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Pupil Grouping: Education Agent Interaction Influence on Education Results

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Abstract

This paper analyses pupil grouping within primary education and its influence on pupils' opportunities to achieve high education results. The author aims to show how pupils' achievements and education interpretation are constructed in classroom interaction, and how such constructs are connected to teacher interpretation of pupils' abilities. The analysis is concerned with micro interaction occurring between the teacher and the pupil. The empirical study is elaborated within the interpretative perspective and based on theories of New Sociology of education and grouping. To obtain data about the questions analyzed interviews with language and mathematics teachers were conducted, followed by interviews with pupils whom the interviewed teachers described as "*high ability*" or "*poor ability*". To analyze the empirical data Critical Discourse Analysis was applied. The results show that both pupils and teachers legitimize pupil grouping and these groups are used to predict pupil performance. It is also possible to conclude that pupils' interpretation of education processes comes from interaction within school. Although there is a link between interaction and pupils' achievements, teachers tend to explain pupil achievements through other factors.

Keywords: education, grouping, schools, class, interaction

Agrupación del Alumnado: La Influencia de las Interacciones de los Agentes Educativos

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Resumen

Este artículo analiza la agrupación del alumnado en la educación primaria y su influencia en alcanzar resultados educativos elevados. El autor tiene como objetivo señalar los logros del alumnado, como la interpretación educativa se construye en la interacción en el aula y como estas construcciones están conectadas con la interpretación del profesorado de las habilidades del alumnado. El análisis está centrado en la interacción micro que ocurre entre el profesorado y el alumnado. Este estudio empírico está elaborado desde la perspectiva interpretativa y basado en las nuevas teorías sociológicas de la educación. Para la obtención de los datos se llevaron a cabo entrevistas con profesorado de lengua y matemáticas, seguidas de entrevistas con alumnado a los que el profesorado describía como de "*altas capacidades*" o de "*bajas capacidades*". Cabe destacar también que el análisis de los datos empíricos se realizó a través de un Análisis Crítico del Discurso. Los resultados demuestran que ambos, alumnado y profesorado, legitiman una agrupación específica del alumnado que condiciona el rendimiento académico. También es posible concluir que la interpretación sobre los procesos educativos que sigue el alumnado están condicionados por las interacciones que se dan en la escuela. Aunque se dé una relación entre interacción y rendimiento académico; el profesorado tiende a explicar el rendimiento académico a través de otros factores.

Palabras claves: educación, agrupación, escuelas, clases sociales, interacción

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It is common to view the education process in schools, both in public and academic discussions, from a macro perspective. Therefore, discussions regardless of the issue addressed, be it education content, pupil achievements, school organization etc., apply a simplified education system interpretation, based on presumption that by putting in place a *right kind of system organization* one can achieve higher academic results. Such a perspective loses its connection to the context of every specific case which is the main argument for explaining various education praxes.

Yet even such superficial analysis reveals problems and questions within Latvia's education system that beg for a much deeper research. For example, data from the Central Statistical Bureau shows that 9th grade is finished by around 10% less pupils than started to study nine years ago. In study year 2009/2010 around 3% of pupils who graduated primary school did not receive the Certificate of Completion but graduated primary school with a school grade report. In year 2010, 5.3% of primary school graduates decided not to continue their studies in secondary school.

In addition, the situation outlined here does not correspond to the goals that Latvia's policy makers stress, namely, promoting a knowledge-based society and life-long learning, and ensuring education availability (RAPLM, 2006; Saeima, 2010). Thus it is necessary to search for explanations which would allow explaining mismatches in the education system. To ensure full understanding, such explanations shouldn't be limited to a macro perspective.

Within this paper I am addressing pupil-teacher interaction interpretation during education processes. The aim of this study is to analyze how the interpretation of pupils and teachers' mutual interaction is used by both groups to construct knowledge about pupil achievement groups. The research object is primary school pupils, their teachers and both teacher and pupil knowledge about the education process. It means that within this paper I use term "education" to refer to "primary education".

The study is elaborated within the perspective of social construc-

tionism. Education processes are explained through the theories of Pierre Bourdieu and Basil Bernstein, tracking and labeling. Ideas of both authors in this research are used to give explanation on how pupil's belonging to a certain social group influences his abilities to act according to education agent expectations. I am interpreting tracking and labeling as "two sides of the same coin" – both are instruments that give real tools to agents involved in education processes to connect their knowledge on education process with the praxis that promotes specific education results.

During research interviews with Latvian language and Mathematics teachers and teacher recommended pupils were conducted. In total 34 in-depth interview data was gathered. To analyze the empirical material Critical Discourse analysis was used.

Theoretical perspective

To explain my education interpretation I draw from several theories. Here the selection of theories is defined by my interpretation of hierarchical relationship between them. Mutual vertical relations of theories allow me describing education processes top down across the whole range – from macro to mezzo to micro. Similarly theories are selected in a way that enables offering a logical explanation from several theoretically relevant education levels and keeping in under consideration the main education system traits. These education system traits are as follows: (1) the presence of power on all its institutional levels, (2) specific interaction types, (3) high legal/normative regulation level and (4) high ability to extrapolate education results.

Theories of Pierre Bourdieu and Basil Bernstein

One of the best known perspectives on interpreting education has been elaborated by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Quite a similar view on education has been offered by the English education researcher and linguist Basil Bernstein. Both authors lived and developed their theories at the same time. This has encouraged critics to suggest that both theories supplement each other (Collins, 1978; Singh, 2002). Yet, several nuances of theories (some of them pointed out also by authors

themselves (Bourdieu, 1991; Bernstein, 1995) encourages us to make a clear distinction between both approaches.

The ideas proposed by both researchers can be integrated under the statement that education will offer differing opportunities for pupils from various social backgrounds. Achievement diversity shouldn't be explained through the overall level of schooling quality (as some researchers may put it) but as a linkage between the school's internal processes and the interests of the social and cultural elite (Sadovnik, 2007, pp. 9-13). In both cases education represents dialectical relations between the group's ability to legitimate dominant praxes and knowledge and its access to power. As a result dominant groups can define categories which later are used to select individuals which are allowed in dominant groups (Young, 1971, p. 8). Such explanation proposes that, firstly, during the analysis, education shouldn't be separated from the space it is located in. Secondly this shows how the school works as a mechanism for social reproduction.

Ideas just mentioned and conclusions derived allow identifying some additional factors which unites both authors. Both Bourdieu and Bernstein describe pupil's attainment of accepted/ valued knowledge as the main factor that can be used in identifying pupils' high achievement ability. Bourdieu illustrates how school is constructed to strengthen symbolic capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) and how education is used to reproduce culture capital (Bourdieu, 2007). Bernstein shows how linguistic codes are used to promote pupils from certain social groups (Bernstein, 2003a). Selection of classroom code is a result of pedagogic praxis used – it is teacher's interpretation of pupils' abilities and capacities.

In both cases the level of achievement pupils will be able to show depends on the kind of knowledge the school accepts. Such knowledge is selected and legitimated by groups most effectively using symbolic capital. In other words – pupils representing groups that have access to resources influencing education praxis will always achieve higher education results.

Another factor which should be taken into account when talking about education is that the school can create knowledge that later on will be accepted and used as a basis for defining social structure. From the perspective of Bourdieu and Bernstein there is a constant conflict

within society over the authority to determine knowledge what will be taught in schools. For group members, access to education content planning guarantees both higher academic achievements for the group members' children and the possibility to use school to ensure the value of such knowledge. Schools don't merely teach kids a predefined set of knowledge – they demonstrate young people which knowledge is worth knowing. As a result, although most pupils can't achieve high school results they still accept knowledge offered in school as an instrument which can support their status and which can be used to restrict or promote their opportunities in future.

This short description of both theories allows us to understand the praxis which is used to reproduce pupils' academic results. Yet, although these theories give a clearer understanding of how pupil achievements are created, both authors have only partially considered the pupil as an active agent (Karabel & Halsey, 1976). Both theories consider interaction which can emerge between the teacher and the pupil just in a context of accepted knowledge. By doing so the authors ignore an important education agent – the pupil and his interpretation and knowledge about the processes he is operating in. Therefore the question of explaining pupil's achievements still remains a “black box” (ibid).

A problematic part of Bourdieu's and Bernstein's perspective is their proposition that pupils (and maybe teachers as well) act in a system where every meaningful praxis occurring is system-predefined – it's already inscribed in the accepted context and education system. Pupils in such a perspective are just passive objects of symbolic violence who do not have any real tools to influence the situation.

Researchers have tried to correct such determinism. For example Ogbu has concluded that pupils' minority group origins can influence their attitude towards the majority created education system – minority pupils may be unwilling to get involved in the education processes (1992; 1982). Other authors point out several other ways how pupil's interpretations and actions can influence schooling outcomes. Pupils who hold different interpretation about their future opportunities, show different academic achievements (MacLeod, 1987; Willis, 1981). Similarly pupil attainment can influence interaction within the classroom (Hargreaves, 1975), teacher's interpretation of pupils (Rist, 2007), and pedagogy used (Cicourel, 1974), etc. Pupils' academic achievements

can be explained through various factors yet we don't have a clear view of how these factors could be connected. Arguments mentioned can be used to conclude that to answer questions asked we should focus our attention on agents' mutual relations within the class on a micro level.

Tracking

To fully understand education mechanics it is important to define instruments which teachers can use to promote pupil's achievement. Two concepts could be used to deal with this issue – tracking and labeling. Both terms are commonly used in theoretical and empirical research and both are used to explain specific interaction which can occur between pupils and teachers and how this results in pupil attainment. Consequently the introduction of tracking and labeling allows for creating a much more detailed explanation of mutual relations between the educational praxis and the interpretation of education by the involved agents.

Explanations of tracking usually contain some indication of hierarchical structures within school which at some point will promote different access to education resources (Brint, 2006, pp. 211-220). Jeannie Oakes explains that tracking is a process during which pupils are divided in categories that later will be used to appoint them to classes or groups (Oakes, 2002). As an example Oakes offers a distinction which she says is commonly used in schools: classes can be divided in groups of fast, middle and slow learners. Oakes points out that usually this distinction is supported by teachers and school officials because they accept the perspective that teachers will be able to select more appropriate pedagogic praxis if pupils are divided in ability groups (ibid).

Although researchers can't agree on tracking consequences most of them tend to describe it as a negative praxis that should be re-evaluated (Slavin, 1993). Researchers point out that depending on the group or class to which pupils during selection are assigned several education factors change: time spent for education (Oakes, 2002), knowledge taught (Rist, 2007; Oakes, 2002), pupils circle of friends (Hallinan & Sørensen, 1985; Hallinan & Teixeira, 1987), opportunities for further education (Cookson & Persell, 1985) as well as access to some specific

knowledge (Hallinan, 1996), etc. Commonly researchers conclude that more often the consequences will be felt by lower class pupils. This can be explained by the fact, that lower class pupils much more often are tracked into low ability classes (Slavin, 1995). Additionally researchers suggest that considerable differences in average achievements can't be observed between classes were pupils are and aren't tracked. In grouped classes the achievement average stays the same because the dispersion of results grows – pupils who are tracked as high achievers tend to get even higher results while pupils, who are considered to be low achievers fall even lower (Slavin, 1993).

Authors often tend to show tracking as nearly a mechanical process during which the structure of society is reproduced and individuals from lower status groups are significantly limited (Oakes, 1995; 1983; Ogbu, 1992; Hallinan, 1994). Such approach can be easily connected to ideas of Bourdieu and Bernstein that emphasize that cultural capital of lower social groups involves limitations when used to perform tasks associated with upper status groups. Tracking from such perspective represents interpretation of pupil's ability by teachers – evaluation of pupil's ability to learn, acquire knowledge and function according to school rules (Brint, 2006, pp. 211-220). This description connects tracking to labeling.

Labeling

The usage of the term “labeling” offers a critical interpretation of education processes and helps to keep distance from the official view on teacher pupil relations. It means that the concept of labeling allows the researcher to expand the borders of the school, education processes and statuses of involved agents.

The concept of labeling has been introduced into sociology of education by Ray Rist. Rist's definition of core characteristics of labeling fits well with the already given description of tracking where teacher's interpretation of pupil ability comes from predefined ability categories selected by teachers to facilitate their work (Rist, 2007; Wineburg, 1987). As mentioned –if we use the term “tracking” then probably some clear, context meaningful and measurable factors that serve as a basis for grouping will be observable. With labeling we can clearly distinguish praxis results, yet we can't notice the grouping

process- there aren't any public definition why some pupil is described as low achieving. The labeled kid is taught in the same class as other pupils and the teacher may not even notice that his pedagogy and interaction differs from pupil to pupil. Officially labeled pupils don't receive any new status that would support the need of some specific model of interaction. Yet although there hasn't been any official changes within the school or class the teacher chooses to form different interaction and maybe even teach some other knowledge, based on his interpretation of pupils' ability.

The result of labeling is a self-fulfilling prophecy – the pupil starts to fit the expectations that are promoted by the teacher. Teacher-pupil interaction has ensured that the teacher's interpretation of pupil's abilities turns out to be true and everyday observations confirm his expectations (Eder, 1981). Still there was not any real support for the teacher's interpretation to start with, and the only reason why the results correspond to teacher's interpretation is his expectations which have promoted unequal resource distribution within the class. We can associate such point of view with the fact that pupils come to school with their social “luggage” – certain cultural capital that defines ways of how pupil works with knowledge and how he chooses to represent himself. Meanwhile the teacher comes to school with his social experience that is used to create more effective pedagogy.

To give a more precise labeling interpretation I would like to point out some final remarks. Firstly – pupils can be labeled on a wide range of factors. Most commonly labeled characteristics in education are drawn from the space that we could call meaningful context – the space where school is located and where teachers' experience is shaped. Secondly, although a label is attached to every single pupil, at the end the classroom will be filled with wider pupil groups where every pupil may be connected to several labels. Thirdly, all of labels will tend to connect with the ability to explain academic achievements. Fourthly, every characteristic which is labeled will tend to legitimize itself. Legitimization should promote two observable consequences: firstly labeling arguments will tend to connect with socially accepted arguments and secondly within the class (school) there will be a search for ways how to legitimize pupil results.

Methodology

In the previous sections of the paper I showed how interaction within the class can promote specific academic outcomes. Here I argue that to predict pupil's academic abilities various unorganized knowledge from the context is brought into everyday classroom interaction. Integrated knowledge then generates teacher and pupil expectations towards the specific pupil's ability to execute everyday tasks that can be used as a factor to explain his achievements.

Differences that can be observed in teachers' interpretation with regard to various pupils are based both in his pedagogical experience and experience obtained outside of school. Such experience is manifested through everyday pedagogical praxes. The teacher who within the school is in a power position can use the authority accessible to him to promote interaction that would support his general beliefs about pupils' skills and abilities. As a result the pupil interacting with the teacher is forced to accept the role assigned by the teacher.

Teacher's interpretation is based on his knowledge – he uses certain constructions that would legitimate the “truth” of social praxis. This means that the main element conditioning teacher's knowledge and his ability to carry out pedagogic praxis based on this knowledge is language. To supplement and explain this point I should mention that here language functions consist of accumulating knowledge, defining what is possible, conditioning power relations and forming (maintaining) reality. For Bourdieu and Bernstein language also is an instrument that creates borders between groups.

To analyze how pupils are grouped within a classroom 8 interviews with Mathematics and Latvian language teachers of 8th and 9th grade and 26 interviews with pupils were conducted. In total I visited eight schools and in every school one teacher and several pupils suggested by teachers were interviewed. Teachers were asked to suggest the highest ability and poorest ability pupils in the class for interviewing and during the interview they were asked to explain their choice.

The obtained text was analyzed using Critical Discourse analysis (CDA). Compared to other similar perspectives CDA draws a great deal more attention to power relations that can be observed within a discourse. As a method CDA does not involve significant limitations for

its usage. On the contrary – it encourages researchers to adapt the method for their needs and to select instruments that fit best for a specific situation. The main restriction for CDA usage is that the theoretical basis selected should emphasize power relations (Wodak, 2001). With characteristics mentioned in mind it is much more easier to describe CDA not as a method but as a principle or perspective used – it is more an approach that stresses researcher’s point of view with regard to social processes (Meyer, 2001): Ruth Wodak points out that it is better to describe CDA as a perspective that can unite several approaches (Wodak, 2001); Teun Adrianus van Dijk defines that CDA is not a specific research direction and that is why it doesn’t have one precise theoretical frame (van Dijk, 2001); Norman Fairclough stresses that optimal CDA usage is possible only if differentiation and cross-disciplinarity is encouraged (Fairclough, 1995).

An oversimplified explanation of CDA could be that it is a method that tends to make more visible the links connecting discursive praxis, social praxis, social structures and text. Another explanation could be that CDA explains through power relations the links that affect every social event as well as text usage yet remain unnoticed during everyday text construction and usage. Usually this method is associated with an attempt to observe dominance, discrimination, observable and hidden power and control within language (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). Interpretation that illustrates CDA presupposes that language, dialectically connected to various elements of social reality, is an inseparable part of this reality. It just means that while researching social reality we should draw our attention to language, and language research can be a productive research field (Fairclough, 2003).

CDA explains reality through language analysis. To be more precise I should mention that by using the term “language” I mean language usage – or, if I use more common terminology – text (Fairclough, 1995; 2003; 2006; van Dijk, 1992). Text as a research object can include any praxis of language use – starting from everyday conversations, continuing with books and finishing with focused interviewing. Interpretation of text can be widened to text as cultural artifacts, such as music, a picture on the TV screen, or, as a matter of fact, TV itself. Such differentiation is based on the argument that a text always includes two characteristics: representation and interpretation (Fairclough, 1995).

Both characteristics can create new links and restrictions that emerge from social praxis and factors brought up by a social situation (Fairclough, 2006). Relying on the mentioned arguments Fairclough defines discourse as language use influenced by social praxis (*ibid*, 63-64).

CDA will always draw its attention to power relations that can be observed in text (Wodak, 2001; Fairclough, 2006; 1999; van Dijk, 1992; 2000; 2008). We can distinguish between two ways language is linked to power relations: firstly, power relations are located behind and within language and, secondly, power relations emerge from restrictions in language usage – from social praxis that regulates interaction (Wooffitt, 2005). It means that every text is simultaneously connected to power relations, reproduction of power relations and restrictions in situation interpretation. In this way discourses are always connected to ideologies and hegemony of certain groups (van Dijk, 2000; 2008; Fairclough, 1995; 2006).

Michael Foucault, while describing constructing and structuring characteristics of discourse, points out that discourse, as a connection between a wider social formation and observable text usage constructs and positions subjects. It means that discourse constantly shapes and deforms objects that are connected to its usage and by doing so discourse constantly draws borders and power relations. From Foucault's perspective power relations are shaped through defining what is true and by attributing this definition to physical and social reality (Foucault, 1972). Here discourse emerges as a mechanics that allows defining and maintaining a social position by giving opportunity to define themselves and others.

In this paper I am using text analysis to explain how teachers and pupils group pupils. To make my explanation deeper I draw my attention to situations when grouping occurs and to the context of grouping praxis. I use N. Fairclough's three dimensions of discourse analysis as a basis of my analysis. This perspective prescribes that the researcher should start analysis with discursive praxis interpretation, follow up with text description and finish analysis with social praxis interpretation.

Results

In this part I will present results of my research. I have tried to group findings in three sections yet in many cases it isn't possible because of amount of conclusions that are overlapping and can be fitted in every section. That is why I show some of the findings just by selecting where they would fit better in the overall story.

The first section of findings addresses the overall explanation of how grouping can be interpreted and how it fits the official or unofficial praxis of the school. The second section is concerned with arguments used to legitimize grouping or other praxis what doesn't fit official school or state policy. The third section questions characteristics of groups created and shows how arguments are chosen for creating groups.

Grouping praxis

Interpretation of optimal education is shaped by Latvia's education legislation, international regulations and agreements, as well as public opinion. In total these agents produce a non-existent Utopian education vision where every pupil shows or can show high achievements and every teacher is highly involved in the development of every pupil. Here I wouldn't like to expand an interpretation of the accepted education perspective. Yet I want to point out that in a perfect system pupil grouping isn't acceptable and it can't be interpreted as a part of technologized education discourse – discursive form that represents accepted perspective of educational praxis and education characteristics. That is why ideas of grouping are brought in informants' stories and they search for ways to legitimate it.

Such legitimization praxes are interesting from several perspectives. Firstly, they illustrate teacher's interpretation of the characteristics of grouping that make it acceptable and the possible use of identified characteristics in legitimizing a praxis that lies outside technologization. Secondly, it allows observing the kind of knowledge teachers tend to bring into technologized education interpretation.

To begin with I have to point out that while talking about everyday education praxes, both teachers and pupils use several official and unofficial categories to group pupils. Informants show that grouping is

part of everyday education praxis that needs to be supported because, firstly, by doing so the teacher would be able to pursue best pedagogical praxes and an optimal education process, secondly, power relations that are necessary for a successful education process could be reproduced and strengthened through grouping. Yet such praxis shouldn't violate some vague borders that are defined by technologized interpretation.

Grouping seems to be a logical result of distribution of power and the necessity to maintain it yet it acts against meritocratic ideals in education. Knowledge and power in the education system can be linked in several ways. Technologized discourse holds an understanding of authority of the wise/ competent teacher and subordination of pupils willing to learn. Those involved in education interaction expect that the power positions, the meaning of authority and the ways the power is practiced will change depending on the status achieved in the education system. In school one can observe a hierarchy of knowledge which directly influences power distribution and usage – and it is directly connected to the social position that different agents in the class have.

Pupils' development is organized in a gradual manner – every day they learn something new. However achievement control is organized regularly, it is not practiced constantly. Teacher monitors pupils by asking them questions, following-up if they have done their home assignments. He repeatedly interacts with the pupils he is not sure about or whose achievements should be improved. At the basis of interaction described is the assumption that regular control will promote pupils' attainment in the education system: at the end the pupil will realize that conflict relations with the teacher aren't optimal so he will change his unacceptable interaction. Yet pupils, while talking about such processes, comment that it just makes them less positive about the education process as such.

Basic interpretation of grouping in pupil and teacher interviews is connected with pupil's abilities to correspond to some overall expectations about pupil's academic achievements at a given age. It is a perspective of optimal development that is connected to a very wide context both in and out-side school. Optimal development here is viewed as a possibility to receive acceptance for being in power positions. A pupil who is developing according to teacher's evaluation of "the right way" can receive more power in deciding for himself on

optimal schooling, schedule, interaction, etc. – he/she receives the opportunity to avoid being the target of some power practices that the teacher uses in the classroom. Development is similarly described by pupils - however they put more emphasis on physical development by pointing out that age itself can serve as a tool for changes in power relations. It shows that pupils see changes in power structure as inevitable and not necessary connected to invested work, while the teacher can interpret everything through invested work - even biological age.

Within school one can observe a much more differentiated inner age distinction which is created by connection to knowledge, development, biological age and behaviorally manifested age. To be more precise – pupils have to fit expectations in several ways and all expectation perspectives can be used to describe him and make conclusions about his academic abilities. Depending on processes one is talking about both teachers and pupils can select any of these factors to prove a point they are trying to defend. Although there is a certain power attached to every successive stage of age, the pupil can't just use it according his biological age. A more complicated perspective presupposes that age requirements should be fulfilled with regard to all factors. So the teacher and the pupil can subtract somebody's power by pointing out that according to some criteria the person hasn't reached the age of power. For example, during interviews respondents were using such expressions as, "they behave like small kids"; knowledge they don't possess "is taught in the fifth grade"; this they had to know "a year ago", etc.

To conclude I should summarize that grouping is about granting or banning access to power positions. Pupils expect that by growing up they will receive more possibilities to decide for themselves yet teachers using several instruments grant power only to those whom they evaluate as worthy of power. Distribution can be explained through the teacher's expectations which the pupil can match and fail to match in several ways.

Argumentation for grouping

As I mentioned earlier there is overall agreement that education should be represented and perceived as a technologized form. Nevertheless,

rather often something that doesn't fit into technologized form is brought out as part of it. In such cases agents tend to search for ways to support interdiscursivity. There are several ways in which teachers and pupils tend to link pupil grouping (and other praxes they interpret as unacceptable) with technologized education interpretation.

Pupils usually are well aware of principles used as a basis of grouping. They can identify several pupil groups in the class and explain why the concrete pupils are in the group. However they use knowledge on grouping with a different aim – with grouping they accept some class principles as obvious and legitimate. Such approach allows them avoiding full involvement in education processes. In other words pupils use grouping to legitimate their low involvement in school rituals and other praxes. As a result pupils who are labeled as “*high ability*” are forced to learn while those who are “*poor ability*” can avoid it.

One of the first arguments used to justify grouping is professionalism - informant argumentation suggests that the grouping of pupils serves as a proof of teacher's professionalism. Both teachers and pupils stress that pupils involved in education are different and they represent various needs. Teacher's ability to promote interaction that is based on this differentiation illustrates his professionalism and serves as a basis for pupils' opportunities. This perspective to depict grouping as a natural part of education automatically accepts the line of different arguments as self-evident. The most obvious example of self-evident knowledge is the statement that pupils differ by their abilities, knowledge, interpretation, etc. to such an extent that adaptations in teachers' pedagogy are needed.

This perspective is used commonly, automatically connecting it to other statements describing teacher professionalism which can again be seen as factors describing the way that pupils are grouped. For example, teachers tend to describe how they coordinate pedagogical praxis with other teachers – teachers agree on common interpretation of the pupil and his achievements and agree on what they expect from this pupil. Comments like these are used to illustrate teacher's professionalism and care about the pupil. Pedagogy from this view point is based on needs of every pupil – it is and should be separated from some distant external regulations.

All arguments used are closely connected to an argument that could be called environment. A pupil is part of an environment that helps teachers explaining what this pupil is like – to explain his abilities and achievements. Teachers tend to talk about pupil's parents, family values, place of living and lifestyle, peers, etc. They use pupil's private experience with a certain group as an argument on how such a pupil should be educated or what he can achieve. Even the fact that the teacher doesn't know anything about the pupil can serve as a basis to come to conclusion that the pupil's parents aren't interested in education of their children.

In a similar way teachers tend to use other information accessible – small everyday facts: whether and how the pupil buys lunch in school may be used as an argument to illustrate that the pupil is facing economic problems, the pupil's friends can be used as evidence that illustrates the pupil's interests and leisure time activities. Again – the ability to deduce weighty conclusions from small details is represented as proof of the teacher's professionalism. Commonly such arguments aren't used separately, but as a part of a wider explanation. Another nuance that serves both as a proof and a reference for showing that teacher is not prejudiced is the teachers' ability to distinguish whether the mentioned observation on the pupil is important. In order to demonstrate that they are not prejudiced, teachers tend to explain how they have managed to distinguish exceptions where seemingly obvious hints were wrong.

One more argument used by both teachers and pupils is natural development. This argument presupposes some mental background and natural limits of pupil's abilities. It means that pupil's inability to achieve certain results should be explained through pupil's intellectual limits rather than by teacher's lack of professionalism.

Yet there is one more way to speak about pupil's mental capacities – to explain that some pupils are not meant for this knowledge. Pupils point out that they can't be good in mathematics or physics, because they are “*artists*”, they don't have “*mathematical thinking*”. In same way teachers tend to label pupils as “*artists*” or “*scientists*” thus explaining why the pupil doesn't show equal results in all subjects.

The forth argument to legitimate pupils grouping is knowledge continuity. Teachers classify pupil's abilities by pointing out that there

has been discontinuity in hierarchical development. Here the informant uses an assumption that knowledge development is a hierarchical process and it isn't possible to obtain knowledge if one hasn't mastered its previous levels. As a result the pupil may be unable to master something because at some previous stage he hasn't been exposed to the right kind of pedagogy. This argument can be used both by teachers and pupils who can explain their present achievements by mentioning something that has happened earlier and can't be changed. The reasons one hasn't learned previous knowledge can differ greatly: it can be that the pupil has missed a great deal of schooling, or he wasn't motivated to learn, or he has been exposed to weak pedagogy.

This argument is interesting because of the idea of discontinuity of hierarchical development. This term helps explaining how guilt about unsuccessful learning/ teaching process can be passed to whatever agent in the past. A teacher can point out, that he can't teach the pupil because he has missed certain basic learning in his family or because a previous teacher hasn't done his teaching work well. A pupil can explain that his former teacher wasn't good at teaching or that he himself didn't want to learn.

The last to describe here is the comparative argument. Comparison is based on experience which can serve to compare a pupil, a class, a school to another pupil, class or school. Teachers commonly use comparison to illustrate his former or up-to-date achievements or just to illustrate his knowledge over the field. Again such argument allows legitimating certain achievements.

Most commonly comparison is made within one class between classmates. A more complicated case is when comparison is created between two or more classes. Teachers can compare to some former classes, to former pupil generations, to pupils' parents (whom they maybe have taught), to other schools in the district or the best schools in the state, etc. By choosing the object to compare with the teacher (and in some cases the pupil too) manages to illustrate every point he is trying to make. Comparison is drawn from the informant's immeasurable context – yet the form of explanation is shaped as the general *truth*.

Grouping and status

The agents involved in the education process can associate any pupil with several interpretations. Connection to a specific label can be interpreted by both - teachers and pupils. Labels can be provoked by separate events, by some explicit characteristic, by ability to integrate into the class group, relatives, etc. Knowledge about a pupil can emerge fast and tends to be persistent - interpretation about the pupil can be practically unchanged yet arguments supporting such interpretation change. Involved agents search and replace arguments to create a more precise and enduring label yet some arguments can be mentioned even if they reflect the situation that occurred several years ago.

During some interviews teachers use the term “*stigma*” underlining that interaction contains prolonged and persistent knowledge that may hold negative attitudes. Usually teachers in interviews doesn’t use terms that hold such provocative meaning and prefer much softer pupil interpretation descriptions. Teachers also mention that their knowledge about the taught class may influence interpretation used to interact with pupils.

Other important factor is pupil’s self-identification. This definitely is a vast question that is linked to all education praxis. If not provoked pupils rarely tend to give meaningful self-description which would be directly linked to education discourse. By using pronouns and pronominals pupils draw connections with classmates, class and school as an opposition to another school, a parallel class or other classmates. Yet none of such identifications are directly connected to the school (somewhat more often I found a link with education). Although all these categories at the end can be used by somebody to describe the pupil’s achievements they don’t have any direct connection to influence pupil’s achievements.

One explanation that could be used to clarify why pupils practically avoid identification with the school is that for pupils who don’t show high achievements the school doesn’t offer any significant status. The only status offered to pupils is “*pupil*”. As a result most of them don’t identify themselves with knowledge they are obtaining or have already obtained. Yet although pupils are not able to identify themselves within the education process they are able to describe affiliation with their

their school and class mates. Even more – pupils can identify the label attached to them and identify the label's influence on his opportunities. For example, a pupil may identify him-self as „slow” and describe that it is the reason he has to learn for longer time than other students.

However, pupils demonstrate a more clear connection to the school and education when they are describing classmates. Pupils often give insight on classmates' relations to the teacher and the school and mention their marks and success in school. Even more – pupils tend to explain classmate achievements both through some personal characteristics and their relations with teachers. I would suggest that pupils notice that success can be explained through teacher's attitude toward the pupil – yet during interviews they reproduce arguments teachers use. Interpretations of pupil achievements are constructed depending on the school context which is both contexts out-side and inside education system. An additional observation is that when describing classmates' school achievements pupils commonly use more than one criterion. Pupils are simultaneously using several arguments and most are just some conclusions drawn out of one of several contexts out of the education discourse.

A more clear description of pupils is given by teachers. Teachers give comments that there are pupils that are “*mentally challenged*” and that teachers in everyday pedagogy have to deal with that. For teachers' pupils may be “*problematic*”, “*hard to teach*”, “*spoiled*”, “*ailing*”, etc. Teachers use a wide range of different and often metaphorical characteristics to describe pupil's inability to fulfill his expectations. Such labels aren't hidden behind the technologized form of education discourse, but legitimized through offered legitimization arguments and then represented as a proof of teachers professionalism: ability to distinct pupil's problems and react based on these conclusions.

Pupils illustrate that there is a connection between teachers' knowledge about the pupil, his individual interpretation about the group he is representing, the pupil's ability to act so that he would be liked by teachers – and the pupil's marks. To be liked by a teacher can be gainful and most pupils not just know that, but can describe strategies employed to become likable.

Quite common is that pupils are described in comparative categories – the description is based on some meaningful oppositions. Knowledge

that underlies such oppositions doesn't differ from school to school. Mainly such distinctions are constructed around pupil categories of who can or has achieved high results and around those who don't or cannot do it.

The group of pupils who don't show high achievements consist of labels such as "idlers", "*shortchanged by God*" (Latvian saying), "*slow developing kids*", "*from disadvantageous family*". Here teachers use social, mental and physical arguments at the same time showing that for every pupil there is a line of maximum knowledge that he can achieve and if he knows more it's a proof of the "right" pedagogy.

Some teachers start their description of a class with a relatively mild pupil achievement description – "*lower end*". Such a label could at least theoretically be interpreted just as a description of school's academic achievements. Yet further in his story the teacher would start to use other forms to describe "lower end" pupils – he refers to the group as the "bad ones" ("*sliktie*"). The second meaning of this Latvian word "*sliktie*" would be "villains". Obviously the last pupil description is much deeper and holds wider interpretation of meanings. One pupil uses the term the "*good list*" which is meant as a group of "*good pupils*". If you're not on this list there is a considerable possibility that you won't have access to the school's resources. In their stories pupils often draw a close link between class achievements and teachers sympathies. This shows that pupils are well aware of the distinction between accepted and un-accepted pupils. In some interviews stories suggest that teachers work with pupils whom they like yet other kids are left on their own. Their contact with the teacher more often is described not through teaching and knowledge but through constant testing, constraints and control.

Although teachers tend to use a technologized interpretation of education, at some point labeling can be used to prove that technologized discourse and accepted knowledge can be far from the context in which *local* school is based. This is just a way how oppositional knowledge finds direct way to school to support struggle for power.

Discussion

I have shown, firstly, pupil-and-teacher interaction in the classroom, secondly, their interpretation of education processes and mutual interaction and, thirdly, pupil grouping mechanisms and their connections to pupil achievements. In order to demonstrate these issues I started with defining the basis of interpreting education processes and education system. With the help of Bourdieu's and Bernstein's theories I was able to illustrate processes that influence pupil opportunities within school. Namely – the school functions based on accepted knowledge that is needed to grant success for one-self. Yet, obviously this explanation isn't adequate, because it doesn't give any real tools that agents could use to influence pupil achievements. This is the reason why two more terms – tracking and labeling - were introduced. Together they show how expectations for certain knowledge and self-representation can affect pupil and teacher mutual relationship and interpretation – two factors that can be used to explain pupil's marks.

In my analysis I showed that mutual interpretation influences pupil's achievements. Yet a lot more interesting conclusion is that pupils are well aware of the scheme I described above. To be more precise they can describe how teacher's interpretation can influence the marks they receive and their everyday relations with the teachers. One of labeling theory arguments is that if a pupil is addressed with the same interpretation persistently, eventually he will respond according to expectations. This argument could be used to explain my observation – pupils tend to accept the teachers' interpretation, because they believe they fit teachers' description.

This line of argumentation however leaves one observation unexplained. Although some pupils are well aware of variations in teachers' communication and they accept that they are not as bright as other students, they still say that if they only wanted to they could change the patterns of interaction. Pupils explain how one can achieve that he is liked by the teacher and can reflect what benefits he would achieve if he could gain teacher's sympathies, yet they choose to remain in the position they are placed in. This could be described as a clash between what pupils actually know and what they do.

One logical explanation that I could offer is that school – the place

where interviews were conducted influences pupils' explanations and interpretations. In school authority relations are deformed and pupils tend to give the "right" response as they would respond to a teacher. Yet the interview situation is new to him so he doesn't know what would be the right answer interviewer expects and he just chooses one he has heard from teachers and reproduces the story of the agent who within the school is an authority. This suggests that pupils reproduced teachers' views. So there isn't any label stickiness – just a willingness to give the answer which wouldn't lead to punishment. It means that there isn't any contradiction – pupils just don't want to be liked by the teacher. In this way they are representing their opposition to the education system.

Yet another explanation would be that pupils are putting blame for their poor results to the system. They acknowledge that they aren't succeeding and that they aren't involved in classroom work in a needed level, to change something. They don't want to be guilty for that. Therefore, accepting a label and showing that the system is corrupted is a way to prove that there are other reasons why they avoid education tasks.

The perspective that has been illuminated by my work is that during education research much more attention should be drawn to education institution context. Most of the questions about education that are there cannot be answered without context references. Although school is a self-contained space with its own power structures and rules it seems that it still is an institution which can function just because of context dependent education interpretation. A school is rooted in local society by strong ties that are unnoticeable if observed from a distance. To explain what actually is happening a considerably more involved research approach is needed.

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