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The Field of Education in Reconstruction as the Consequence of COVID Pandemic Rebuilding Education? Mapping Landscapes of Changes in the COVID-19 Era

Abstract

The pandemic outbreak in 2020 has influenced all aspects of social life. We focus on the education system and its impact on social (in)equality using Poland's case to analyse them, through the notion of Bordieuan social field and knowledge-power relations. We claim that lockdown put into motion important processes or even systemic changes of education, by the emancipation and empowerment mechanism of social actors that aspire to be an active part of the educational field. In Poland, we deal with a static, centralized and hierarchic system. The time of pandemic made the field of education more dynamic. New actors were invited with the result that the power-knowledge relations changed.

In this frame, we put the question about educational inequalities. We ask how the educational field is changing in face of the unforeseen and scarcely manageable global pandemic risk. Do they mean less in the global pandemic context or, on the contrary, are they strengthened?

Keywords

education, schools, COVID-19 pandemic, Poland, inequalities, field of education.

1. Introduction

The education system all around the world was hit hard by the attack of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in spring 2020. Schools were closed and remote teaching was introduced. According to UNESCO data,¹ 1.2 billion students in the world were affected by the pandemic. Students have returned to schools, and continue to do so, in very diverse forms. Moreover, it may turn out not to have been just a difficult, closed chapter, since similar situations may recur. The “new normality” means observing sanitary regimes and maintaining physical distance. The object of our interest is the diagnosed consequences of remote education for relations within the education system, with a focus on questions of educational inequalities. We pose a question about potential changes in the relations of social actors, the balance of power of participants in the educational system, and the prospect of an increase or decrease in educational inequalities.

At the first glance the world of remote education might have less educational barriers. Despite the difference in material status of the family and place of residence, it might seem that every pupil could participate in lessons at school, but also, in order to benefit from global virtual educational resources (in Poland, as in many other countries OECD 2021, it was the task of schools and local authorities to ensure access to the computer and the internet). Can we therefore conclude that ensuring equal educational opportunities – the objective of most educational reforms² – is within reach? Or do we face new dividing lines? What are the factors that generate educational inequalities under pandemic conditions, and what will influence educational opportunities in the post-pandemic school?

By situation analysis of the education system before the outbreak of the pandemic and several months later, we demonstrate the coping strategies of schools in Poland, but also describe more universally, the potential these strategies provide (not always conceptions of change, but sometimes strategies for returning to the time before the pandemic). We ask if, and how, the local/national educational field is changing in the face of the unexpected and scarcely manageable global risk and try to answer this question, while at the same time, considering the context of educational inequalities. Our hypothesis is that this situation

¹ UNESCO, *When schools shut. Gendered impacts of COVID-19 school closures*, 2021, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379270> (25.04.2022).

² M. Ślusarczyk, *Spory o edukację wczoraj i dziś: społeczny, polityczny i kulturowy kontekst reform oświatowych – porównanie Polski i Niemiec*, Cracow 2010, Oficyna Wydawnicza AFM.

has interfered in old dividing lines, partly changing their significance and scale of influence (e.g. socio-economic capital, space, gender), as well as questioning the previously employed strategies of inclusion.

2. Educational system in Poland – regional disparities and social inequalities

Taking the Polish educational system as a case study, we need to begin by explaining the background the conditions in which it developed in the twentieth and twenty-first century. Firstly, this occurred in the context of a changing political situation. The final stage is the next change in 1989 and the building of a democratic state. The second factor is the political instability and lack of agreement between the main political forces on the shaping of the education system³. The third determinant are infrastructural and financial shortages, where poorer regions were affected by an accumulation of inequalities.

Moreover, the development of an educational administration system is also crucial, with focus on shifting a part of the responsibility for education on NGOs, churches or religious organisations.⁴ They are natural social actors in education, but acting as a "proxy" state, so this alters their situation and means of activity. Although they may seem responsible for preventing even greater social stratification, since the private education landscape is diverse, in many cases their activity is counter-egalitarian. The reason is the final, fourth determinant of development of education in Poland – the strong link in the social views between investment in "good" education, and a child's opportunities in future life. While maintaining the distinct axis of inequality mentioned at the beginning of this section, this factor has also introduced an additional dimension – habitus,⁵ a certain set of attitudes, dispositions and potentials. This is also related to the concepts of cultural, social and economic capital, generating resources, allowing people to pursue higher educational

³ M. Ślusarczyk, *Spory o edukację...*, p. 31.

⁴ M. Ślusarczyk, P. Pustułka, L. Balduzzi, A. Lazzari, J. de Mets, J. *Comparing ECEC across Italy, Poland and Belgium*, 2018, http://www.tracks.socjologia.uj.edu.pl/documents/138243923/140250127/Comparing+ECEC_full+report_1.0_final.pdf/4b0d2361-9889-40b2-9339-24eb2bc62669 (25.04.2022).

⁵ P. Bourdieu, J.-C. Passeron, *Reprodukcja. Elementy teorii systemu nauczania*, Warszawa 1990, PWN.

aspirations of students and/or their parents. What is important and significant for social inequalities, are both the way the education system is organised, and the engagement of key social actors with links to education, including autonomous actions by local authorities and schools or cooperation with NGOs or universities. Even if the same tracking age applies for the whole system or there are uniform nationwide examinations,⁶ school activities, sometimes combined with cooperation with external actors, can weaken the association between family socio-economic status and student achievement.⁷ At the same time, some actors will withdraw, creating alternative schools and transferring the potential for innovation outside the public system.

3. Methodology

In keeping with these principles, we identify actors who have various objectives and values, who employ diverse strategies to obtain power. In this article, we analyse how the educational field has changed during the pandemic and how that has affected educational inequalities. The data source was material collected between March 2020 and February 2021, when schools in Poland were shut down because of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, opening after the holidays, and then shut down again in October/November.⁸

The key words used for searching for materials were: education, pandemic, school and lockdown. Based on a preliminary analysis, we identified the following types of sources for further systematic analysis:

- Online editions of daily newspapers (Gazeta Wyborcza, Dziennik Polski), news websites (Onet, Wirtualna Polska, Interia), educational portals and institution pages.

⁶ T. Bol, J. Witschge, H. Van de Werfhorst, J. Dronkers, *Curricular tracking and central examinations: counterbalancing the impact of social background on student achievement in 36 countries*, "Social Forces" 92 (2014) 4, pp. 1545–1572.

⁷ J. Lavrijsen, I. Nicaise, *New empirical evidence on the effect of educational tracking on social inequalities in reading achievement*, "European Educational Research Journal" 14 (2015) 3–4, pp. 206–221.

⁸ Schools were closed at the end of October / beginning of November. Primary schools returned to residential learning for grades 1-3 on 18 January 2021, with the rest of the primary grades and secondary schools provided online teaching till the end of school year in June 2021.

- Social media groups bringing together social actors (teachers, school headteachers, educational activists), focused on analysis of the situation and building conceptions for the work of schools during the pandemic/designing future changes. Teachers' groups (including people involved in informal educational initiatives) acting as support networks (sharing materials, co-teaching classes).
- Parents' groups in social media forming information and protest networks, geared towards exerting pressure for children's return to schools, or alternatively calling for continuation of remote teaching.

The material, though exploratory, is also very extensive. We assembled more than 370 initiatives which had a place on the internet and were aimed at pupils, schools, teachers, parents, or educational authorities. The material was divided into three groups: actions of public institutions (ministry, local authorities, cultural institutions), grassroots initiatives (teachers, educators, educational activists), and non-school activities (related to education, but not connected to initiatives concerning remote learning).

The analysis was inspired by Clarke's situational analysis.⁹ The main objective is to understand the elements of a situation and the relations between them, by constructing three types of maps: situational (which represent people, institutions, non-material aspects and relations between them; they assume a visual depiction of the situation); social worlds (social actors, areas of engagement and the discourses within which negotiations take place); and positional (representing the positions occupied and not occupied in the discourse in question).

We focused on the situational map because the actors, institutions and non-material aspects in the pandemic situation were crucial. We asked questions about who and what is important in the situation, what elements make a difference in the situation.¹⁰ After analysing data, we decided to distinguish five categories to construct a situational map:

- **Transmitting actors** – senders of educational contents. Clarke distinguishes active (creating the discourses) and passive actors (embroiled in them). We introduced a modification in this area by identifying transmitting actors of educational contents, recipient actors, and

⁹ A. E. Clarke, *Situational analyses: Grounded theory mapping after the postmodern turn*, "Symbolic interaction" 26 (2003) 4, pp. 553–576.

¹⁰ A. E. Clarke, *Situational analyses...*, p. 561.

co-participant actors – these are neither transmitters nor direct recipients, but their presence in the educational field is significant. Actors produce a message and transmit it, and possess sanctions allowing them to enforce an interaction.

- **Recipient actors.** We identify this type of actors because, although they are not active actors, transmitters take them into account when constructing their messages. They are mainly parents, and in some cases, the pupils themselves. Olson¹¹ refers to them as collective actors and a latent group.
- **Co-participant actors** are those to whom the message is not addressed, but it may be mediated through them (parents explaining the contents of a lesson to younger children, or migrant children who need support with an educational platform). Since they have – often for the first time – such close contact and access to the contents of the educational transmission, they begin to play an active role, not only accepting but also contesting the contents, methods or pupils' workload.
- **Material factors** – the main role in this case was played by communications tools such as computers, telephones and tablets, as well as telecommunications technologies providing adequate internet access or otherwise.
- **Non-material factors** – values and expectations associated with education (the assumption that it is worth trying versus pressure on results), legal solutions (acts or decrees) placing responsibility as well as opportunities at specific levels (e.g., regarding return to school, which is up to headteachers in consultation with epidemiological supervision institutions).

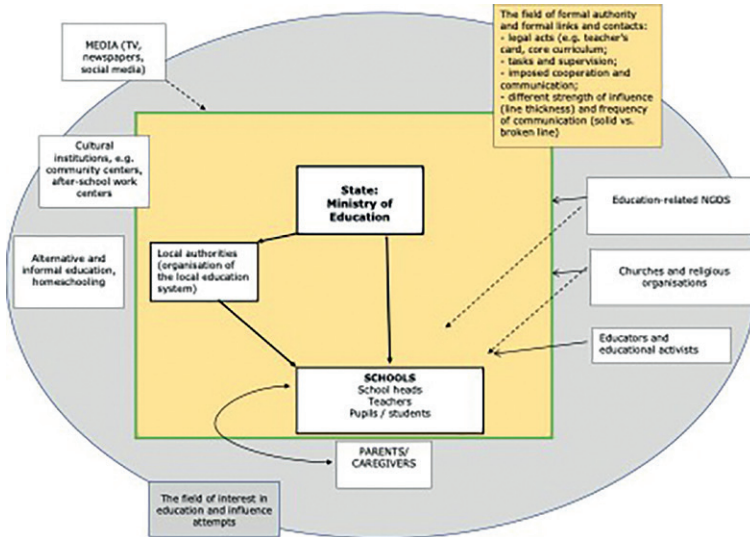
The analysis allows maps to be produced, and in subsequent stages, the relations between the various elements can be outlined. Onto these maps, we can overlay the “traditional” dividing lines generating educational inequalities as well as the coping strategies and struggles for domination entered by specific groups of actors.

¹¹ M. Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*, Cambridge 1965, Harvard University Press.

4. Balances of power – defining social actors in education and their influence

Our analysis is based on a comparison of the world before and during the pandemic. By showing the new and old balances of power (Fig 1 and 2), our main intention is to address those mechanisms and tools which could be harnessed to equalise educational opportunities and reduce inequalities.

Figure 1. Map of field of education in Poland before pandemic outbreak in March 2020



The “old” educational system (cf. Fig. 1) results from the determinants described in previous sections. Following Archer’s analysis,¹² the central actor of this map is the state, that decides on the structure of the system, teaching curriculum and selection thresholds. In the functional context, this can be explained by ensuring equality of opportunities, while critical concepts emphasise its role in realising the interests of upper classes.¹³ As a result, all changes either

¹² M. Archer, *Social Origins of Educational Systems*, Londyn 1984, SAGE Publications.

¹³ P. Bourdieu, J.-C. Passeron, Reprodukcyjność. *Elementy teorii systemu nauczania...*; S. Bowles, H. Gintis, *Schooling in capitalist America revisited*, “Sociology of education” (2002), pp. 1–18.

start from the state or pass through it, but they are legitimised. The state aspires to mark out an epistemic community defining the fundamental values around which education is constructed. However, its activity is political in nature, becoming a representative of an interest group.

The second actor that works together with the state, while also implementing the premises of educational policy, is local authorities. The reform of 1999 envisaged a certain decentralisation of the system, giving local authorities an influence on forming the school network, the organisation of the local education system and staffing policy. At the same time, it left them heavily dependent with respect to other educational issues.¹⁴ The third actor is schools, understood particularly as the environments of teachers' work – this is also how they are often treated in the political context. – as a professional protecting its privileges.

We also see certain actors in the field of education; however, their position is not particularly strong, and their activities are possible only “by invitation”. Those who come to mind are parents, NGOs, and educators. They are concentrated around certain practices and focused upon building a favourable educational environment, albeit only to a limited extent (sometimes only for their own children or communities). With the state playing such a dominant role, their move towards the centre, entry to the epistemic community and participation in negotiating values, is unlikely, as participation in the discourse results rather from success in becoming a significant interest group. Of particular interest in this group are parents who are often treated as claimants, admittedly interested in the school for the sake of their children, but lacking the necessary knowledge to influence changes and unacquainted with the realities of school-work.¹⁵ Despite the possibilities created by law to co-shape the school's work concept, they are most often invited to perform caring tasks and to participate in financing and organising school activities.

Apart from the state (the organiser of the education system), local authorities (executors and administrators of funds), and schools, we also marked NGOs and religious organisations on the map. The field of education is described precisely in laws (education acts, core curriculum, teacher's charter) and the role of each actor is specifically defined. The door remains open for alternative

¹⁴ M. Ślusarczyk, *Spory o edukację...*, p. 40.

¹⁵ B. Dusza, *Współpraca nauczycieli z rodzicami – perspektywa nauczycieli (raport z badań przeprowadzonych wśród nauczycieli klas gimnazjalnych)*, “Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Humanitas” 16 (2018), pp. 149–155.

forms of education, yet these are still niche activities, which we could describe as being external to the system.

In the field of education described as such, we observe discrepancies in access to educational resources, resulting in inequalities. Firstly, there are economic factors, which were largely taken into consideration in the educational changes, translating at least into quantitative results. Additionally, however, there are cultural factors, namely habitus of the pupils' families, barely perceptible elements related to the culture of educational organisations, and the institution of family,¹⁶ which has a decisive impact on raising children and informal education, as well as local spatial contexts. Numerous studies also discuss the question of what has a decisive impact on inequalities in cognitive abilities.¹⁷ Schools, not only in Poland, experienced unprecedented "losing of pupils", who failed to log into systems or react to messages.¹⁸

Finally, the third path of practices means leaving the system or acting on the fringes. This applies to alternative schools, home-schooling, and the latest activity in the Polish reality, unschooling. In this case, the actors concentrate on negotiating the conditions of formal recognition of the education obtained by pupils but fight for the possibility to work in accordance with their values. Although these are extra-systemic activities, in many cases, the elements of these practices also permeate schools in the system.

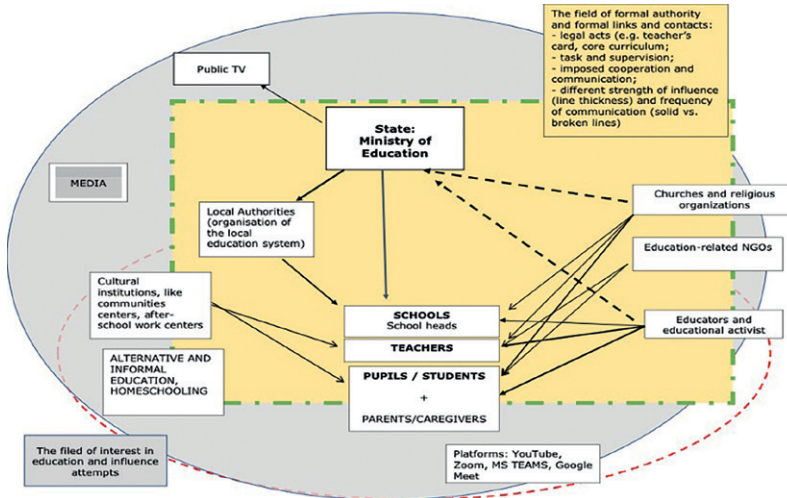
The outbreak of the pandemic and the switch to remote teaching overnight resulted in a change in the educational scene. The below map 2 (Fig. 2) shows the situation during the pandemic (March 2020–February 2021 in Poland).

¹⁶ J. Bartak, *Instytucjonalne uwarunkowania nierówności szans edukacyjnych w Polsce*, "Nierówności społeczne a wzrost gospodarczy" 57 (2019), pp. 387–401.

¹⁷ P.T. von Hippel, J. Workman, D. Downey, *Inequality in reading and math skills forms mainly before kindergarten: A replication, and partial correction, of >Are schools the great equalizer?<*, "Sociology of Education" 91 (2018) 4, pp. 323–357.

¹⁸ A. Żądło, *Dzieci po prostu znikają. Szkoła traci z nimi kontakt, nikt nie wie, co się dzieje*, "Newsweek" (2021), <https://www.newsweek.pl/swiat/spoleczenstwo/szkola-podczasepidemii-dzieci-znikaja-nikt-nie-wie-co-sie-z-nimi-dzieje/0z4fkx4> (15.06.2021).

Figure 2. Map of field of education in Poland after pandemic outbreak in March 2020



The change visible in map 2, mainly concerns the boundaries of the field of education. At first, the pandemic situation has made these boundaries more flexible, and although this situation has been assumed to be extraordinary, in our view it will not be possible to close these borders again fully, even if the state – as we are seeing – makes such efforts. Actors whose activity in the field was hitherto marginalised or treated as niche, acquired a space for their actions. Schools, which had previously been closed systems, were – by necessity – opened, and teachers, whose power had so far been based on access to knowledge resources, had to reconcile themselves with the fact that they no longer had a monopoly on either power or knowledge. Remote teaching gave pupils legitimisation and validating use of media, including online platforms, and schools, which had previously challenged the role of media (e.g., banning use of mobile telephones in school), had to accept the new situation. The state, which had to-date been the depository of power, knowledge, and values in education, building its position with the help of hierarchical and scarcely accessible (especially for pupils and parents) communications strategies and their agents (education boards, head-teachers), had to seek for a direct communication channel with pupils. To the same degree the official educational resources were made available to all pupils. Other actors were also activated in the field of education, such as educators,

educational activists, NGOs and cultural institutions. These actors' online initiatives aimed at pupils, can be treated as overcoming unequal space-related tendencies. The activity of such institutions made it possible for everybody to participate in high-culture events and educational actions, regardless of their place of residence and economic resources, as these events were, for some time, free of charge. Moreover, these were not new actors, but those operating on the fringes of the system or outside it for years, as in the case of unschooling activities. In the new situation, they became active participants in the dialogue, inviting debate on the classical shape of school and proposing new solutions. New actors and providers of information and teaching channels also appeared, such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom, as well as social media, not previously regarded as official educational venues.

We can divide all these activities according to whether they take place at the macro, meso or micro level. Activities at the macro level were mainly public ones, with the state playing an active role. Moreover, we can also place at this level, the actions of certain institutions whose location and funding also gave them public status, such as the Warsaw Rising Museum, which for several months offered free lectures. Still, this access remained ostensible for part of the society, because it required equipment, which was particularly problematic for families with more school-age children,¹⁹ and good access to the Internet, which is still not a given in some regions of Poland.²⁰

At the meso level we can identify local authorities, which attempted to ensure the requisite infrastructure, organising educational platforms, as well as purchasing computer equipment to borrow. Finally, the micro level comprises firstly the activities of specific schools, but also grassroots initiatives offered almost around the system. These were especially public educational schemes such as the "Invite me to your lesson" campaign, a teaching resource with good practices. This is a group formed in early May 2020, with the objective of inviting teachers and educators to teach remote lessons in their classes. However, this level was also characterised by educational networks aiming to find innovative

¹⁹ J. Kurzępa, K. Leszczyński, M. Przybysz, *Uczniowie a pandemia*, Lublin 2021, Wydawnictwo Academicon.

²⁰ A. Bartol, J. Herbst, A. Pierścińska, *Wykluczenie społeczno-cyfrowe w Polsce. Stan zjawiska, trendy, rekomendacje*, Fundacja Stocznia 2021, https://admin.fundacja.orange.pl/app/uploads/2021/11/RAPORT_WYKLUCZENIE-S POLECZNO -CYFROWE-W-POLSCE_2021.pdf (26.04.2022).

educational solutions and analysing opportunities for changing the system.²¹ These networks encompassed both activities in the virtual space,²² and a collaboration between schools, foundations, and educational associations. Lastly, such grassroots initiatives also included numerous activities taking place outside the system: from those popularising science on YouTube, to commercial activities of educational companies.

However, the key change is the school-home relationship. At the time of the lockdown, the school became an “extension” of the family, the achievement of the educational goals set by teachers depended to a large extent upon the supporting students by family members. It required technical help and adequate working conditions, but usually also the explanation of the sent tasks and exercises, as well as motivation and mental support. The crucial factor is whether schools assume that this may be contributing to the broadening of the role of parents in the school. In Autumn 2020, during the short period of school reopening, it seemed that most schools expected parents to withdraw to their previous role of simply accepting school programs and activities. As a result, we have been, and still are, dealing with criticism about the education system, while the remote teaching period serves as an argument that schools, their organization, and their mode of operation are now known “inside out” to the parents. They feel now permitted to contest all school decisions which they find improper. The question remains as to what extent this is transformed into activity leading to system change. Our analysis suggests that there are three responses. The first is subordination, which does not exclude criticism, but there is no readiness for action; parents remain (reluctant) recipients of content and coerced co-operators in remote learning. The second and third reactions are resistance strategies. One form is withdrawal and hence the increase in the number of families opting for home-schooling.²³ Finally, an attempt is to be made

²¹ These networks encompasses both activities in the virtual space, such as Szkoła Minimalna (Minimal School), EduKlaster (EduCluster), #Działamy (#Let’s Act), Dealerzy Wiedzy (Knowledge Dealers), and those that are part of collaboration between schools or educational associations, e.g. Budząca się szkoła (Waking-up school).

²² Such as Szkoła Minimalna (Minimal School), EduKlaster, #Działamy (#Let’s Act), Dealerzy Wiedzy (Knowledge Dealers).

²³ P. Nowosielska, K. Klinger, *Rodzice sami zabrali się za naukę dzieci. Rośnie liczba wniosków o edukację domową*, “Serwis Gazeta Prawna” (2020), <https://serwis.gazetaprawna.pl/edukacja/artykuly/1491006,edukacja-domowa-w-polsce-wniosek-szkola-egzaminy.html> (5.12.2021).

for change to be implemented. In the following months of the pandemic and school closures, these groups began to crystallise, not in the main school discourse, but within non-public and alternative education. On the one hand, they failed to engage with the state, that ultimately defined the pandemic teaching situation as a transitional period. Among the proposed changes upon return to school are three proposals: lowering in 2021 (as in 2020), the level of academic difficulty (performance in?) for the baccalaureate, temporarily increasing the hours of physical education (since it was considered that in the pandemic the risk of obesity increases), and temporarily increasing the hours of remedial classes to “catch up with the programme”. Radical proposals to abolish the post-primary school, i.e. school-leaving test and the baccalaureate were not adopted. Moreover, by focusing on the correct but far-reaching plans for a fundamental change in the philosophy of teaching (moving away from assessment, abolishing exams, moving away from encyclopedism towards shaping soft competencies), they defined most parents as being the problem. These parents, in the course of focusing on their children’s achievements, do not understand, as the reform groups believe, the need for revolutionary change. A significant proportion of teachers, described as hostile to changing the culture of teaching, are regarded as similarly problematic.

The time of the pandemic has been one of unprecedented creativity, which is undoubtedly advantageous for teaching. The question, however, remains whether this also translates into a better situation in terms of equality of educational opportunities, and which good practices could prove to be methods for reducing educational inequalities. Here, we also deal with a class dimension, potentially translating into inequalities. One of the leaders of the reformation communities postulated tolerating backlogs in learning from the period of remote learning (according to the World Bank,²⁴ remote learners master up to 70% of the material less), explained by the fact that shaping soft and relational competences is more important, which is lacking in systemic school programmes. This explanation is correct, but it ignores the fact that school is still a channel of social mobility; and formal education has a significant impact on the life chances of individuals. The result, in our view, is a form of discourse which we define as closing discourses of change, failing to consider the needs, expectations and

²⁴ World Bank, *The World Bank’s Education Response to Covid-19*, 2020 <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/487971608326640355-0090022020/original/ExternalWBEDUResponsetoCOVIDDec15FINAL.pdf> (15.12.2020).

knowledge of other social actors, their willingness to change and take risks, and therefore precisely, the differentiated habitus. The same is true of teachers, who, additionally, when subjected to harsh criticism, activate defence mechanisms. As a result, after the pandemic, we may have a situation where the alternative education community will be strengthened, but public education, which is the dominant form, will remain without significant changes, once again increasing class-based educational differences. This is more likely because, as we point out, there is so far no activity on the part of the state that has suggested greater socialisation of schools. There are civic proposals, as well as a meeting in the Polish Senate, but at the same time the current Minister postulates a return to greater centralisation of education.²⁵

5. The juggling between sustainable changes or temporary activities?

As Colao et al state.²⁶, the COVID-19 crisis gave as a chance, to re-assess what type of school we want for the future. The UNESCO Chair of Education and Sustainability Development, suggests that now it is high time to promote wellbeing and knowledge-based health culture. Will we opt for this?

Schools in Poland – like in most countries – were not well prepared for implementing remote education. The report on readiness for digitalisation, as well as other studies,²⁷ suggested that the problem was both the infrastructure and low competences of teachers, as well as lack of cultural readiness for change. Application of digital technologies was generally confined to screening of films and the use of multimedia presentations, with interactive quizzes or games less frequent. Similarly, to UNESCO, experts proposed to concentrate first on the psychological needs of young people, especially related to social interaction,

²⁵ P. Czarnek, *System nadzoru nad szkołami należy centralizować*, “Rzeczpospolita” (2021), <https://www.rp.pl/edukacja/art287191-czarnek-system-nadzoru-nad-szkolami-nalezy-centralizowac> (20.03.2021).

²⁶ A. Colao, P. Piscitelli, M. Pulimen, S. Colazzo, A. Miani, S. Giannini, *Rethinking the role of Education*, “The Lancet, Public Health” 5 (2020) 7.

²⁷ A. Schleicher, *The impact of COVID-19 on Education. Insight from Education at Glance*, OECD 2020, <https://www.oecd.org/education/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-education-insights-education-at-a-glance-2020.pdf> (15.12.2021).

and only afterwards on teaching.²⁸ International research reports in the ensuing months of the pandemic, pointed to the dangers of remote teaching and learning²⁹. These are the so-called educational loss, i.e., less time spent on learning, motivation problems, stress and anxiety, schools' problems with infrastructure and digital teacher preparation and, finally, new factors of inequality in education. It has also been demonstrated that deprivations in this area (because, for example, of inequalities resulting from special educational needs) could affect certain groups of pupils to a greater extent.³⁰ Schools claimed that they did not receive enough support in adapting to online learning for students with disabilities or a migrant background. A solution to prevent the deepening of inequalities was to open schools for children with special educational needs, which meant creating seemingly similar conditions to those which existed before the pandemic but could also have resulted in stigmatization.

However, initiatives generally focused on providing access and allowing the school year to proceed through various forms of work, as we indicated in the previous section. Retaining the division into the macro, meso and micro levels, therefore, let us examine what might be the consequences of this redefinition of education and changes to the system (even temporary) for the problem of educational inequalities. Initiatives at macro level potentially provide an opportunity for improving the situation, although there is a very strong correlation with the activity of actors at level, and thus provision of infrastructure. Even though OECD Report (2021) presents some short-term actions that support students in poorer economic situation, our analysis shows that lockdown caused a "new (in)equality." What in fact happened was that the opportunity was regulated, to a large extent, by the social and cultural capital of the pupils' families. Parents from different socio-economic backgrounds may have different ability and availability to support their children in their learning process at home during the

²⁸ G. Ptaszek, M. Bigaj, M. Dębski, J. Pyżalski, G. Stunża, *Zdalna edukacja – gdzie byliśmy, dokąd idziemy? Wstępne wyniki badania naukowego*, "Zdalne nauczanie a adaptacja do warunków społecznych w czasie epidemii koronawirusa", Warszawa 2020, https://zdalnenauczanie.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Badanie-zdalne-nauczanie_org-prezentacja.pdf (15.12.2021).

²⁹ G. Di Pietro, F. Biagi, P. Costa, Z. Karpiński, J. Mazza, *The likely impact of COVID-19 on education: Reflections based on the existing literature and recent international datasets*, Brussel 2020, Publications Office of the European Union.

³⁰ P. Plichta, *Różne konteksty nierówności cyfrowych a wyzwania dla zdalnej edukacji – propozycje rozwiązań*, in: J. Pyżalski (ed.), *Edukacja w czasach pandemii wirusa COVID-19. Z dystansem o tym, co robimy obecnie jako nauczyciele*, Warszawa 2020, EduAkcja, pp. 70–80.

lockdown.³¹ This manifests itself both in the dimension of cognitive ability,³² the tendency to spend more time with children, and to be involved in the learning process, as well as non-cognitive skills, socio-emotional abilities (value or not value education enough to encourage their children to study while at home).³³ There are also considerable socio-economic inequalities in students' access to digital technologies at home. Students from higher socio-economic status are significantly more likely to have a computer at home than those from lower socio-economic status. The latter are likely to gain access to online classroom learning only through their mobile phones, which makes any completion of work and uploading it onto an e-platform, very difficult. Important are also a home environment that is conducive to learning and even nutrition. In fact, schools play a key role in the nutrition of students from poor families and this also applies to Poland.³⁴ Usually, the middle classes fare significantly better, while children from deprived environments fare worst. The lockdown produced a similar situation. Pupils spending time in their families were subject to educational stimulation mainly from them, and the family's habitus played a significant role. This did not just relate to the family's socio-economic capital, but especially the value it assigned to education. The mere accessibility of educational websites or classes is not sufficient, and especially in the case of young children, it was essential to involve parents in order to attain the possibilities in question. The lockdown therefore had a class aspect, further increased by analysis of parents' situation on the labour market: possibilities of moving to working from home, or options for care versus the threat of losing their jobs.

The second key factor which contributed to the increase or decrease of the risk of inequalities was the actions taken by schools. Regardless of provision

³¹ G. Di Pietro, F. Biagi, P. Costa, Z. Karpiński, J. Mazza, The likely impact of COVID-19 on education...

³² S. Anger, G. Heineck, *Do smart parents raise smart children? The intergenerational transmission of cognitive abilities*, "Journal of Population Economics" 23 (2010) 3, pp. 1105–1132.

³³ K. Alexander, D. Entwisle, L. Olson, *Schools, Achievement, and Inequality: A Seasonal Perspective*, "Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis" 23 (2001), pp. 171–191; R. Coley, C. Kruzik, E. Votruba-Drzal, *Do family investments explain growing socioeconomic disparities in children's reading, math, and science achievement during school versus summer months?*, "Journal of Educational Psychology" 112 (2020) 6, pp. 1183–1196.

³⁴ A. Klimczuk, *The COVID-19 Pandemic from the Perspective of Risk Theory*, in: A. Bartoszewicz, K. Książopolski, A. Zybala (eds.), *Polska... Unia Europejska... Świat... w pandemii COVID-19-wybrane zagadnienia. Wnioski dla kształtowania i prowadzenia polityki publicznej*, Warszawa 2021, Elipsa, pp. 34–56.

of equipment, there were huge differences in the organisation of remote teaching: from new, permanent timetables and classes taught through a platform in real time, to simply sending assignments which pupils were expected to cope with on their own. Difficult as group work through media may be, it provides greater opportunities for offering pupils support and transmitting knowledge more effectively, although all studies of pupils' activity report "disappearance" of some of them, when they failed to pick up lessons that had been sent or to send assignments. A Vodafone Stiftung report³⁵ published in Germany in April 2020, noted that only 7% of pupils participated in online lessons every day, and that parents were not always able to offer them the necessary support, because of work or fears over losing their jobs. Only in the former case, is it possible to utilise the pedagogical innovations, invite guests for virtual classes and employ the positive solutions developed during the pandemic. In the latter case, again the family habitus comes to the fore. Pertinent in both situations, however, are the socio-economic status (place for learning, access to computer at a specific time) and family size. Possibilities were available, but it was the children from families with higher cultural capital who were able to avail themselves, and more specifically, possessed the necessary competences to do so. The habitus of the family here moderates the possibility of access to strategies: remaining with a strategy of subordination or "hidden contestation", of evasion, dialogue or withdrawal (alternative schools, home-schooling). The family's habitus, its cultural and social capital, is therefore crucial and unleashes the possibility for strategies other than unthinking subordination. Building a dialogue with the school is available to families with higher capital and resources, as are withdrawal strategies. After experiencing closed schools and the necessity for home-teaching, parents who were previously subject to the conditions of the system, are increasingly opting for home education and building their own educational systems.

The scale of change appears to depend largely upon political will. Rather, in centralised systems, as we see in the example of Poland, attempts may be made to restore relations in the educational field to the old tracks. We could observe the implementation of the afore-mentioned centralisation measures in Poland. On the one hand, the state declared additional activities (introduced in the

³⁵ Vodafone Stiftung, *Die Situation von Eltern und ihren schulpflichtigen Kindern während der Schulschließungen*, 2020, https://www.vodafone-stiftung.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Vodafone-Stiftung-Deutschland_Studie_Unter_Druck.pdf (15.05.2020).

school year 2021/2022) and mental health support programmes, but on the other hand, centralising statutory changes were proposed.

Unfortunately, the educational initiatives pertaining to the time of the pandemic, seemingly available to everyone, can increase educational inequalities – and moreover, this may be the case even after the return of in-person teaching. Some schools maintain good practices, enriching teachers’ methodology or exploiting their acquired work skills in the virtual space, by providing equipment and access to suitable media, and the teachers themselves might be inclined to continue to work together in networks constructed during the lockdown.

6. Conclusion

Finally, we would like to draw attention to the pandemic-induced differentiation of education systems at the macro level, due the level of economic development and wealth of countries or to cultural differences. The former factor – the wealth of the country – translated into the choice of possible solutions, e.g., regular testing of children instead of closing schools. The second issue is related to the positioning of school as a value in the society, which translates into a political effect. In countries where schooling, especially public education, is highly esteemed, because it transmits a coherent system of values, schools were closed for the shortest possible time, and the priority was to look for other solutions.³⁶ On the other hand, in countries such as Poland, where the school as an agenda of the state is traditionally treated with distrust, or by part of the society even as counter-effective against (e.g. family values, and additionally, its operation has been strongly criticized for years), a longer closure, despite the social costs, was much more easily accepted and did not translate into a decline in political ratings of the government, nor was it an object of activity of opposition parties.

³⁶ S. Lehmann, J. Skogen, E. Haug, S. Mæland, L. Fadnes, G. Sandal, M. Hysing, R. Bjørknes, *Perceived consequences and worries among youth in Norway during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown*, “Scandinavian Journal of Public Health” 49 (2021) 7, pp. 755–765; C. Lien, S. Khan, J. Eid, *School Principals’ Experiences and Learning from the Covid-19 Pandemic in Norway*, “Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research” (2022), pp. 1–16.

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