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Polish student trapped in a process of socialization. Socialization at Polish schools and preservation of social gender roles.

"(...) I have been working all my life to improve my cooperation with girls. Boys are naughty, disobedient, sometimes aggressive, but more interesting [...] girls tend to stick to their roles, are sensitive about critics [...] they are fearful about disappointing someone [...] they are eager, helpful but less creative" ¹.

School as important educational environment

Undoubtedly, apart from family, school is the most important educational environment, whose task is to shape social attitudes which would have a positive influence on students' coexistence with other people. School can be regarded as one of socialization agendas which initiates a whole range of processes that involve transmitting and accepting specified behaviours, norms, models and a sort of knowledge that refers to reality around us (Kłoskowska, 2004: 263). Socialization within schools largely influences shaping different sorts of social life. School is a place where the first emotional relations with other people, such as friendship, are established. Children learn how to cooperate and coexist with other members of the society. But at the same time it is a place where different communicates on femininity and masculinity as socio-cultural categories meet (Kłoskowska, 2004: 263). As a result, school is an institution which plays a major role in gender socialization and shaping gender identity of students. During school period peer group has a great impact on pupil's development but the same may be told about educators, who are so called significant persons, providers of life style patterns, with which children identify themselves, and people who can be followed. Another element in constructing children's relation towards their own and the other gender are the issues included in science, mass culture and peers' opinion. Thus gender socialization at school is a complex issue of great significance regarding its consequences for pupils' social development. Theories of socialization assume that the fact of differences in ways women and men participate in public space and experience variety of professional

¹ One of statements of a pedagogues (22-year experience) taking part in research conducted by R. Szczepanik, *Nauczyciele wobec zachowań szkolnych uczniów i uczennic starszych klas szkoły podstawowej* [in:] *Płeć i rodzaj w edukacji*, edited by M. Chomczyńska-Rubacha, Łódź 2004, p. 107.

successes and failures is determined mainly by diversified preliminary socialization (Barry, Bacon, Child, 1957: 327-332). Regarding that school is such an important socializing institution for each child it is worth to consider its nature, and even more, consequences of socialization processes that take place within schools. This is the issue which shall be a reference point of all the concerns included here.

School as place of gender typization

Basic task of the common educational system is to equal opportunities of all children. As a consequence, designing and fulfilling school's educational task shall be accompanied by introducing and obeying some rules, including especially quality, objectivism and criticism. Both curriculums and whole impact of educational environment should reflect constitutional regulations on equality of citizens and treating each human being in the same way regardless of his race, religion, origin or gender. Unfortunately, Polish school not only fails to protect equality but even generates a wide range of educational and socializing impacts which are not beneficial for student's social development. Instead of promoting emancipating tendencies, it reproduces and preserves pattern of dominating classes' traditional culture, what forces people of lower social status to adjust to the current socio-cultural order (Pankowska, 2005: 88). Such phenomenon leads not only to preservation of the present "order" but, in the first place, it inhibits any attempts to change this social arrangement. This inhibition may be considered with reference to the social structure of classes or territories, however, it might be referred to transmission of traditional beliefs and opinions on gender roles as well (Giroux, 1994: 419-420). This article is an attempt to recognize those mechanisms of educational system which "help" to preserve the *status quo* within the area of gender roles and to consider consequences of unidirectional gender socialization. Because the issue is broad and complex I will restrict my analysis to the process of socialization in primary schools.²

Official curriculums or organizational structures of Polish educational system hardly allow to find unambiguous and clear evidence that would confirm existence of such mechanisms. Polish schools are mainly co-educative and available both for boys and girls. Teaching content is similar for both genders as well (Pankowska, 2005: 88). So what factors determine preserving traditional order of gender roles, and as a consequence, stereotypical vision of femininity and masculinity? According to Ronald Meighan, it mostly concerns the unnamed and usually unaware sphere, that is so called hidden curriculum (Meighan, 1993:

² After September 1, 1999 - that is right after the reform of education in Poland had been implemented, primary school covers students of I-VIth class (aged 7-13).

332-333). As a result, it is the analysis of this sphere that allows to identify those socializing mechanisms of schools which influence students' gender identity or the way they perceive roles associated with their own gender. Thus all the factors of school socialization, including organization of school's space, staff, teachers' beliefs and opinions, curriculum and textbooks' content, should be taken under consideration. Ronald Meighan adds the following factors to those that influence on how students operate within the school's space: time (schedules and syllabuses), division of powers at school, evaluation methods, language and communication styles within the class (Meighan, 1993: 69, 190). Detailed analysis of these elements of school socialization allows to notice its gender distinction. All of these factors provide children with hierarchical social structure where men always occupy higher and more prestigious positions. Reality which results from such communicates is a world where all that is "male" is appreciated more than what is "female".

It is not unjustified to represent that school education (following the family upbringing³) is another stage of preserving traditional division of roles. Knowledge transmitted at school is strictly connected with picture of femininity and masculinity that functions in beliefs of particular society. It turns out that comparing to dynamic economical, social and cultural changes that has taken place in Poland during recent years, Polish mentality is modified very slowly, what is confirmed by preserved distinctions between women's and men's domains. Such distinction arises from gender stereotypes which has been determining male and female habits in Poland for many years. And despite all the above mentioned socio-cultural changes we experience continually, Polish mentality still involves patriarchal family model and traditional (not always fair) division of roles. Roles schemes are nothing more than reflection of gender stereotypes which have been deeply rooted in mentality of Polish society. As simplified interpretation schemes rooted in particular culture, stereotypes are transferred between generations in a course of socialization and create areas of so called "common knowledge" on how femininity and masculinity should be perceived (Miluska, 1994). Such knowledge on women and men may concern variety of aspects of human existence, what has been displayed in the table below.

³ According to E. Górnikowska-Zwolak (2004: 85) gender socialization is initiated in childhood within family. With the run of time it expands due to the influence of peer groups (school, mass media) and creates intended "gender policy" reinforced by various legal and ethical regulations.

Table 1. Content of gender-related stereotypes - multidimensional approach.

Dimension	Female stereotype	Male stereotype
Physical appearance	Fragile, slim body shape (sandglass shape), high voice.	Tall, broad shoulders and developed muscles (triangular shape), low voice.
Personal characteristics	Characteristics of so called interpersonal orientation that is protectiveness, tenderness, empathy, helpfulness, kindness, fragility, submissiveness, dependency, emotional expressiveness.	Instrumental features that is dominance, ambition, aggressiveness, expansiveness, independency, individualism, courage, initiative, consequential activity, emotional restraint.
Social behaviours	Connected with personal features - starting and keeping positive contact with other people, offering help and support, searching for compromise in conflicts.	Treating interpersonal relations as means to achieve desired goals, competition, searching for opportunities to control the environment.
Occupational roles	Nurse, nursery school teacher, secretary, teleoperator, beautician.	Mechanic, driver, soldier, fitter, plumber.
Family roles	Taking care of home, performing houseworks (cooking, cleaning, laundry), supervising children.	Responsibility for maintenance of family, performing hard physical works, intervening if children's behaviour is not appropriate.

Source: A. Hulewska, *Stereotypy związane z płcią a realizacja zadań rozwojowych w okresie dorobności* (in:) *Zadania i role społeczne w okresie dorobności*, edited by K. Appelt, J. Wojciechowska, Poznań 2002, p. 130.

However, it should be noted that recently there have been some attempts to break this extremely stiff regulations on gender roles in Poland. Changes are provoked mainly by women who are becoming more and more confident and try to reach this turn that would help them to brake any "rules" that force them to undertake strictly specified social and family roles. Women's struggle and winnings bring proportional result in emancipation. As a consequence, we are witnessing not only significant changes in role of woman but also some major modifications in how the role of man is perceived allowing him to enter these areas that used to be reserved for women only. Although these changes appear in Poland relatively late, they are quite optimistic. A chance appears to create new quality of Polish society where each individual has equal rights, opportunities of development or choice of life path - regardless of gender.

But does the Polish school, which transmits stereotypical division of gender roles, show students alternative models of family life and opportunities to realize yourself beyond it? Does it teach active participation in every sphere of social life and gaining benefits from our rights? Will any student who has been socialized in such way be able to adjust to

constantly changing socio-cultural conditions as an adult? Will he or she be able to accept "non-traditional" (different from the learnt ones) choices of other members of the society? And finally, does the Polish school teach that gender, and similarly race, origin or religion, cannot restrict human's life choices? All these questions can be regarded as rhetoric ones as the answer is quite clear - considering how strong and ubiquitous stereotypes on femininity and masculinity are in school socializing transmissions, it is easy to come to conclusion that this need has not yet been met by the Polish school. Perhaps more and more intensive socio-cultural changes will force multidimensional modifications within the educational system. Regarding fact that schools' everyday life is a place of action for such gentle and unaware mechanisms which expose boys and girls to gendered socializing practices (Kopciewicz, 2006: 230), we may suppose that any deep changes in this field require a lot of time to happen. It does not mean, however, that it is not worth to try to change such state of affairs. But to make any intervention possible it is necessary to diagnose elements of gendered school socialization. Now, I would like to present in short the key elements of school socialization with reference to gender typization.

Participation of teachers in acquiring gender roles

There is no doubt that teacher is a significant socializing factor in school education (Barnes, 1988: 10-12). Behaviours of pedagogues, their beliefs and opinions on femininity and masculinity may largely influence on establishing gender roles in a course of students socialization (Pankowska, 2005: 99). M. Chomczynska-Miliszkievicz (2002) emphasizes that teachers seem to enhance gender stereotypes of the society by channeling children's interest and preferences according to defined gender type. It is even more supported by didactic materials and textbooks (what will be discussed further). Teachers are interested not only in students' educational achievements but also their social behaviours (Szczepanik, 2004: 93). In 2004 R. Szczepanik (2004: 93) conducted an interesting piece of research on how teachers perceive social behaviours of boys and girls within the school premises. Results confirmed the hypothesis that teachers interpret students' behaviours according to their gender. As for educational difficulties the teachers indicated physical aggression as typical for boys and rudeness and intrigues as main difficulties that appear within the group of girls. It was also interesting that girls have been assigned such features as disloyalty. At the same time, female students were perceived as those who try to reach consensus with teachers and allow mediation while boys tend to be loyal, "they keep together" (Szczepanik, 2004: 105-107). Similar conclusions have been reached by B. Łaciak (1995: 291), who noticed that sense of

group loyalty is much weaker in case of girls what implies poor internalization of loyalty rules, while it is completely opposite in relation to boys.

A significant "carrier" of knowledge on femininity and masculinity are also those teachers' statements which (usually unconsciously) include some contents concerning the binding "gender order". These communicates reflect fixed beliefs on gender roles and differences in students' interests, abilities and opportunities (Pankowska, 2005: 100). In course of many research which aimed to observe interaction within the classroom we have notices that teachers tend to pay more attention to boys, but at the same time, they criticize them more often. Boys are often told off but teachers' critics concerns mainly inappropriate behaviours that disturb the course of classes, lack of diligence and motivation. On the other hand, girls are criticized mainly for quality of their work. Considering prizing, boys are usually prized for content of their work, while girls - for behaviour and diligence (Pankowska, 2005: 100). More of such examples could be given for this. However, it is worth to pay attention to what attributes of femininity - submissiveness, passiveness and masculinity - dominance, action are transmitted in teachers' communicates. It gives students a clear information on preferred pattern of their gender role. A statement of D. Spender (1983: 98-115) can also be interesting in this context as the author claims that male dominance shown in variety of fields of social life is reflected in school discussions. In fact, there are differences in how boys and girls communicate within classroom. Boys are more eager to speak and they are asked for the answer much more often. So the teachers not only communicate quantitatively more with boys during the lessons and marginalize participation of girls but also, as many surveys have shown, are more likely to accept boys' work, listen to them with more interest and focus on work they are performing (Pankowska, 2005: 101).

Teaching contents

Diversification of teaching contents in educating boys and girls is the most evident example of shaping gender roles in accordance with social schemes (Pankowska, 2005: 90). Obviously, all the teaching contents – according to the curriculum – are officially uniform. The curriculum does not assume diversifying educational content with regard to gender. However, we can observe such practices by analysing, for instance, how such subjects as physical education or technology are carried out in classrooms. Usually, dividing the class into two separate groups (of boys and girls) is groundless and inconsistent with the curriculum but unfortunately it occurs quite frequently. Of course, there are some situations when separation of girls and boys is strongly recommended, for example, during some physical

education classes. Nevertheless, D. Pankowska (2005: 92) warns that it emphasises the dualistic world division and strengthens children's belief that some areas are reserved for one gender only. R. Meighan (1993: 99-109) notices that such division is likely to be experienced in course of other school subjects as well – including mainly those that are obligatory for everyone. Scientific subjects, associated with men, are usually perceived more seriously than humanistic or artistic ones (associated with women). Several authors, especially authoresses, emphasise that the whole education is based mainly on the way how men perceive the world. Therefore any women's world perspectives and their experiences are not reflected in the school teaching contents or are treated as marginal (Humm, 1993: 26, 145).

Contents of school textbooks

In case of school textbooks, the gender polarisation is also very definite. While analysing their contents or pictures it is easily noticeable that presented positions of men and women in textbooks are considerably different. Textbook men are presented as being of definitely higher status than women. While career, their own interests and power are mostly men's domain, women perform all housework and take care of the family. School textbooks assign women mostly to the house roles and even if they present women in professions, then they perform a work in such traditional areas as for example teaching, nursing, clothes making etc. Consequently, children learn from the textbooks that there is a certain role division that cannot be skipped in any way.

In 1989 D. Pankowska (2005: 96-97) made an interesting analysis of school textbooks. She noticed that the world in textbooks visibly divides into two “sub-worlds”: the one of women and the other of men. Women almost always performed the role of a mother but only one man in ten was presented as a father. In case of professional career, the situation was inverse. Summing up, while the woman's world was concentrated on the house and children (barely diversified and static), the man's world was presented as diversified, dynamic and active.

Nowadays, the textbooks for children of school age are relatively adjusted to the new socio-cultural conditions. D. Pankowska (2005: 99) noticed that the proportions of male and female characters tend to equalise, but still, the image of family and professional roles performed by men and women is considerably traditional. E. Kalinowska (1995: 27) supports this argument with the statement: “the world's image [...] does not stand in agreement with the reality, it is reduced to only one way of life for a man and one for a woman and does not present the whole range of miscellaneous situations and social systems, in which people

function. At the same time it is prepared in a way that not only does not represent girl's achievements and aspirations but simply underrates them”.

Consequences of gender typization

The above-presented socialising practices, occurring in the school environment, even though described very briefly (several were not mentioned at all) give a general image of what students encounter everyday at schools. Strengthening those gender typicized attitudes and behaviour patterns by the school brings gender diversity of educational life chances for boys and girls. Promoting only one gender pattern implies negative consequences for both boys and girls. Girls lose faith in their own abilities, choose a way of life “appropriate for women” and at the same time resign from their own dreams and aspirations. School precisely “shows” in what areas the girls should feel fulfilled. However, for boys the collision with reality brings frustration and deviant behaviours because people expect them to be constantly successful and they grow up in a belief that they possess unlimited opportunities. The pressure for constant proving that they are “real” men who are always able to handle everything is connected with enormous psychological costs.

Gender related stereotypes, being taught in the socialization process, have a great impact on the professional career of men and women and on roles they perform in the family life. The immense meaning of gender stereotypes can be felt not only in the process of applying for work but also in the following stages of women's professional career. With regard to the belief that women lack essential instrumental features required for effective management, they are less often promoted to higher positions. And even if they “manage” to get promoted, unfortunately, the negative effects of gender stereotypes are inevitable. Such women are exposed to the peculiar psychological effect which is associated with the fact that perceiving women as competent, ambitious and possessing talent for leadership causes lowering of their qualities that are traditionally assigned to their gender group. However, gender stereotypes influence men's professional careers as well. While it is true that men are usually preferred job candidates and they are promoted definitely more quickly, this does not mean that traditional beliefs have only positive influence on their situation (Hulewska, 2002: 136). A socially respected scheme of man's career has only one course – climbing up the ladder of competence, power and wealth. The necessity to fulfil these conditions instils strong fear of failure in men and therefore, experiencing it is connected with being given a label of a life loser. This strong compulsion to achieve professional successes constitutes a serious source of stress and puts male gender representatives into the jeopardy of falling for

psychosomatic diseases (Hulewska, 2002: 137). Various analyses of school gender socializing practices mostly emphasise their negative effects on girls. In fact, the social life presented in schools appears as the world where it is men, who have the right to express their opinions, are responsible for politics, are professionally fulfilled and have many privileges resulting from their gender. However, there are not many researches (in Poland in fact, there are no such researches) that would show how boys perceive the traditional man's image imposed in the socialization process. Perhaps these male sex privileges are only apparent. Nevertheless, such traditional boys' socialization imposes a limited range of life choices. The man's image taught along with the stereotypes is deprived of such “womanly elements” as showing emotions or the need for intimacy. The obligation to be emotionally indifferent does not allow to, for instance, fully perform the role of a father. Being a “real man” argues with performing such occupations as nursery teacher or nurse because in a taught “role order” these are professions for women. Apparently, nowadays men working in such professions are more popular, but it is worth mentioning that the point of view that they are typically womanly occupations still exists and overcoming the resistance occurs very slowly.

As we can witness, inflexible understanding of men and women roles adversely limits the possibilities for life choices of both genders. This simply stands in conflict with the basic function of schools – preparing their students for the full and active social life.

Resulting from the above-mentioned analyses, school not only does not do its duty but also creates a kind of a socializing trap. Can it be avoided? As it was mentioned before, the changes are possible but fairly difficult to be implemented. The one to blame for student's gender socialization is the dominating for centuries patriarchal system and the gender stereotypes that still function in the society. For the changes to appear, the fundamental transformations ought to be carried out in the whole educational system, including verification of curriculum and content of textbooks. But perhaps the most important factor would be “motivating” teachers to change – making them realise in what way their messages are harming for the students, what ought to be changed and what needs to be worked on. This would be the hardest element to change because it requires transformation of teacher's understanding of the roles of men and women in the modern society. It would interrelate with the necessity to completely reject gender stereotypes that not only do not stand in agreement with the present socio-cultural conditions but also are harmful for both boys and girls. And finally, for a stable change to appear the family involvement is needed, because it is the family (as the child's primary socializing environment) that creates the foundations for what students will build the concepts of femininity and masculinity on. Therefore, rejecting

stereotypical role order is so essential. Despite the fact that struggle with stereotypes seems to be (and indeed is) strenuous, long-lasting and harsh it is worth its effort. It would be the milestone in building society where each individual has equal rights and chances.

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