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## **THE CRISIS OF GLOBAL NEOLIBERALISM AND EDUCATION**

### **INTRODUCTION**

**W**e live in the times when the consequences of realizing two ideas concerning the organization of human community life have been fully revealed. The implementation of these projects is sometimes referred to as revolution. The former was the 1960s counter-cultural revolution, introducing the principle of individualism to all the aspects of human life, the latter was the turn of the 70s and 80s, when the neoliberal revolution took place, in which all areas of life were subject to a process of marketization and supposed to make profit. Both revolutions had their origins in the fact that the European culture has become a place of a great experiment consisting in designing and implementing new systems of organizing people's collective life and – what is connected with it – also on various ways of creating appropriate models of a new human.

According to Andrzej Grzegorzczak (2002), it is called a fashion for shaping social life in accordance with philosophical theories and rational scientific argumentation. An important element of these processes is the essentially significant role attribut-

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ed to the institutional system of education, treated as a kind of tool enabling or supporting the “construction” of these social projects through upbringing, shaping a new human appropriate to the designed assumptions. Taking into account the inseparable connection between the institutional educational system and the culture and community life, it should be considered how the relationship looks in neoliberalism and how it could function in a world where neoliberalism will not constitute the dominant order.

## NEOLIBERALISM AND EDUCATION

The beginnings of contemporary neoliberalism should be seen in the process of individualization that took place in the Western civilization. The ancient Greeks considered the issue of the relationship between an individual and the social unity, thus perceiving the problem of the autonomy of an individual as a theoretical and ideological one (Szacki, 2003). However, they did not treat an individual as an entity separated from the community. Self-awareness, the sense of identity and reflection did not go beyond the participation in the life of communities, they were immanently united. A significant change in this respect occurred in the times of the first individualist revolution. What was emphasized along with liberal individualism was the explicit emancipation of individuals both in the political and economic spheres, in which actions were subject to rational calculation in terms of profits and losses. However, the position of an individual and their place in the social hierarchy were determined by belonging to a social class, and thus the responsibility for an individual fate did not fall exclusively upon the individual. It was the counter-culture of the 1960s, referred to as the next libertarian revolution in the sphere of culture, that changed the nature of individualism with the appearance of mass consumption (Jacyno, 2007). According to the new individualism, what was put at the center of human actions was an individual subject, making decisions on their own and taking the responsibility. Jacyno refers to it as the professionalization of subjectivity. In this way, alongside the sphere of economy and politics, it is considered appropriate to recognize the rights of individuals to shape all the aspects of their lives in accordance with their own norms, values and objectives. At the same time, the so-called libertarian revolution abolishes the responsibility for others and disestablishes the permanence of relationships with other people (Taylor, 1996). Ulrich Beck (2002) emphasizes that people had been “freed” from group ties and they had to make themselves the center of command and control of their own lives, so that they could attend to their own business.

In the neo-liberal world, human faced a challenge directly related to the project of combining the principles of the neo-liberal economy with the counter-cultural revolution. The individualist culture made it possible to recognize an individual’s own reinterpretation of events in which they participate as a valid one. The search for what is important on one’s own had been recognized as a success and, above all, as a mani-

festation of freedom. The new free human could formulate his or her own judgements concerning what had happened to them, accept or evaluate their behavior and its effects in an arbitrary way, in short, they were brought alone in front of the world. In this way, apart from the sphere of economy and politics, it is considered right for individuals to shape all the aspects of their lives according to their own norms, values and goals. Following this path, what is came across is the model of a human “liberated” from the community, who is an autonomous subject, not giving in to the demands of others. A human was to create culture in him or herself, create their own identity, which was defined as a the revolution of subjects (Obuchowski, 1999).

Described by I. Wallerstein (2004) as a global system, the global neoliberalism is, above all, what constitutes its essential feature, i.e. the priority of continuous capital accumulation, and the focus on rewarding those who deal with capital accumulation and punishing everyone else who tries to implement other priorities.

This translates into further standard-setting elements of its functioning:

- an unrestricted free market guided solely by the rule of the maximization of profit;
- making profits as the guiding principle of both individual and social life;
- procedures and the standardization of human activities, their formalization and submission to formal control;
- the principle of competition between individuals and social groups striving for success;
- weakening interest in the fate of social groups.

Thus, the autonomous entity responsible for their own actions taken to achieve benefit/profit is reduced and becomes nothing more but a *homo economicus*. As a consequence, it can be assumed that neoliberalism is not only a phenomenon of an economic nature, but it constitutes a comprehensive state of modern culture, where it is the market mechanisms that control people’s lives, and the profit does not contribute to their wellbeing, but rules over them instead (Rutkowiak, Potulicka, 2012).

Adopting the concept of a human as a separate and unique being who possesses subjectivity, neoliberalism brought enormous havoc among societies subjected to this peculiar experiment, as well as among the members of these societies. A human was reduced to the role of a perseverant producer and an insatiable consumer. The effects in the social life are as follows:

- polarization of the status of possession and social position;
- an increase in the importance of competitive mechanisms;
- consumer attitudes – consumerism;
- weakening of civic attitudes – lack of concern for the common good;
- growing deficit in human spirituality – lack of reflection on the meaning of human life (Rutkowiak, Potulicka, 2012).

It seems that in the neoliberal world fewer and fewer people have more wealth, and a constantly increasing part of society is falling into poverty. It is no longer a certain percentage of the richest who own the majority of the accumulated wealth, they are particular dozens or hundreds of people. Corporate CEOs earn several hundred times as much money as average employees. The working precariat does not earn their own living, entire social groups are marginalized and meant to be “shredded,” and private prisons make profits from slave labor. The neo-liberals’ beautiful thesis that the faster the rich grow wealthier, the faster the poor will become richer, has already been falsified more than once.

The negative consequences of neoliberal strategy of social life are also visible in the sphere of education, designed a priori and aiming at theologically defined objectives. There is no coincidence, it is well thought and structural. According to F.A. von Hayek (2007), one of the most prominent representatives of liberalism, not only is there no need for education to be financed by the state, but there is even no need to guarantee state education in any form. Hayek’s further dissertation is devoted to answering the question of what economic benefits can be obtained from implementing various solutions in the field of education.

The ubiquitous culture of neoliberalism influences the general school education, which can be characterized by the following features:

- instrumentalization, i.e. treating education as a means to implement one’s own or designed interests;
- polarization, i.e. contributing to social inequalities through inadequately implemented education;
- one-sidedness, i.e. focusing on what is directly applicable, useful, utilitarian;
- simplification, i.e. pursuing its extreme realization, atomization, using a restricted code and the language of everyday life; everything should be smooth and easy;
- passivization, i.e. orienting learners to acquire with the least effort, which is obtained by ready-made solutions, slogans, completing algorithm-based schemes.

Neoliberalism creates such an educational context in which education is not focused on developing the ability of an in-depth perception of reality, but on shaping ordinary “bread-eaters” without greater aspirations, striving to multiply their material resources and increase consumption. A system of accountability is introduced through standardization, measuring students’ achievements (testing). On the basis of quantifiable indicators, decisions are made concerning penalties and rewards (Rutkowiak, Potulicka, 2012). However, all these measures, undertaken in the name of the effectiveness of education through an economic strategy, do not increase the level of education. They serve the political control over education rather than its quality. The

conclusions from the studies on the effects of standardization in the USA and the UK are unambiguous – standardization does not increase, but it decreases the level of education (Rutkowiak, Potulicka, 2012).

It seems that the sources of the effects different from the intended ones are to be found in the mechanisms governing people's behavior, including teachers', of course. Setting up standards and, consequently, introducing bureaucratic control, removes the teachers' responsibility for pupils. As there is no such method of checking the so-called educational outcomes, and there is no knowledge, competence or skill that could be checked by these unclear standards, in most cases schools and teachers are doomed to present themselves as implementing these standards and to prove to the bureaucrats monitoring their work that they have actually been implemented, but not that the intended results have been achieved. There is no verification method that would be able to reflect the educational reality. What becomes the goal is to convince the controlling authority that the assumed effects have been achieved, and not the fact of achieving these effects! The school teaches what can be checked by testing.

Another aspect of the neoliberal education policy is the attempt to make financing schools dependent on test results and rankings of achievements. The educational added value method used in these cases reflects the actual quality of work of a school to a small extent. There are too many variables involved here to consider it as an objective measure of the quality of work of a school. In order to evaluate the effects of the neoliberal education reforms, the hidden curriculum should rather be referred to. The presented principle, from the standardization through testing and competing for money by means of adding value, introduces neoliberal assumptions into students' souls. They must be ready to compete, to accept market rules in every life situation, not to give in to emotions and feelings that might disrupt their faith in the market that saves the world. It turns out that this world favors a few, whereas the majority is offered the status of losers, not to mention the status of "to be shredded." Competition, the lack of community and solidarity constitute a desirable image acquired by the young generation as a paradigm of practical life in the real adult world. This war among everyone at school is a good school of life in the world of risk, where it is the corporate suitability that matters, and losers must realize that they have no right to count on anyone's support and compassion.

## **EDUCATION AFTER NEOLIBERALISM**

Taking into account I. Wallerstein's opinion (2004), the neoliberal system has a few decades ahead. The end of the story has not come yet, but it seems that the end of the neoliberal world is likely to happen. As the goals of neoliberalism have been harmful to many societies and to many members of societies in which neoliberalism has benefited a few, and brought misfortunes of many, there is no reason to worry about its

possible collapse. Before opening a discussion concerning education after liberalism, it is necessary to formulate basic theses on the rights of social life of people in order to avoid mistakes dictated by false assumptions.

The first sin is to accept – both knowingly and unknowingly – the assumptions of ontological and methodological individualism (Szacki, 1999). In this way, the authors describing the world, not only from the neoliberal position, remain closed to the essence and proper ontological status of social reality. The social world is neither the world of particular individuals only, nor the one of social unities exclusively. It constitutes a oneness of individuals and social unities, as S. Hessen (1973) described it, or it can also be the world of Me and Us simultaneously, as it was pointed out by N. Elias (2011).

It is impossible to understand the social world if both an individual and the society are considered to be two separate objects, and not different aspects of the same human communities. While analyzing societies, the individualistic concepts should be derogated from and the essential aspect of community should be restored, along with sharing the systems of values, common goals and aspirations – this is a condition for a realistic discussion about education and its role in society. In any other case, we will get back to the past, which is well illustrated by H.G. Gadamer (2008). Recalling the story of Plato's cave, he referred to it in the context of university, but it can be extended to the situation of education and its overall dimension. The essence of the problem lies in the fact that neoliberal education can be regarded as corresponding to the knowledge of the prisoners tied in the cave, who ridicule those who were told to know the truth. Gadamer draws attention to the unbearable barrier between true knowledge and pragmatic validity. What can be emphasized is, on one hand, the pursuit of the truth, and, on the other, the ideological preconceptions of neoliberalism, covering the very practical interests of the neo-liberal oligarchy. In the ontological sphere, human societies should be considered as an inseparable whole, the oneness of individuals and social unities, in order for education to be understood in a right way.

It is also necessary to adopt a position assuming the need to include the importance/equivalence of different types of human activities in the analyzes of social life. It is assumed that M. Weber's social action theory (2002) has not been outdated. Weber distinguished four ways of determining social activities, i.e. deliberate-rational actions, undertaken due to the goal (the calculation of profits and losses is made and the selection of the most effective means); value-rational, undertaken for the sake of values (the key element is the shared values and striving for them irrespective of the means); affective actions (an individual guided by their emotions at a particular moment); traditional actions (habits). In the neo-liberal version of the world, it is assumed that a human makes use only of his or her instrumental rationality, which reduces a person to what is described by Weber as deliberate-rational actions.

Another issue is the necessity to move away from the idea of a theological nature of the historical process. The world does not aim to achieve an objective, either

consciously or unconsciously. The historical process is open and it is impossible to predict the future, or to describe its course. Also, education cannot directly influence the course of social processes. It is also assumed that democracy will remain the basic political system, but not burdened with any adjectives, such as socialist or liberal.

The alternative of two types of pedagogy presented by Z. Kwieciński (1995) also proves to be fundamentally false, from the ontological, epistemological and practical perspective. It is unjustified to present the pedagogy of cultural transmission as an alternative and, on the other hand, pedagogy of progress as a pedagogy of change. Apparently, building the future without the past cannot succeed, and proper education is to be rooted in the culture and tradition of a given cultural group. Apart from the problem of progress and development, which are difficult to define and implement, all positive effects of the school system pupils' actions require their involvement in the sphere of values. For if a description of the consequences of neoliberal pedagogy is applied to the dichotomous division, the effects are as follows: degeneracy, obscurantism, anomie, lack of competence, personality degradation, addiction, personality disintegration and, consequently, the need to seek the help of therapists.

Two important assumptions regarding the essence of education were also formulated in the work of Z. Melosik and T. Szkudlarek (1998). They indicate a certain artificiality in treating education and culture separately. The authors state explicitly that a cultural experience is of an educational nature. Equally legitimate is what the authors point to, emphasizing a similar relationship between politics and culture. What should be assumed as a basic principle is the education implemented by a democratic political whole in accordance with its tradition and culture, and in this political and cultural whole the goals and tasks of education should be resolved. Hence, the continuation of the constructivist ideas concerning breeding a new human being through active Europeanisation instead of reproducing nationality must arouse astonishment, or even terror (Beck, Grande, 2009).

It is the common good that should be placed at the center of education, understood not as the collectivist welfare of the socialist system or as the good of lone individuals in neoliberalism, but the common good as the good of the national community, which should be restored, based on the tradition and solidarity of people who share common values. It is the communities organized in democratic political structures that should develop educational rules and systems that will contribute to their survival. A good example is the attempt of the Commission of National Education to provide education for the benefit of individuals considered to be the same as the common good, and any action for the general public is believed to be acting for a well-defined self-interest (Bartnicka, 1973).

Such a community/subject that can be responsible for education is the nation state, which not only has the instruments, but also its own interest in it, being the survival of the country and its national culture. A similar conviction is also presented by A. Saad-Filho (2009), according to whom only a democratic state with strong social legitimacy is able to achieve economic and social goals effectively. It would be

consistent with the postulate of ensuring autonomy and liberty to individuals and social unities. It is difficult to disagree with R. Aron's remarks concerning empowerment in the form of own country, which the members of a nation demand. On the other hand, it is impossible to agree with the idea of U. Beck and E. Grande (2009), who suggest to carry out active Europeanisation through education instead of reproducing nationality, in order to abolish the nation state.

It is the nation state, with a particular dominant culture, that should be responsible for the social survival unit it represents and, under the necessary conditions for survival, it is essential to educate young generations in the belief that they live in a "good culture" and that this culture provides them with the opportunity to meet their needs, together with fellow citizens, contributing to meeting their needs. Thus, in such circumstances beneficial changes can take place, which requires an essential condition in the form of, according to S. Hessen (1973), becoming a personality deeply rooted in one's own culture. It is worth emphasizing that social change is possible only through the actions of people who are a personality. In order to change something, to create something new, a person must first be someone, and have self-knowledge concerning their own identity.

In practice, it means a postulate of rejecting privatization, deregulation and marketization of education. Education constitutes a common good, the culture of society which, thanks to it, can live in solidarity and community, build a system of values based on virtues, not profit, thanks to which it can shape direction of the educational processes. It is necessary that managerial and rational striving for one's own interest is put where they belong, i.e. the deliberate-rational behaviors, in the Weberian sense, should be left in the field of instrumental behavior, which is of a servile role to the autotelic behaviors aimed at implementing community values, respecting tradition and culture, and empathizing for the common good consisting in the pursuit of self-interest. The school is also responsible for shaping feelings and emotions, as well as preserving tradition.

It is impossible to bring up a healthy person without the aforementioned elements. Therefore, a holistic human is what we need. A person who is guided by tradition, emotions and values, motivated to live a virtuous life, not guided by his or her own interest.

## FINAL REMARKS

In the light of what has been stated above, it should be assumed that it ought to be considered a crime to oppose people's natural features resulting from their gregarious, or community nature, as it is referred to in the times of culture. Both neo-liberalism in its economic version and the multifaceted ideology of individualism try to counteract and tame these inborn biological characteristics, shaped by particular human cultures, i.e. to produce or train a new human. Meanwhile, people cannot freely choose

their lifestyles, as they will not make up a social unity. In this way, it will allow for the liquidation of the supraindividual whole, which constitutes a unit of protection and resistance, decisive for our collective and hence individual survival. People would become a collection of individuals, so they would no longer exist as a whole. The social world would turn into nothing but anarchy (Szczerkiewicz, 1970).

It is a natural course of things that a human is to grow in the culture of a group, the environment in which they came into the world and which is responsible for their hominization. In this way human cultures are to be developed. In this way, of course, the world will be a multicultural multitude of human cultures with their respective individuals, and it cannot be a “multicultural” world of particular individuals belonging to the human species. Such an idea prevents the implementation of any values, since each culture determines the truth, goodness, beauty or freedom in its own way. It might constitute a field for educational ideologists to work out a way of not using force and shaping tolerance towards different cultures within their unity.

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## THE CRISIS OF GLOBAL NEOLIBERALISM AND EDUCATION

**Keywords:** education, individualism, culture, neo-liberalism

**Abstract:** Visible crisis of neoliberalism prescribes to reflect about the present as well as the future role of education in societies. In Europe for centuries education have been very often used as a tool by authors and executors of ideas and projects of how to construct a social world. That way was also with the project connecting extreme individualism of the counter-culture revolution in the sixties and neoliberal economic revolution in the following decades of the XXth century. The project which leads to a domination of global neoliberalism. Authors of constructivistic projects willingly use education to realize their goals. The main point of the text concerns the possibility of freeing education from its instrumental role in realizing different projects of the brave new world.

## KRYZYS GLOBALNEGO NEOLIBERALIZMU A EDUKACJA

**Słowa kluczowe:** edukacja, indywidualizm, kultura, neoliberalizm

**Streszczenie:** Widoczny kryzys neoliberalizmu nakazuje podjąć refleksję nad dotychczasową i przyszłą rolą edukacji w społeczeństwach. W Europie od wieków edukacja była często instrumentalizowana przez autorów pomysłów i realizatorów konstruktywistycznych projektów urządzania ludziom społecznego świata. Tak było z projektem łączącym skrajny indywidualizm rewolucji kontrkulturowej lat sześćdziesiątych XX wieku z neoliberalną rewolucją ekonomiczną następnych dziesięcioleci XX wieku, który doprowadził do globalnego neoliberalizmu. Autorzy konstruktywistycznych projektów chętnie wspomagają się edukacją dla realizacji swoich celów. Problem podjęty w tekście dotyczy możliwości uwolnienia edukacji od wykorzystywania jej przez różnych pomysłodawców nowego wspaniałego świata.