Construction of Pupil Identities at School

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Several theorists who have analysed education on the micro-level have illustrated how mutual relations and process interpretation influence the education results. Furthermore, these authors show why relations are more beneficial to some pupils than to others. However, explanations why some pupils tend to benefit more are still simplistic, addressing only some of involved agents. This paper analyses how pupil identities in school are constructed.

A teacher – one of the agents involved in the education process – holds the power to control the education process of pupils. Additionally, he has power to reinterpret the identities of other involved agents. However, although a teacher has power to state pupil connections to school, a pupil has power not to accept or follow the teacher's definitions. In this paper, I show how these two agents interpret pupil's identity and how differences in the interpretation occur. I approach identity construction at school from the perspective of three involved agents – pupils, teachers, and classmates. I analyse the text of 34 interviews with teachers and pupils. The analysis is structured so that it could represent three important agents that can influence identity construction, i. e. teachers, pupils, and classmates. I conclude that there are differences how pupil identity is influenced by the mentioned agents.

Key words*: school, identities, education*

When we analyse and try to explain education, usually the first distinction we make is between teachers and pupils. This simple distinction allows us to grasp the main characteristics of education structure – some expert giving knowledge to persons who have to study to be prepared for their future existence in society. This simple distinction can be useful when talking about some idealized form of education or when we speak about education in general. However, this seems to be not enough when we try to explain much more complicated issues of education processes. Distinction can be useful to explain the education system, however, when education is approached much closer (on the micro-level), it turns out to be too simplistic. The use of these terms alone will not allow any meaningful analysis.

The reason is obvious: in the education process, much more complicated and evolved identification and interaction forms emerge. From the teacher's point of view, the situation could be described as follows: a group of kids that were known neither to her nor to each other suddenly are unified as a group that has to be taught. These kids could be connected by just some characteristics – they most probably are of the same age, could come from the same district, may hold some common cultural heritage and maybe represent the same status. However, it is more likely that there are quite a lot of differences among these kids. However, from this moment the teacher can refer to these kids as to pupils. This means that suddenly the teacher has to involve in a meaningful interaction with them, and every pupil at this moment either fits or does not fit the

teacher's intentions to construct an interaction between her and the pupils. This illustrates that even just a superficial analysis reveals cracks in a simple distinction between teachers and pupils and that such distinction may not be enough.

A similar analysis can be attributed to pupil experiences: for pupils, an unknown and abstract teacher suddenly becomes a person whom they meet several or more times a week and who has the power over their daily routine and actions. The teacher may have some specific rules for her class and can support some specific form of interaction. Therefore, the form of how a child has to act to be a fitting pupil differs from class to class (and even this is a simplified explanation).

The fact that the teacher's and pupil's mutual interpretation is much more complicated is revealed by numerous researchers. For example, researchers illustrate how the teacher's attitude changes depending on how she interprets a pupil with whom she is communicating or how some kind of personal characteristics (or group origins) can influence the pupil's image in the classroom (Hallinan et al. 2003; Oakes 2002; Rist 2007). The teacher interprets who a pupil is and how well he is fitting the role of a pupil, and from these observations she then develops the interpretation identity that can be ascribed to a specific pupil. We can clearly conclude that all this leads to a simple statement that there is no one clear perspective of how pupils can be described. The reasons for such a variations can be searched for in pupils' characteristics, teachers' interpretation of these characteristics, and mutual relations. Additionally, teachers can use differing knowledge to interpret pupils. This means that to define a pupil and a teacher beyond the school context is as important as processes within the class.

However, it is clear that a teacher's and a pupil's ability to perceive and understand each other's point of view is crucial for a successful education process, i.e. in order to get most use from the education, all the involved agents should be able to agree on how to interpret the education process and how they can interpret each other. Researchers have often concluded that the teacher's inability to interpret a pupil's identity but the willingness to assign to a pupil some specific label results in the pupil's failure. Therefore, understanding the mutual relations and interpretations is crucial for understanding how the education process can be improved.

The aim of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of identities within classroom and to show how pupil identities are negotiated among the involved agents. This article is concerned with the common patterns that underlie pupil identity construction within school. To do this, I draw attention to the question how teachers interpret the education processes and the pupils they are teaching. Furthermore, to understand how teacher interpretation influences pupils' identity construction, I analyse pupils' classroom interpretation and the teacher as part of this classroom. Such an approach allows combining the influence of two agents and shows a more elaborated perspective of how pupil identities are constructed. This article shows how pupil identities emerge as a result of mutual involved agent negotiations.

Such an approach could be considered novel for sociological education research in Latvia and for sociological education research in general. Up to now, most of Latvian researchers have studied education from the quantitative perspective, and just a few researchers have tried analysing how pupils interpreted their experience in school (Grivins 2011). In the global perspective, this paper is novel because in general there is a lack of researches addressing micro-level education processes and trying to simultaneously grasp the interpretations of all involved agents. Therefore, there is a wide range of methodological challenges I had to solve during the research. The presented solutions could be considered novel, too.

In this paper, I use data gathered in 34 in-depth interviews conducted in 8 secondary schools of Latvia. Interviews were conducted both with pupils and teachers and covered a wide range of

topics. The text obtained in the interviews was analysed by the critical discourse analysis. More precise methodological explanations are given in the chapter "Data gathering and analysis". The paper is elaborated in a constructionist perspective. This perspective suggests that our knowledge is constructed through text.

Pupil identity at school

When talking about school-age youth, it is common to associate them with their life in school. Although outside of school it is acceptable for a pupil to construct identities detached from school, school experiences and knowledge that have emerged in school most likely will accompany a pupil outside of school. The situation differs significantly if pupil identity at school is analysed. Logic tells us that the same principle that knowledge emerging in one field can influence identity in other fields should be applicable in this case, too. However, the common interpretation of education suggests that there is one – *right* – way how a pupil should behave in school and what should be his intentions while studying. So, although we recognise that outside of school pupils differ, we still expect that within school these differences will vanish, the main reason of such vanishing being just the simple statement that education is such *an important* institution for both society and person. Therefore, we can conclude that the identity of "pupil" is considered more important than other possible youth identities. Furthermore, it is one of the few identities that link a child to an official institution and as such determines a child's official position in society.

This idea can be divided into two statements that are commonly described by theorists who approach education critically. The first statement: school is created to support one specific interpretation of values, one specific cultural capital. The second statement is partly derived from the first one: to succeed in school, you have to fit some characteristics that are supported by the school system. Both statements, although not precisely in this form, have served as the basis of theoretical considerations of several authors. For example, Pierre Bourdieu argues that education has been supported by powerful groups which use the education system to reproduce society's structure (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990; Bourdieu 1984). To support the sustainability of the social structure, education promotes a certain *truth* that can be associated with some dominant social groups. Although the main point of Bourdieu is that such a structure produces inequality among social groups, I would like to mark out this point from different points of view: education supports one kind of *right* pupils – to succeed in school you have to fit certain clichés concerning who or what a pupil is. These clichés are a result of the accepted knowledge of what pupils should learn, how they should be taught, and how they are learning. This means that the ways how one can be a pupil emerge from a wider knowledge of schooling. Commonly, the researches that follow Bourdieu's ideas illustrate how various backgrounds can influence education outcomes. However, this approach illustrates inequality as too simplistic and draws attention only to one side of interpretation. The same theoretical ideas should lead to the conclusion that outside of school the identities do influence the schooling process. To rephrase it, school supports one precise identity that is applicable just to one of school identities but is not applicable to the other. At the end, this means that some pupils can supplement who they are out of school with being a pupil. However, others, to be a pupil, have to reject self-conceptions they have evolved beyond school. This just means that some pupils have to pay a smaller price for being fitting pupils, and they most likely find it easier to fit school requirements.

Another way to look at the same issue is through the statements of another famous education researcher Basil Bernstein. Much of Bernstein's ideas are close to those stated by Bourdieu. Furthermore, the statements that I have just made about Bourdieu's work can be easily attributed to Bernstein's work as well. However, Bernstein turns more attention to issues of how pedagogy is constructed and implemented (Bernstein 2003; 2007). The bottom line of Bernstein's argument is that there is a line of possible pedagogical practices, all of them having some specific requirements to be successfully implemented, and some limitations in their outcomes. Various social groups will select differing pedagogies and by doing so will create a differing communication with a person educated. This basically means that every possible pedagogical practice has already some requirements on how an educated person should behave or react. The lack of required reactions (or pupil characteristics that allow him to react in the right way) threatens pedagogy. The easiest way to remove such a threat is to declare pupils not reacting in the right way as unfitting for education. A logical conclusion here is that after a while we start to adapt pedagogy (and education institutions) for various needs of pupils, and the education system becomes more structured, more elaborated. However, with a more complicated structure, stratification and segregation develop as well. To extrapolate such conclusion to the question of pupil identity, I can conclude that his identity has to fit certain pedagogical requirements. This again shows that within class there is a lack of possible variations in the ways how pupils can interpret themselves within school.

There are other, critical and not so critical, theorists who suggest similar ideas mainly arguing that education, to keep its position as a reproducer of values and social structure usually acknowledges just a fixed amount of the ways how pupils can act and succeed in school. Although it is not always believed that variations are threatening education, they are considered as threatening society. So, at the end, the education system has to accept as fit only a certain type of pupils. However, the fact that some identities will never be able to find acceptance within school threatens with at least some consequences.

Teacher power

To illustrate the reproductive nature of education, researchers commonly use a quantitative approach. The macro-level approach, supported with quantitative data, fits the common interpretation that out-of-school socio-economic characteristics can be used to explain pupil achievements. Although such approach gives an understanding of the scale of reproduction, it does not offer a valuable perspective on how the reproduction takes place. Furthermore, such approach does not give us any insight into individual experiences. It is easy to approach the education system as a chain of institutions that have clear rules of both the vertical and the horizontal integration and stratification. However, such perspective proves to be inefficient when micro-issues are addressed, because education outcomes are always connected with the specific relations that emerge during the schooling process and, although it may seem explanatory to label some kid as not fitting the school expectations, the question is much deeper. Every case can be associated with a specific identity that a pupil has accepted and with the interpretation the teacher has about a pupil and how these two views interact. The results of this interaction communicate a pupil either as deviant or as acceptable. This then influences the pupil's possibilities and later on the education outcomes. So, practices and reactions take place on the micro-level and can differ from teacher to teacher and from pupil to pupil. Although we tend to approach education results on an aggregated level, a

deeper analysis reveals that there won't be two similar cases. Furthermore, the macro-perspective cannot acknowledge such separate identities, because to acknowledge you have to define some specific criteria which either will fit this specific identity or will be used when communicating with this new identity. These requirements restrict the possibility to describe school processes critically. It seems more likely that the quantitative approach will just create one more official identity.

Furthermore, pupil identity can be analysed just in the context of schooling. So, it is impossible to approach the analysis of such identities without the analysis of education practices. This once more suggests that the analysis of pupil identities should be started at a micro-level on which the educative interaction among the agents involved can be observed. The object of analysis should have observable relations between a pupil's identity and the other educating agents (teachers and other pupils). The object of analysis should allow to observe how teachers interpret a pupil's identity, how afterwards the teacher makes this identity to fit education requirements, and how he is constructing the behaviour that would correspond to his conclusions later on. The teacher is given a great authority to implement the practices that will promote certain common goals and accept certain pupils, and the analyst should acknowledge that.

The idea that the teacher has the authority he can use to influence the education process is common in theoretical literature. Bourdieu calls such authority "*pedagogical authority*" (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990). For Bourdieu, it is an authority the teacher receives from school, and it is intended as a tool the teacher can use to achieve common goals. In works of other researchers, we can distinguish several ways of how such power can be practised. For example, Michael Foucault speaks about the total control of bodily movements and the space used (Foucault 1995). Other authors go a little further by saying that it is the specific spatial relations that emerge (Rist 2007). Jenny Oakes states that teachers can select pupils with whom they will spend more teaching time (Oakes 2002). She continues with the point which is used also by Maureen Hallinan: a teacher when teaching is constantly making decisions which knowledge fits the needs of certain pupils and which does not (Hallinan et al. 2003; Hallinan 1994). This means that school is not giving all pupils the same knowledge – it is giving pupils the knowledge their teacher believes to fit their needs. However, an even more important conclusion can be made: all these authors show that in order to maintain control and achieve results, a teachers is given power to improvise with how he approaches the class and each separate pupil.

So, whenever a pupil comes to school, he is exposed to the authority that takes shape through a teacher. A teacher uses his authority and evaluates whether a pupil fits school requirements and acts accordingly. Since not all pedagogical principles are applicable to every pupil, the teacher can change his practices to fit his interpretation of the pupil he is teaching.

This just shows that a teacher can select of most likely pedagogy according to his belief who the pupil is. Pupils' not fitting the accepted identity does not force teachers to search for new, extended interpretations of the accepted identities, but it forces to act according to some alternative plan which includes all non-fitting identities. This means that finally pupils do fit school requirements, but in a way which is not productive. Such classification does not have any real relation to pupils' original identity characteristics.

Teacher's influence on student's results

Up to now, I have shown that teachers do react to variations in the ways how pupils correspond to identities accepted in school. However, such statement forces us to go further asking about

the nature of this reaction. First of all, we are faced with the question: what are the practices that should be observed to capture variations in teacher reactions? Although it could be interpreted as a methodological question, here it becomes rather a description or a list of practices that allow observing how the representatives of an institution try to fit pupils in the already fixed interpretation of education. In other words, their actions illuminate their knowledge about education and what is accepted and what is not.

The second question that we have to ask is how the practices of reactions influence pupil behaviour in school and schooling outcomes. Logically, changes in the teacher's chosen interaction should lead to at least some changes in the results. The first reason for this is simple: a pupil can only learn what he has access to. For example, if the teacher uses instruction time not for instruction but to establish order, then less time is spent on real work with the curricula. Therefore, whenever the teacher chooses one or another action or tool of pedagogy, he influences the equality of education outcomes. Of course, this is not always bad. Sometimes the fact that the teacher is willing to change the approach to his communication with a pupil can help the pupil to improve his results. However, it can also be a reason for pupils' failure.

The explanation of the ideas I am talking about roots in Robert Merton's concept of *self-fulfilling prophecy* (Merton 1968): if something is believed to be true in the process, then it will definitely be true in the consequences. In the context of education, this means that teacher expectancies are an important factor that should be taken into account when trying to explain pupils' achievements. This approach acknowledges teachers' influence on pupils' development, but it shows different aspects of this process. Teachers' actions generate results. However, these results aren't just a matter of school knowledge. It is the teacher's interpretation of the schooling system and its relations to society. So, the teacher again, consciously or unconsciously, acts according to his interpretation and knowledge he has access to. However, such action does not just create access to academic knowledge, but it strengthens the interpretation that was in the basis of the action.

Such explanation becomes even more meaningful if the pupil's possibility to choose one or another identity is considered. School is an institution where teachers are legitimated to hold the power. This is why they have the resources to either accept or reject certain knowledge. This means that they can decide about pupil's identity interpretation as well. However, since they are forced to interpret pupils through the viewpoint of school needs, they obviously cannot use the same interpretation as pupils. So, the identities pupils bring to school will automatically be confused with the ones that are either accepted or rejected in school and will accordingly provoke certain results. This interpretation suggests that pupils can come to school with a personal out-of-school identity. However, the teacher will still put him in the framework of school-accepted interpretation.

The fact that teachers have such an influence has been shown by a long series of research – starting from the famous but contradictorily evaluated research of Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) in which direct teacher influence is measured by comparing achievements of pupils before and after the expectations have been triggered, continuing with the research of Hargreaves (Hargreaves 1975; Hargreaves et al. 1975) in which she clarifies the definitions and shows the ways how teachers influence kids to fit their expectations. Other famous researchers, for example, Rist (2007), show how from the curricula effects are achieved without really trying to achieve such results; Aaron Cicourel illustrates teacher's original pedagogical intentions and how pedagogical principles are applied when working with pupils (1968). In general, these results show that the

authority of teacher doesn't stop with teaching. His authority goes further, defining the power structure and roles and identities of the involved agents. These *labels* are the source of further actions.

Identity negotiation

The previous chapter shows how the school structure is forced upon the pupil and how during this process the pupil is forced to accept the teacher's terms of situation explanation. However, although the teacher holds power to introduce the education process explanation, it would be naïve to suggest that pupils have no influence on the process. Although the teacher dictates the rules, the pupil still can either accept or reject them. Furthermore, the pupil can choose to reject power relations and the education process interpretation imposed by the teacher, or he can ignore the process totally. This means that he is not obligated to interpret schooling processes from the viewpoint of accepted knowledge. He is free to select any identity that can be selected from any field. Although the teacher won't recognise this identity and will recode it in terms of the education system and school rules, a pupil most probably will continue to act based on his original identification. We could speculate that this would be true more often if the teacher is evaluating a pupil as a low achiever. This then shows that the teacher and the pupil start their interaction with differing interpretations of what the identity of pupils is. Although the interpretations differ, because of his power position the teacher most probably will influence the pupil's achievements. However, he will not notice the chain of events I have just described, and the pupil, because of this different interpretation of his identity, won't be able to re-negotiate his involvement in the education institution.

The idea that pupils tend to perceive themselves avoiding official school interpretations has been described by a number of researchers. Perhaps the best known example of this perspective is Paul Willis' ethnography on working class lads (Willis, 1981). Willis' research shows how pupils' interpretation of their own possibilities shapes their involvement in education processes. In this explanation, pupils' identity is shaped by the background knowledge that transforms into a specific school behaviour. The bottom line of Willis' argument is as follows: if pupils don't see any value in the education result, then they can start to select identities that do not fit school regulations. This line of argumentation can be continued by some other researchers who state that if a pupil believes that the teacher is crossing the borders of legitimate authority, then he can refuse all possible school identifications (Werthman 1963). The latter argument basically means that if a pupil does not feel that the education system is fair, he can start to behave in a way to oppose this system. This suggests that, although teachers are holders of power who can force upon other involved agents their interpretation of education processes, pupils still can choose other identities. Moreover, this approach suggests that pupils do have their own interpretation of teachers' actions. Furthermore, teachers' actions can be a cause of specific pupil reaction in several ways: there can be teachers' both planned and unplanned response.

Other authors, when addressing the question how pupils identify themselves in the class, give even more direct answers. They suggest that commonly pupils do not identify themselves with school, and their identities are built around their friends (Pollard 1985; Hallinan & Sørensen 1985). This suggests one more interesting argument: in school, pupils feel more connected to peers (or other pupils) than to school in general. Pupils identify themselves with groups of people, and this identification does not happen because it has been triggered by school. To conclude this argument, I should mention that this line of thinking suggests that at the end school has little

effect on the pupil's selections. Pupils' direct actions are the consequences of their interpretation of peers they feel related to. So, to change pupils' identities, school has to manage to influence their selection of peers.

The above arguments illustrate that pupils are actively involved in their identity construction. Furthermore, teachers can influence pupils' identification. However, it seems logical at this point to suggest that there is a significant influence of classmates on identity selection. At this point, it is hard to suggest what the outcomes of classmates' influence are, but some interpretations could be suggested. The first interpretation is that they accept the duality supported by their knowledge about education. Another interpretation would be that they support the identities that are created out of school. This, in turn, would support the idea that pupils in school tend to the selected identities according to the principles of their peers. The only clear suggestion here would be that it is not really clear what is the role of peers in identity selection. However, it is possible to conclude that the way how pupils construct their identity in class is complicated and follows the patterns that are hard to explain without a deeper analysis.

Data gathering and analysis

The issue addressed in this article is complicated. Furthermore, because of its novelty, there aren't clear theoretical guidelines of how to gather and analyse data. The main challenge is to simultaneously grasp the interpretation of all agents and to observe the dynamics of nodes.

As I have shown earlier, pupil identity interpretation can differ depending on the agent we are approaching. Furthermore, every agent has some influence on identity formation. This means that we can single out at least three ways how to interpret pupil identity in class: from the perspective of the teacher, of the pupil, and from the perspective of classmates. To elaborate the understanding of how pupil identity is constructed within classroom, we must grasp the interpretation of all the mentioned agents. These considerations impose important challenges on the ways of obtaining data. Furthermore, this was the main task to be achieved when the methodology was elaborated.

During this research, I conducted 34 interviews with teachers and pupils. The interviews were gathered in eight schools. All schools were selected trying to ensure a greater diversity. When choosing a school, its location, size, and achievements were taken into account. All schools were public. In every school, one teacher was interviewed. To be selected, teachers had to teach in primary school either the Latvian language or mathematics. These two subjects were selected because teachers of these subjects in the overall primary school curriculum have the most direct lessons. Since they have most direct lessons, it is possible to suggest that they can have the greatest effect on pupils' interpretation of the schooling processes.

Before the interview with a teacher, in every school I randomly chose one 8th or 9th grade that was taught by the interviewed teacher. During the interview, the teacher was asked to talk more closely about this one specific class. Furthermore, teachers were encouraged to give examples coming from the daily life of this class. During interviews, teachers were asked to propose the pupils from the class we were talking about that could be interviewed. Teachers were asked to suggest the pupils that from their point of view were most and least promising in the class. Later on, interviews with the proposed pupils were conducted. The average interview length was a little more that one hour. Interviews with teachers in general were longer than interviews with pupils.

In all interviews, the education process in the classroom was discussed. Every interview was concerned with important events and common memories of all participants, various explanations of

the same events and an individual interpretation of the schooling process. In this way, the interpretation of all involved agents was gathered and different approaches to the same processes were observed. This allowed me to access various interpretations of identities of the pupils involved.

The first step of data analysis was to identify the important points that were either concerned with a pupil's self-reflection of education processes, gave a description of some classmates or just allowed a comparison between differing viewpoints. These parts of the text were selected for the further analysis. The selected parts of texts were then analysed by the critical discourse analysis (CDA).

CDA is usually used to analyse the power structures underlying a text (Fairclough 1995). In our case, power analysis was not the primary issue, but it was an integral part of the text, and the text was part of school discourse. School has clear power structures rooted in the roles of the involved agents. That is why the text is always a reflection of the power that interweaves everything in this field.

In the analysis, the text was coded, and a simple linguistic analysis was conducted. Both of these stages were used circularly, and I returned to both levels of analysis several times. Although I analysed all interviews together, the end results were drawn by creating separate groups of respondents.

As I have shown in this paper, pupil identities are the issue that can be approached from various viewpoints. Since my data allow it, I will illustrate all the perspectives that emerge in school. By doing so, I will try to build a chronological explanation of how pupil identities emerge. This aim limits the possibilities of how the further results of text analysis in this work can be structured.

The results are presented in three chapters. Each of these chapters shows some specific aspect of how to approach pupil identity. The first addresses the questions how teachers describe pupil identities, the second shows how classmates (pupils) are illustrating other pupils' identities, and the third chapter illustrates how a pupil himself builds his belonging to a certain group.

Teacher-assigned identities

Teachers are power holders in education and, as I have shown in previous chapters, they can easily force pupils to accept the identities they find appropriate for them. Generally speaking, they have the power to impose identities. This is why teacher-assigned identities are crucial for understanding a pupil's position at school; these are the identities that most likely will explain pupil achievements.

Interviews with teachers show that teachers rarely use the noun "pupil" to describe one specific child from a class. The word "pupil" is used when referring to some abstract person or an ideal form of actions in the classroom. It is used when referring to wider discourses of how education should be and what it is all about. Whenever a teacher is explaining the general rules of how a child should behave at school and in the class, he uses a broader notion "pupil". However, when talking about a specific student, teachers tend to be more precise. Although they can still use the word "pupil", it is supplemented with an adjective. The simplest example would be referring to "bad pupils" and "good pupils". In this case, the adjective is connected to the abstract form "pupil"; however, the adjective shows the level of fitting to this abstract form.

All these references are always used to define a pupil's relation to education processes. This means that all pupil descriptions can be traced back to the evaluation of the level of fitting to

education requirements. As mentioned in the previous chapters, the teacher recodes information from outside of school into schooling-relevant categories. In interviews with teachers, this process is frequently described as professional, or as an example that teacher can read specific signs. In general, teachers illustrate this identity assignment process as a sign of professionalism that witnesses the opposite characteristics than those suggested by theory: for a teacher, the ability to recode such signs shows a great involvement in the education process and the ability to improve education outcomes. To explain this process in more detail, I can give an example: during one interview, we were talking about a child who was very low on grades but managed to accomplish minimal requirements. When I asked for the reasons why this kid had troubles with improving her results, the teacher replied that she had been teaching long ago the pupil's parents. She came to a conclusion that parents were not too bright, and this explains why the kid has problems. What the teacher said basically means: "I know why the kid has problems and I know that this cannot be solved. And I see it because I have such a long experience and a high professionalism". The subtext hidden under this text is that you should know when your effort to change the pupil's performance will pay off. In this example, this is not the case – it is not productive to try changing the pupil's marks, because the teacher's professionalism gives reasons why it cannot be done.

There are the common characteristics that allow describing how pupils' identities are constructed. All texts teachers generated about pupils can be placed on three general axes – discourses of pupil ability assessment that are used to create pupil identities. These three axes serve as a backbone for the formulation of pupil identities. None of these axes are more important than others. Even more, several of these axes can be used simultaneously to describe a pupil. Usually, during the interview, a teacher uses several core arguments coming from different axes that may even contradict each other.

An axis can be clearly linked to teachers' sense of professionalism, too. Basically, the axes are the three ways of teachers' arguments what a specific pupil can achieve. So, these are the pools of arguments that differ in their strength and in anticipated future possibilities. The arguments based on the same axis are logically interlinked. However, the reason why a specific axe is used have to be illustrated in relation to specific knowledge that the teacher has.

The first axis could be referred to as "mental characteristics". This axis includes references to the possible psychological issues of a pupil. This axis differs from the other two because it holds noticeable possibilities of a low evaluation and just a small fraction with positive evaluations. However, teachers regularly use this axis to translate a pupil's identity into school terms. Furthermore, this axis holds signs of predetermination – inability to change the situation. Here, the teacher describes the pupil's brain capacity by illustrating that a change for the better is not possible and her pedagogical professionalism in this case won't help. So, the use of this argument shows that the issue needs expertise from a different field. Quite often, when using this axis, a teacher uses just a simple statement that a child "obviously has mental problems". This again shows the same logic that the teacher's inability to achieve some results is not her fault. And there is a long line of ways how a teacher can announce that a pupil has some psychological limitations or problems that do not allow her to work up to the expected results.

However, there are more complicated ways of using this axis. If we return to the example with the pupil whose parents were taught by the same teacher, we can see traces of the same argumentation. What the teacher suggests is a link to genetics. She is giving a hint that there are families that cannot be educated. So, she is pointing out that a family has some specific problems

that characterise every generation. The subtext of this message is that these limitations should be taken into account when a teacher's professionalism is evaluated.

The second axis – "social context" – is much wider than the first one. When using this axis, the teacher refers to the context showing how it influences pupil abilities in school. Here, translation between out-of-school and school identity is most visible. It is because in the teachers' text, the link is considered to be something logical that does not need any further explanation. For example, if somebody comes from an adverse family, it is automatically expected that he will cause problems to the teacher. This connection is presented in the teacher's text as something obvious that does not require further explanation. However, if needed, teachers are giving a more detailed explanation how the social context influences a pupil's ability to work in school. Social context can serve teachers to explain both achievements and failures. Interestingly similar background factors can be translated into diagonally opposite school identities, and the same teacher's observations in a different context can serve as an achievement or afailure.

The third axis concerns personal traits. Like the first axis, it is more related to the assumption that the teacher is able to analyse a pupil and the develop some conclusions that are relevant to estimating the pupil's future achievements. Mental characteristics are something predefined that cannot be changed. Personal traits are somewhere in the middle between personality and context; these are the factors that a pupil has acquired and are supported by his deeper personality. Accordingly, these traits can be changed, but the idea that a pupil does have such traits is perceived as logical, as part of a longer development of his personality.

This axis removes the fault for failure from the teacher and shifts it to the pupil who can be lazy, absent-minded, or in other ways not living up to the expectations. However, he can be interested, diligent, and hard-working – the traits that are associated with achievements. Therefore, selection of right characteristics can explain pupils' achievements within school.

These three axes define that there are at least three ways of how to be either a good or a bad pupil. To be a good pupil, one must be evaluated as fitting from all the three perspectives. However, to be evaluated as someone who cannot improve or just is a bad pupil, one axis is enough. This creates a complex structure of how some pupils are not achieving best results.

Pupil-assigned identities

Pupils, similarly as teachers, in interviews use the term "pupil" in an abstract sense. Typically, again it is used as a way to describe theoretical considerations of pupils' role within school. It is not attributed to any specific pupil, but it illustrates that pupils have a clear grasp of what schooling means. This knowledge is accessible to pupils no matter whether they are labelled as good or as bad pupils; it is part of the education discourse. The ability to reflect on this discourse serves as a proof that a pupil can participate in the conversation. So, we cannot ascribe pupils' low achievements to their inability to understand the behaviour the school is requiring from them.

During interviews, pupils widely refer to pupil characteristics described by teachers. When describing such identities, pupils often copy the teacher's text and even use the same words as teachers did. However, the way of copying teachers' text differs depending on the evaluation the teacher has given to the pupil. Low achievers often copy wide parts of the text while high achievers, although giving the same description as the teacher, can supplement this text with

additional arguments. This intertextuality shows that the teacher when assigning an identity to a pupil gets important support from the pupil's classmates. Other pupils later on copy the text the teacher has used and by doing so reproduce the *truth* that has been promoted by the teacher. In this case, it means that pupils are promoting the same identities.

This again can be explained by the limitations of education discourse. Pupils, when asked to describe their classmates, are forced to use the same tools as the teacher had. However, a pupil has not prepared to give estimations. Furthermore, he has no access to any primary information that would allow evaluating the success of other pupils. All he has is the statements that have been given by the teacher. This is why the only way how he can give some answer is by copying the teacher's text. This makes pupils a powerful tool that can be used by teachers to impose identities to other students.

An important point is that, although pupils copy the teacher's text to describe the situation in the classroom, they rarely do it to describe their own identity. When describing themselves, only some arguments may be borrowed from the teacher. More commonly pupils use the arguments that mirror their own interpretation of her in school. This does not mean that the pupil disagrees with the teacher's evaluation – he just stresses some new ways of how he should be perceived. However, his own interpretation most likely will not be so loud to be heard. First of all, this is because, as compared to the teacher, he does not have a legitimate way to express his interpretation. Second, from the school perspective, such identity does not exist. Third, the teacher as a holder of pedagogical authority has a right to evaluate and describe the process.

When describing classmates, pupils rely on teachers' text. This means that, when referring to classmates, pupils can freely copy the text given by the teacher. By this act, pupils strengthen the teacher's power in the classroom. Additionally, they accept the teacher's judgement and force school-related identities upon other pupils.

However, most importantly, this shows that pupils believe that in school a school-related identity should be used. Although most probably this was not the main intention why the teachers' text was copied, this is the outcome of the action. By the reproduction of teachers' judgement, pupils strengthen power relations within school. This means that every pupil simultaneously feels school identity pressure from two channels: they are labelled in some specific way by the teacher, and this label is restated / reproduced by the classmates. Although such enforcement does not describe pupils' accepted identity, it certainly creates barriers that a pupil can be in school. Furthermore, this influences pupils' selected identity indirectly by triggering specific mechanisms of identity selection.

Pupil-adopted identities

Up to now, I have considered identities imposed by teachers and classmates. I have shown that identity assignment can be viewed as a unified process in which both teachers and pupils work as one coordinated mechanism. However, as I have already mentioned, pupils less often referred to teacher-ascribed characteristics when they were asked to talk about their own identity. So, separately we have to address the question how a pupil constructs his own identity.

When constructing their own identity, pupils tend to draw more attention to the outside-of-school context. This identity does not have necessarily to be connected with inner school requirements or in fact with the formulation of an absolute pupil. It would be more precise to

suggest that when constructing their identity pupils voluntarily choose either to connect or not to the school context, and even reliance on the out-of-school context does not draw out the abstract identity of "pupil". It would be more precise to suggest that it gives this identity new edges that allow a greater variation. For example, one of the interviewed pupils has suggested that he is lagging behind in school because he has to perform various tasks at home. The teacher described the same pupil as lazy and therefore not fitting for education. However, in her text, the pupil suggested that her school performance should be interpreted together with her relations to home, or a pupil who suggests that he is going to be an engineer in the eyes of a teacher becomes just a motivated student. However, for a student, this statement is a way to explain his involvement in exact sciences while ignoring humanitarian ones. Furthermore, for a pupil this means that education is just a tool and therefore is used according to needs. This shows that pupils' interpretation is much wider than could be expected.

The reason for moving away from just the identification with school-offered possibilities seems to be the lack of the possibilities school identity offers, and just being a good or a bad pupil does not seem to offer enough of the possible gains to be selected as the only identity. The situation is even worse if we analyse pupils evaluated as low achievers. Their identity does not offer any valuable links, so it could be suggested that the easiest way to gain a valuable identity is to search for it somewhere else, somewhere outside of school. To rephrase it, I suggest that school is fitting its institutional structure; however, it does not fit the pupils' need for strong identification and belonging. Therefore, pupils start their search out of school, and since most likely the out-of-school identification is considered more valuable, it is used in school surroundings, too.

However, pupils differ in the ways they choose to construct a link between school and their own identity. This seems to be related to the value one can gain from a specific school-situated identity. Pupils who are evaluated by teachers as low achievers and whose assigned identity does not offer any significant value (school officially accepts pupils who have managed to succeed and show both high involvement and noticeable results) more clearly move away from the "pupil" identity. They can refer to this identity, yet they stress some other important identification related to place, peers, family, interests, etc.

Interestingly, these pupils do notice teachers' assigned identity and can explain it. However, they represent it in the way to show that they have some influence on it. In other words, in their text they suggest that if they just wanted they could change this overall interpretation assigned to them. However, at the moment, they don't have the need to change anything. This shows their clear willingness to hold power over the identity selection and control over education process.

However, instead of this unwanted identity, pupils construct the one that is their *real* identity. It is connected with other fields outside of school and, in terms of some other social field shows them in a favourable light. This construct can come from a variety of fields and can represent a wide variety of the ideas who the pupil is. In some cases, identities drawn by pupils can be easily associated with the need of high involvement, but in some cases the identities can be delinquent.

Differences can be observed between pupils whom the teacher has evaluated as high and low achievers. Low-achievers more often select the identities that have no relation to education. However, if low-achiever identities were selected from totally different fields, then high-achievers' identities could be associated with some form of advanced school identities. In other words, the identity of these pupils roots in classroom description. However, a pupil creates from it a form that can be used out of school, too. So, here school identity is translated back to a more

complicated model that can be evaluated by out-of-school society, too. This then serves as a clear distinction between high and low achievers. Low-achievers take their out-of-school identity to use it in school. However, high-achievers use their achievements in school to elaborate a more complicated identity that would fit also the out-of-school use.

In the direct form, none of the pupils seems to see in school identity something valuable. It is a resource that can be used, but as such in the pupils' eyes it is worthless. Those who see their school identity to be of any value use it as a tool to construct their own – more complicated – identity.

Discussion

In this paper, I have shown how pupils' identity is formed. Furthermore, I show the differences than can be observed among teachers', pupils' and classmates' interpretation of pupil identities. As suggested in theory, the teacher has an authority to influence the education processes. In this case, the teacher uses his authority to reinforce specific pupils' identity interpretation. This theoretical conclusion was supported by the analysed data. Furthermore, the data have shown that the teacher's authority grants his support of classmates.

However, theoretical explanations suggest that pupils can choose to act upon more elaborated identities. This research supports such statement by showing that pupils always elaborate more sophisticated and valuable identities. The real issue is how well the pupil's selected identity fits the teacher's expectations.

The study results suggest that some modifications in theory should be made. Most of researchers interpret the teacher–pupil relations as if there is some link between them. Most commonly, this link is interpreted as the teacher's ability to influence the pupil's school achievements. However, the present research suggests that there is no direct influence on the pupil's ability to study or *real* knowledge. It would seem more appropriate to state that the teacher's evaluation generates his own interpretation of a pupil's achievements. Yet, the pupil selects his own interpretation which is either connected or separated from school. These are the two processes that have some linkage, but mostly follow their own inner logic.

The first of the questions that emerge after my analysis is the issue of causality. I have drawn my results relying on teachers' assigned identity. However, as always, it is discussible whether teachers have created their opinion after pupils stated having their identity or pupils have come up with identity after facing the teachers' schooling practices. In both cases, we have to acknowledge that identity construction is a constant process that requires regular reconstruction. Thus, it does not matter who has acted first. What matters is why during this process of reaffirmation of knowledge, which is accessible in the classroom and is in the basis of education process, there have been no changes to more favourable pupil identities. In other words, as have I put it earlier, identity needs reaffirmation through practice. Why then practice has not been changed?

Yet another important question that can be asked is: do schools offer any value to pupils? It is easy to assure that education will offer to pupils some future possibilities. However, it seems that pupils do not use such explanation as a valuable source to back up their identities. In everyday life, pupils need the identities that would be evaluated by their peers and that would offer some ability to be evaluated as a successful individual. School offers success only to a limited number of pupils while others will always stay in the background. As I have shown, the background is not as neutral as one could imagine. This means that at least some part of pupils cannot find an

immediate value in the schooling process. A more practical conclusion, then, is that schools need to search for the values that would give immediate benefits to pupils.

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Mokinių identiteto konstravimas mokykloje

Mikelis Grivins

Santrauka

Teoretikai, analizuodami švietimo procesą mikrolygmeniu, apibūdina tarpusavio santykių organizacijoje poveikį švietimo rezultatams. Be to, tyrėjai atskleidė, kad skirtingi moksleiviai gauna nevienodą naudą. Tačiau pateikiami aiškinimai per daug supaprastinti. Šiame straipsnyje analizuojamas mokinių identiteto konstravimas mokykloje. Analizuojant 34 interviu su mokiniais ir mokytojais, išskiriami trys svarbūs konstruojant mokinio identitetą dalyvaujantys veikėjai: mokiniai, mokytojai ir klasės draugai.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai*:* mokykla, identitetas, švietimas.