wiłkomirska, 2004)

Non-public schools include: private schools, constituting more than one half of all non-public schools, community schools – about one third, and the least numerous – religious – constituting about one tenth of all non-public schools. Research has shown that social composition of the student population of Catholic schools differs somewhat from social composition of community and private schools. The community is divided along the lines of conservatism – liberalism rather than wealthy – poor (Smak, 2011). On the average, tuition

fees in Catholic schools are lower than in non-public schools. In many cases, the fees are diversified depending on family income (Potocki, 2007).

Krakow is characterized by a high share of non-public schools in the educational system. Almost 8% students attend non-public lower secondary schools. The schools are small (the average number of students is 92, while in lower secondary schools run by the local government, it is 557; the average number of students per unit is 15, and in public schools – 25). Non-public schools have been increasingly popular. In years 2010–2012, the number of students in non-public lower secondary schools increased by 1%, while the number of students in public schools decreased by 5% (*Raport o stanie miasta 2012*). Interviews conducted with lower secondary school principals show that registering their children in non-public schools, the parents hope to make sure that they get „good” and safe education. *A great majority want their children to be successful in adult life. They believe our school to be good and able to prepare them well for university and for adulthood.* (W6). *The parents of our students want their children to be well-educated and to feel comfortable at school.* (W5). Educational aspirations of the parents concerning their children are high: *I notice a scary phenomenon in non-public schooling – parents do their best to give their children everything that they did not have. Those children attend piano lessons, horse riding, tennis, Spanish – because it’s fashionable now. Some children are busy from eight in the morning until eight in the evening. Usually, the mother is the <car driver>.* (W5). Many parents treat education of their children as an investment in the future, calculating in detail the expenditures and returns: *They make the assumption that in a public lower secondary school, sooner or later, private lessons will be needed, so, if the child needs 2 hours per week, at the rate of 50 PLN per hour, it amounts to 400 PLN per month, and our tuition fee is 450 PLN per month”* (W6). Another factor that attracts students to non-public lower secondary school is the fear of public schools: *Public lower secondary schools are perceived by our parents as the nest of evil and there is no way they are going to send their children there.* (W5).

The non-public lower secondary schools of Krakow conduct a careful selection of candidates. Enrollment takes place one year in advance. What are the criteria? *The grade for conduct on the diploma must not be lower than good, and the grade average must be at least 4.3* (W5). Sometimes, children with lower grades are accepted, if they can be expected to behave properly.

At non-public schools, the pupils have more mandatory classes – at least one hour per week more for subjects concluded with exams. This allows the teachers to work very comfortably: *The teacher does not have to <run fast with the curriculum>, and all this results in the child being prepared more thoroughly. We do our best to make sure that the children learn at school, we try to make sure they are not overburdened with homework.* (W5). Small classes contribute to

individual treatment of the students by teachers. A significant feature of non-public schools are close relations between the teachers and the parents. *We have worked out a model of communication with the parents. It is not an electronic grade register but direct contact. If a given student gets many poor grades, the class supervisor is obliged to contact the parents by phone. The parents can talk to teachers at any time. There are meetings and open school days, during which we are at the disposal of the parents.* (W6). *Communication is simpler here than in the public schools, although some parents registering their children at non-public schools seem to believe that the school should take care of everything, and their participation in the education process is reduced to a minimum. These parents constitute a small minority. Most parents care about their children, and, at the same time, they have specific expectations, for instance, regarding foreign language classes* (W5).

The principals declare that their students come mainly from families, in which the parents have tertiary education. They live either in Krakow or in the suburbs of the city. *The inhabitants of Krakow, living in the most attractive areas, for instance, in the most expensive districts. These include the <natives of Krakow> from the downtown area. At the same time, we have a growing number of children traveling to school from outside the city – their parents have built houses in the suburbs* (W5). It has been noted that „lack of a shared playground” hinders integration of the pupils: *The parents have built their houses in the suburbs and the children have to be driven to school. One of the problems faced by non-public schools is lack of common space, where the children could meet after classes. Their shared playground is the Internet.* (W5). The principals notice that their students come from families, which know little of the problems of the poor: *We have a Film Academy at the school, and there was a showing of a movie, which depicts the darkest side of Wałbrzych. The students said later that the movie was surely very interesting, but Poland did not look like that and it had to be the director’s trick of some kind.* (W5).

Public lower secondary schools with the best results

While non-public schools engage openly in selection of candidates, in public lower secondary schools, the selection process is more or less concealed. Public lower secondary schools are assigned to administrative districts, inhabited by students, who cannot be rejected in the enrollment process. For these students, general education classes are established. Recruitment is organized for the remaining classes. Students from outside the administrative area are enrolled in „profile-specific” classes (math and IT science, biology and chemistry). Candidates for classes with extended language programmed (e.g. German, French) have to pass a language fluency exam. According to the principals, students from outside the administrative area constitute about 70-80% of

all students of the best lower secondary schools. The parents of these students are involved in education of their children, they keep in touch with the schools, they help the children do their homework and they organize extracurricular activities for them. Many of them are university graduates, working in the city downtown. They work as doctors, lawyers, businessmen, academic teachers. Students from outside the administrative areas, attending the best lower secondary schools, are characterized by high intellectual potential and educational aspirations. *Success is imprinted into the family life of these children. The expectations of their parents are very high. Sometimes, when the teacher is sick, for instance, for two weeks, the class supervisor is asked by the parents whether such absence is not too long, and they suggest it is time to look for a substitute* (W2).

On the other hand, children belonging to the administrative district come from families, which differ in terms of their financial situation and occupation of the parents. *The local inhabitants vary. There is a son of a renowned professor, but there are also kids from the slums, hidden behind the facades of tenement house* (W3). *Students from the administrative district vary – there are contest and competition laureates, as well as ordinary students, with substantial needs, with varying intellectual and environmental backgrounds. Very often, they are weaker in terms of their intellectual potential; some are , but they lack family support* (W2).

The principals believe that „mixing” of children living in the administrative area and those from the outside results in raising of the grades achieved by the poorest students as the expectations are high towards everyone. *The entire school is focused on learning, on success. These children, whose potential is lower due to family reasons, they lack support at home, thanks to a positive school community, which exerts positive influence on them, are able to achieve a success* (W2). In order to raise the education system, many extracurricular activities are offered. *This explains the popularity of our school – we offer something more, we have facultative classes in math, physics, IT, chemistry, biology, Polish and English language, geography. The children get all of these as extracurricular activities.* (W2).

The principals are convinced that education of talented students requires specific skills of the teachers. *I was a supervisor of classes with great aspirations – they needed a lot of care, because the children came with good grades, the average of 5.5, they were like <shining bright stars> in their previous schools, smart, hard-working, and now they can't understand how it's possible they're no longer the best.* (W2). Sometimes, there are problems with students of the general education classes. *If the critical mass is exceeded, no matter whether there are 5 or 7 people causing problems, they will bring everybody else down. If my <little rascals> get together in one class, I wait for the first problem to emerge and then I talk to them as a warning. One more time, and they are transferred to another class, I speak to the parents and I tell them the boys attract each other and exert mutual negative impact on one another,*

and they are expected to study hard (W3). One of the principals noted that in his school, the students from the administrative district failed to integrate with those from the outside. We usually have two language classes and one class for the local students. There is a substantial difference in the intellectual level of these students. To be honest, they do not integrate with each other. The classes tend to stick together. There is no contact, even though they study in the same building, there are no iron bars to separate them, they are in adjacent rooms, and still they live in their vacuum tight worlds, they have no common language. (W1).

Public lower secondary schools with poor results

Finally, let us present lower secondary schools, which achieve poor results in the final exams and have recorded the highest rates of student outflow in the recent years. These schools are located far from downtown, in large settlements inhabited by a population characterized by low education, with a majority of blue-collar workers. A principal of one of the „good” lower secondary schools has commented as follows on the „poor” ones: *They struggle to keep the schools going, to maintain their workplaces, and their recruitment processes function differently. The requirements are the same, but we accept children with scores of 90 to 100, and they accept those with 30. In fact, they accept everyone. (W2).* A similar statement was made by a principal of one of the „poor” schools: *District schools are doomed to accept children from the district. I have no arguments here, I cannot say: <I'm sorry, Chris, your grades are low, go somewhere else.> No, I will enroll such child and that's it. There's nothing else I can do. Many schools have education and care centers and orphanages in their districts, and these children are not easy to work with. (W9).*

What are the families of students attending schools <that need assistance>? *It's a total mix-up – the principal said – from academics, journalists, enterprises, to a great number of the unemployed and those running their own farms. (W7).* Another principal said: *The students come from various families. Most of them are characterized by rather low income, allowing them to function more or less normally. A great majority are families, in which both of the parents work until late evening – we have to organize meetings for the parents late enough to make sure they are able to attend. There is also a much smaller group of people, who benefitted from the system transformation, they run some businesses. There are some single fathers and mothers. (W9).* Research shows that most of the children from these families spend their free time with their peers in the playgrounds; only a few attend extracurricular activities. *Some get private lessons, but they are really a minority. Mostly these are provided for individual subjects, as needed, by the end of the semester or the school year. For instance, if a child's aunt is good at chemistry, they will assist the child. (W9).* Some of the first-graders have not mastered fluent reading and writing.

Why do the parents send their children to district schools? The principals declare that some of them have or had older children at these schools and thus they have been able to „test” them. Some parents want their children to attend a school nearby, to avoid loss of time associated with traveling. Usually, the parents do not travel to work to the downtown. Each year, there are several students „returning to the district” after they failed to achieve a success in other schools.

According to estimates made by the principals, around 70% of students living in the district choose to attend schools outside. A great part of these are children from families with extensive ambitions. *Everyone would like to declare their child attends the best lower secondary school. (W7).* The principals have noted a visible tendency of „movement towards downtown”. The parents working there take the children by car and pick them up after work. *It’s easier to put the children in the car and pick them up later to have them under control than leave them, go alone, and then keep checking during the day whether they are home or not. (W7).* Some of the parents fear for the safety of their children at the local school. *Like in city center, we have conflicts here, but in our case, these are conflicts between individual housing estates, on a local scale, for instance, between sports fans. (W7).*

The persons interviewed often referred to the conflicts and problems faced. *Very often, our students are neighbors. If their grandparents and their parents used to fight, so do the children (W7).* The local conflicts between housing estates are also transferred to lower secondary schools. *They come in large groups from elementary schools, they all know one another. And the groups clash, and the balance of power is already established. (W7).*

A serious problem is lack of appropriate parental care. *They are brought up differently, by the computers, the modern media, the parents no longer have so much time for them. Nowadays, one works not from 7 a.m. until 3 p.m., but from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m or from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. The parents cede everything to the school now: the school should teach, educate, prepare. (W8).* *The basic problem is lack of direct contact with other people. We are all in a hurry, and so are the parents. There’s little direct talk. The parents don’t talk to the children – not because they don’t want to or aren’t qualified to do it, but simply because they do not have the time (W11).* Many parents fail to help their children do their homework. *In fact, the parents force the school to make sure the child does their homework at school. So that the child comes back home and doesn’t even mention the school (W8).* Some are helpless when it comes to upbringing. *The parents often have no idea what to do – all of a sudden, they have an unruly, wild adolescent at home, and they are shocked: <what has happened to my Johnny?> (W12).* Sometimes, the students turn to teachers in difficult situations. *The children come and they report problems. There are many dramatic situations, for instance, the child is unable to spend the night at home, because their mum has just found a new partner and the partner does not accept the fact that she has children. (W9).*

In the lower secondary schools examined, there are many behavioral problems. The students are impressed by vulgarity, mocking of others, pushing, swearing, standing up to the teachers and squabbles. There are fights. *The children fight, these are not <death struggles> using sharp tools, but they pummel each other. The boys are often unaware of how strong they are. In my class, one student hit the other one so strongly that the victim could not walk. (W12). Very often, they are unbelievably insolent, vulgar, they seem to think we wish for the worst for them, we want to do everything out of spite (W9).* Most problems are caused by persons, who have not had the proper role models at home. Lack of motivation to study is a serious problem. *They used to have passions, but not anymore. There used to be good classes, very efficient at <pushing up> the poor students. It was a pleasure to teach them. (W7).*

Conclusions

The aim of the educational research introduced by the Polish government in the period of transformation was to ensure equal opportunities for children and young people, especially for those from poor families by giving them an easier access to different schools and high quality education. It was expected that lower secondary schools would contribute to raising of the intellectual level of the youth, and facilitate access to upper secondary schools.

The research presented in the paper concentrates on three categories of lower secondary schools. The first consists of elite non-public schools, which ensure selection of their candidates in terms of educational achievements and social background, focused on high quality of education. The second – of the best public lower secondary schools – in many aspects similar to the non-public schools, applying preliminary segregation and internal division. The third type are schools facing enormous problems and substantial education needs, serving students from poor families, requiring urgent assistance from the authorities and the local institutions.

The research conducted indicates that the education policy of the local authorities of Krakow is not effective in terms of equalization of opportunities of the children and youth from socially neglected and marginalized communities. In the existing situation, it is necessary to develop a desegregation programmed in education, which would lead to emergence of a socially diversified environment in lower secondary schools (limitation of selection, random enrollment of candidates from outside the administrative area) and support schools with substantial needs (psychological and teaching assistance, trainings for teachers, additional funds for extracurricular activities). The present educational policy of the municipal authorities has led to reduction of expenditures for education through liquidation of schools, dismissal of teachers and establishment of large schools and school units, which will contribute in the future to progressing

polarization of lower secondary schools and emergence of new problems associated with the schooling system.

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Роберт Павлак. Шкільна реформа та освітні нерівності в посткомуністичній Польщі¹

Стаття присвячена аналізу результатів дослідження стратифікації в шкільній системі Польщі. Дослідження було проведено в колишній польській столиці Кракові в 2011-2012 роках та базується на опрацюванні статистичних даних місцевої системи освіти, індивідуальних глибинних інтерв'ю з

¹ Переклад з англійської С. Курбатова.

директорами та вчителями початкової середньої школи, а також представниками місцевої влади. Особливу увагу було приділено політикам набору до шкіл, нерівному доступу до освіти представників різних соціальних верств та освітнім стратегіям місцевої влади. В результаті було ідентифіковано три типи початкових середніх шкіл: 1) елітні приватні школи; 2) кращі публічні школи та 3) школи для представників незаможних верств населення із значними проблемами та освітніми потребами. Зроблено висновок, що освітня політика органів місцевого самоврядування Кракова не є ефективною для зрівнювання можливостей навчання дітей та молоді з соціально незахищених та маргінальних груп.

***Ключові слова:** освіта, освітня реформа, соціальні нерівності, початкові середні школи, освітня політика, Польща.*

Роберт Павлак. Школьная реформа и неравенство в образовании в посткоммунистической Польше

Статья посвящена анализу результатов исследования стратификации в школьной системе Польши. Исследование было проведено в бывшей польской столице Кракове в 2011-2012 годах и базируется на обработке статистических данных местной системы образования, индивидуальных глубинных интервью с директорами и учителями начальных средних школ, а также представителями местной власти. Особое внимание было уделено политике набора в школы, неравному доступу к образованию представителей разных социальных слоев и образовательным стратегиям местной власти. В результате было идентифицировано три типа начальных средних школ: 1) элитные частные школы; 2) лучшие публичные школы и 3) школы для представителей малоимущих слоев населения со значительными проблемами и образовательными потребностями. Сделан вывод, что образовательная политика органов местного самоуправления Краков не является эффективной для уравнивания возможностей обучения детей и молодежи из социально незащищенных и маргинальных групп.

***Ключевые слова:** образование, образовательная реформа, социальное неравенство, начальные средние школы, образовательная политика, Польша.*

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