

Joanna M. Łukasik

Sociology of Education as a New Pedagogical Subdiscipline

Studia Paedagogica Ignatiana. Rocznik Wydziału Pedagogicznego Akademii
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Joanna M. Łukasik
Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow, Poland

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Mirosław J. Szymański, *Studia i szkice z socjologii edukacji*
[*Studies and Essays in Sociology of Education*],
Wydawnictwo Akademii Pedagogiki Specjalnej,
Warszawa 2015, pages 202

Sociology of education is a branch of sociology, relying on sociological theories and fundamental research. It is a relatively young discipline, a discipline in the making, which evolves by referring to and drawing on other scientific fields, such as philosophy, psychology, social pedagogy, political studies, etc. Considering just these assumptions, it must be emphasized that preparing a publication in the field of the sociology of education is a challenge, accessible only to masters of the discipline and the work reviewed in this text is undoubtedly such a case. Aware of the uncharted territory of this field of study, the author—Professor Mirosław J. Szymański—assumed the task of casting some light on those research areas that have already been explored at this stage of development of the discipline. In the book, he presents selected issues in the sociology of education—those that are crucial and fundamental.

Szymański's volume consists of ten chapters. The first one, entitled "Social structure," presents the problems of social structure in the historical context (making reference to social stratification based on caste, estate, and class, theories of social stratification, and empirical evidence of occurrence of social differentiation.

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This section of the chapter constitutes a perfect introduction to the subjects discussed in chapter two, “Social differentiation and education.” Here the author presents the issues of educational inequalities against the background of social conditions. For this purpose, he invokes the most important theories that explain the mechanisms generating such inequalities.

In the next chapter, the topic of socialization is discussed. The author describes factors of human development, definitions of socialization, development of theories of socialization, and stages of socialization. The final considerations and conclusions of this chapter deserve special attention. It is emphasized that, apart from stratification factors, it is the course of socialization that affects social awareness, selection and the internalization of certain values, the lifestyle, educational and cultural aspirations, and development of educational and life paths of the next generations.

Chapter four, “Educational ideologies,” provides extremely important knowledge on the dominant educational ideologies (neoliberalism, radical ideology), prevailing in the developed countries, which have the greatest influence on the shape of educational policies, school reform projects, concepts and currents in education, and educational practice.

Chapter five contains a chronological presentation of selected theories, proposed by researchers from different countries, who attempt to explain the causes of popularization of education. The referenced theories include those by W.T. Schultz, P.T. Drucker, S. Bowles and H. Gintis, R. Collins, F.O. Ramirez and R. Rubinson or P. Bourdieu. In the conclusion, Szymański remarks that it does not matter whether the dominating category which allows us to view the causes of education spread in a comprehensive and multi-aspectual way “is the modernisation of contemporary societies, or a different category, which determines the character of transformations in the modern civilization,” and he states that “the appropriate interpretations of the process in question must be complex in nature” (p. 97). It mainly stems from the complexity of the modern world, which generates more and more complicated conditions for the development of education in particular countries.

The sixth chapter, “Selective functions of education and their social determinants,” provides valuable information on the current state

of knowledge of social determinants of the school's selective functions (from a typology of selective factors to a model of conditioning of selective functions). These problems are further discussed in the following chapter ("Function of the educational system in the social reproduction processes"), which presents an analysis of the selective function in the general social dimension. In this section of the book it is worth noticing that the author focuses particularly on the consequences that certain selective mechanisms in education have for the social reproduction processes. The highlighted aspects are the role of the educational system and the model of school's selective function. The next chapter, "Social barriers in youth education in rural areas." is, to a large extent, connected with the previous two. Szymański discusses the phenomenon of inequality of chances on the example of children and youth in rural areas. He notes that the educational opportunities of children and youth in those areas are still influenced by the same factors that typically hindered education and further life career in the 1970s and 1980s. These factors still exist, although in a modified form. This situation has not been prevented by the educational reform initiated in 1999, although its assumptions guaranteed positive changes in this aspect.

The ninth chapter is a valuable source of information about the types and categories of actions taken by the state on the micro- and macroscale, aimed to decrease the inequalities in educational opportunities. In order to present the validity and effectiveness of such measures, the author quotes the research on the subject, conducted in the Netherlands.

The volume is concluded by chapter ten, "Neoliberal tendencies in the Polish society and the question of social justice in education." Here, the author critically analyses and comments on the liberal solutions functioning in the Polish educational system.

Summing up, it is worth emphasizing that the author of the volume focuses on the analysis of two functions of the school system: socialization and stratification. The volume is a valuable source of knowledge on the sociology of education. The information is presented in an organized and clear manner, with references being made to the most significant, crucial scientific sources. As the author himself often states, many of the questions discussed remain open, yet he offers suggestions as to where to look for information to deepen,



broaden, and organize one's knowledge of the subject. His mastery is shown in his ability to present difficult topics in an accessible way, and to inspire the reader to pursue further self-study. Owing to its great specialist value, the volume can be recommended to a wider audience: not only to students of pedagogy, sociology, or political science, but also to theoreticians and researchers in many fields, including teachers, tutors, and pedagogues.

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE:

Dr. hab. Joanna Łukasik, prof. AIK
Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow, Poland
joanna.lukasik@ignatianum.edu.pl