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THE ROLE OF POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN THE ACQUIREMENT OF EDUCATIONAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL COMPETENCES OF CHILDREN

Nevenka Podgornik¹

Abstract

In this article we study the concept of social exclusion from a point of view of social inequality that surpasses the dimension of the material capital "to have" and that focus on the dimension of social capital, which is the position of individuals in society, their habitus. In other words, this is what determines the opportunities and possibilities of individuals for their integration, belonging, connection, acceptance, realization and social upward mobility. We understand and present the concept of social exclusion like the consequence of a small income, poverty, unemployment, lack of social security, isolation and anomie. In this article, we present the social and political responsibility for the phenomenon of social exclusion and its influence on the children's educational and psychosocial achievements.

Key words: poverty, social exclusion, educational competences, psychosocial competences, youth's social vulnerability, school leavers, educational system, parent's formation, good school

Conceptual starting-point

The period from 1997 to 2006, labelled by the United Nations General Assembly as a decade with a view of eradicating poverty, is over. By the official statistical data, there are 68 millions of people in the extended European Union dealing with poverty today. The fight against poverty and social exclusion continues, furthermore it has become a high priority task of the European union. In accordance with the European legislation, Slovenia also has passed numerous documents for the diminution of poverty and the elimination of social exclusion.

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The Government of the Republic of Slovenia defined the modern politics of the social inclusion in February 2000 in the *Program of fight against poverty and social exclusion*. The program includes the measures for achieving two key objectives, helping and enabling the people, who found themselves in situations of poverty and social exclusion, to find a way out of this situation and preventing poverty and social exclusion from striking people who live on the border (Program of fight..., 2000: 4). After two years of exercising the program, the Government established in the *Statement of the realization of the Program of fight against poverty and social exclusion* that most of the adopted measures were in accordance with delineated directions and adequately mutually coordinated, in order to follow the collective goals for reducing the poverty and social exclusion. It is expected that these measures will have an important contribution to a better social position of the more vulnerable groups (The exercising of the social inclusion strategy, 2002: 88-90). The partial evaluation of the strategies for social protection and social inclusion of the period from 2006 to 2008 was presented in *The national report's supplement of the strategies* (2007), which already predicts new measurements for the educational level's lift and the amelioration of the vulnerable groups' social inclusion.

In April 2002 the Government passed the first statement of the program's enforcement and defined the directives for its further execution. Passing this program, the social inclusion politics was defined as a priority task of the government politics. The government committed itself completely to lower the risk for poverty and social exclusion and to enable the social inclusion for excluded people or people that risk to be excluded.

In 2003 there was a *Collective memorandum* prepared in collaboration with the non-governmental department which follows the strategic objectives of the European union, included in the Lisbon's document. Besides other, short-term measurements in the field of social security, the measurements passed in the field of education and employment are oriented in the sense of precautionary effect of poverty and social exclusion prevention.

- The social inclusion measurements are formed around four key elements, namely:
- encouraging employment inclusion (employment's active politics measurements, understood as the instrument of social inclusion)
- ameliorating the access to sources, rights, goods and services (social protection system and access to apartments, health protection, education, judicial protection, culture and free-time activities and lowering the regional differences)

- preventing the risk of exclusion (preventing the exclusion from work, preventing discrimination and other forms of exclusion and stimulating e-inclusion) and
- helping the most vulnerable groups with explicitly limited measurements for Romani and invalids (helping with employment options, education and solving their housing problems) (Collective memorandum..., 2003: 42).

The national action plan for social inclusion for the period from 2004 to 2006 includes written measurements for achieving objectives from the memorandum. Among the preferential tasks and goals it classifies everyone's (regardless of the social and cultural origins, gender, nationality,) possibility to education, rise of the educational level and improvement of the employment possibilities and prevention of discrimination.

The active plan envisages the following long-term objectives in order to prevent discrimination:

- stimulating the respect for differences in all the social life spheres
- creating the conditions to realize the principle of treating equally anyone on all the levels of the social life, establishment of the institutional sphere of discrimination prevention (The national active plan..., 2004: 24).

We did not get an insight into the content of the successive action plan for the period 2005 – 2010.

For the period 2006 – 2008 there was introduced the *National statement of the social protection and social inclusion strategies (2006)*. In the field of social protection and social inclusion, the National statement notifies that Slovenia is classified among the EU members with favorable work conditions on the labor market, in the social protection system and relatively on the attained standard of living, risk of poverty and different incomes. The standard of living is improving, the level of poverty risk and different incomes are lowering and they are among the lowest in EU (Complement of the national report..., 2007: 16).

The Parliament of the Republic of Slovenian ratified in 1999 the revised European social document which defines in the article 30 the right to protection from poverty and social exclusion. It is worded as follows:

»To assure an effective realization of the right to protection from poverty and social exclusion, the contractors bind up to:

- adopt the measurements, with an integral and adjusting approach, with which they stimulate an effective access to

employment, housing, training, education, culture and social and medical assistance for people and families that live or risk to live in poverty or social exclusion...» (Program of fight... 2000: 7).

The Slovenian chairing of the EU along with the European anti-poverty network (EAPN), and the support of the European commission, aims to contribute actively at the realization of national and collective European objectives in the field of lowering the poverty and social exclusion in Europe until 2010. The Slovenian chairing gives a lot of attention to the social exclusion problems. The priority task of the chairing is the preparation of a new open coordination method cycle in the field of social protection and social inclusion and a further strengthening of positive interactions between the Lisbon's agenda and collective social objectives of the member states. There is also a special attention given to the inclusion and participation of people, who are confronted with poverty and who are the most distant from the labor market, and to the formation of active inclusion strategies (Priority tasks...).

We understand the social exclusion as a bad inclusion of individuals or groups into the political, economic or social systems of society's activity in which they live. It is about the exclusion at the access to the institutions and social sources and the collaboration among them, about the exclusion of generally inclined possibilities and opportunities which are important for an individual's material and social security and the assurance of living sources and living conditions. The social exclusion is often accompanied by a poor involvement of individuals in the network of interpersonal relations and their poor participation in the social activities. The social exclusion is a relational concept, because the individuals and groups exclusion or inclusion is studied thoroughly through the relation with others in the society (by Javornik et. al., 2006: 9-10).

The concept of social exclusion is complex, large and multi-dimensional. Some sociologists consider it as an advantage, because it is the only way to include different dimensions and forms of the same phenomenon. Commins connects the social exclusion to the failure of the collaboration in one of the systems which assure the individuals inclusion into the society. He divides the systems in:

- democratic and legal (juridical) system – civil inclusion;
- manpower market – economic inclusion;
- state welfare system – social inclusion in a narrow sense;
- family and neighbourly and friendly networks systems – interpersonal inclusion (Commins in Trbanc, 1996).

The social inclusion in a wider sense includes a civil, economic, social and interpersonal dimension, and within these dimensions it has fields from which an individual can be excluded.

On the European union level the social exclusion is understood as tightly linked to the unsuitable access to education and training, to a poor position in the manpower market and to lower incomes. The basic supposition is that unemployment and reduced social expenses endanger the social participation and integration, and consequently the social inclusion. The unemployment and the insufficiency of incomes cause an accumulation of further insufficiency and deprivation on other living spheres (by Javornik (ed.), 2006: 10). Here the social exclusion meets or exchanges with poverty. The concept of poverty can be understood as a part of the social exclusion or as a condition that leads to social exclusion.

Katherine Duffy (1998) defines the difference between poverty and social exclusion as the difference between »unsuitable or unequal material resources and an unsuitable or unequal participation in the social life«. Poverty refers to the exclusion from money and services, while social exclusion surpasses the exclusion from a consuming society and includes the exclusion from a social status.

Abrahamson mentions that the concept of social exclusion refers to structurally new marginalization processes and concepts in modern post-industrial societies, the so-called middle classes societies. He defines poverty as a modern society concept, and social exclusion as it's postmodern equivalent. We have to understand both in relation with their opposites – wealth and social integration. Poverty is the condition of the major part of a society (working class), while social exclusion is the condition of a minority, pushed from the principal current of the social action to the margins because of an unsuccessful collaboration in the key sources, institutions and mechanisms. Abrahamson alleges to this affirmation a proof, namely different social politics emphasis in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. In the first example they focus on the distribution of material sources, while in the second example they focus on assuring the access to important sources and institutions and they enables its inclusion (Abrahamson in Trbanc, 1996).

Review of the data about social exclusion, unemployment and poverty in the Republic of Slovenian

There were only a few researches that discovered the phenomenon of social exclusion, because the social exclusion research has an essentially shorter tradition than the research of the poverty

(phenomenon). The subjective point of view for identifying and measuring the discussed phenomena is characteristic of the social exclusion researches. We do not understand this as an imperfection, because we believe that sensing and feeling poverty and social exclusion is in every person's domain, in the way of his perception, understanding the visions and being aware of the conditions and the phenomena.

The research Quality of life in Slovenia (Trbanc, 1996) took place in 1994 and included a representative sample of 1806 people older than 17.

The research took into consideration the economic, social and interpersonal dimension and it showed that the interviewee are the most excluded in the field of education and in apartment's access (almost one of two persons) and the least in the social field (isolation). 13,7% of them believed that they are excluded from all three dimensions and 16,9% believe that they are at the limit of being socially excluded.

Regarding the social exclusion and the attained educational level, the research showed that among people, who finished elementary school or even less, one of four people is excluded. For people with finished vocational school have less possibilities to be excluded, a higher educational level lowers essentially the possibility of social exclusion.

In 1998 subjective idea of social exclusion was prepared and 15,4% of the respondents answered that they feel exposed to a high risk of social exclusion. Unemployment, loneliness and fear of violence, so feelings of being isolated, lead to the most commonly expressed feeling which is the insufficiency of being a member of a group. The feelings of weakness – anomy, absurdity and political apathy – were a little less expressed (Program of fight against poverty and social exclusion, 2000: 15).

In 1975 the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (EUROFOUND) was established with the purpose of contributing to the planning and re-establishing of better living and working conditions. EUROFOUND did a complex, comparative study of social exclusion perceptions, causes of exclusion in the society, conditions for a social integration and sense of different integration points of view for individuals in different EU countries. The mentioned study was realized on the basis of the data from 28 European countries, gathered in 2001 and 2001, including Slovenia. The study showed that Slovenians feel the less socially excluded (5,6%) in comparison to respondents from other countries that took part in the research. The

sense of social exclusion was measured by the feeling of alienation, powerlessness and inferiority, the lack of recognition and the feeling of marginalization in the society (by Javornik (ed.), 2006: 2).

According to the data of the Statistical office the level of relative poverty (inequality within the examined group) is low. In 2004 in Slovenia the 12,2% of the population lived below the poverty line, in EU there were 16% of them. Another characteristic of Slovenia is a low incomings inequality comparing to other EU countries (Intihar, 2007). In 2005 the level of poverty risk stayed on the same level as the year before, it came to 11,7 %. The comparison of the risk of poverty levels among the EU countries shows us that only 5 other countries had a lower percentage of poor people than Slovenia: Netherlands, Norway, Czech republic, Iceland and Sweden. Austria, Denmark and Finland had a similar percentage as Slovenia. The average for 25 EU countries was 16% (ibid).

Let's take a look at the everyday life data. In October 2003, Slovenia experimentally started to undertake EUSILC (*Statistics on Income and Living Condition*). The first data of the questionnaire about living conditions, carried out by SURS, show that only 2% of the households cannot afford a car, 32% of them cannot afford one week of holidays a year and 8% cannot afford to eat meat every second day. An insight, of the non-financial poverty and social exclusion components, can show us that 6% of the households live in an apartment where there is not enough daily light, the majority (98%) can afford an adequately warm apartment. The situation about living conditions is even worse: 18% of all the households have problems with humidity in the apartments. 68% of the households in Slovenia can afford to take an annual vacation, most of the differences among them are made by a collective income which they can use. Among the poorest households, the ones from the first quintile, only 39% can afford a one-week annual vacation; among the households from the fifth quintile the percentage is 91%. Only 92% of the households can afford proper food, but regarding the different types, the one-member households' stand out, for their percentage is 81%, and households with 2 grown-up kids, without supported children and one-parent households with at least one supported child, for which the percentage is 88%. 60% of the households can cover unexpected expenses with their own funds; once again the renters stand out, because there is only one fifth among them that could cover unexpected expenses with their own funds.

The interviewees judged their state of health as good, only 3% have a bad health condition.

The questionnaire showed that households are well equipped with permanent and durable goods. More than 98% of the households have a phone, washing machine and a color TV. 93% of the households own a personal car, 2% cannot afford one and 5% do not have it, because they do not need it. 71% of the households own a personal computer, 5% cannot afford it and 24% think they do not need it. The questionnaire confirms that the most deprived households belong to the first income quintile, because 15% of the households in this group cannot afford a computer (SURS, 2005).

In generally Slovenia does not belong among countries with a high level of inequality, but we can see the discrepancy between the registered poverty and the subjective perception of inequality. The Human Rights Ombudsman Office also warns about that, because they frequently come up against the question about poverty and social exclusion of our citizens, exposing separately children and youth's needs. They treat the children and youth's poverty and social exclusion in relation to a general poverty level and social exclusion in a society and in correlation with their parent's poverty and social exclusion.

People from the Ombudsman Office are convinced that children from this kind of families, most of the time, do not have enough stimulations and support. They do not finish their studies, because they do not have the necessary self-confidence and they are often socially bad equipped, they have less possibilities for a personal development, they acquire the adequate education with more difficulty, they have more difficulties integrating into society and they have less possibilities finding a job, the director of the Human Rights Ombudsman Expert service (Cvahte, 2004:111).

Regarding the data from the researches SJM (Slovenian public opinion, The Public Opinion and Mass Communication Research Centre – Faculty of Social Sciences) in Slovenia, half of the interviewees fit in the middle class. Almost 40% are members of the lower working class, 5% are members of the upper class, which can be called elite (Aralica, 2003:40). These are the data of the self-image, self-perception and self-judgment of the interviewees, but they are not negligible, because poverty has many faces, it's subjectively perceived, it's not easily recognized and not always measurable.

The new research of the characteristics and forms of poverty and social exclusion of families with children (2008) reflects the people's reality

from the point of view of poverty and social exclusion in the key spheres of life (health, housing standard, education, possibilities and forms of free-time activities...). The Social Protection Institute of the Republic of Slovenia realized the analysis of the accessible secondary data about the children poverty (especially the analysis of the Leaken indicators, data from the HBSC study...) and completed it with the realization of focus groups with the representatives of target groups, who meet every day with poor people and families, and with half-structured interviews with poor people (57 realized interviews). The focus groups and the interviews were carried out in five Slovenian regions (Črnak Meglič, 2008).

Based on the obtained data, they formulated four groups of poor families with kids:

- »apparently poor« - a group of families that know very well the rights welfare services and facilities specified by statute, which result from their status and they put them entirely into effect. They do not show their actual social standing (a false showing of the single-parent family status, scab work). In the co-speakers estimation from the focus groups, they represent 10-25% of social financial welfare receivers. The percentage is higher in the bigger urban centres.
- »truly poor« - they represent the largest part of the poor families. They are marked by one or more forms of social exclusion at the same time (besides the low incomes or unemployment also low housing standard, bad state of health...). Their status decreases with the augmenting number of social exclusion forms they are confronted with. Half of this population is marked by serious health problems of one or both parents.
- »invisible poor« - group of families that does not know their rights, does not know how to assert them, does not feel poor enough to ask for help or they are ashamed of their position. In the co-speakers estimation from the focus groups, their percentage come to 10-30%, compared to the existing social financial welfare receivers.
- »poor employees« or group that exceed the censuses for the assignment of social welfare funds because of their incomes, however their social situation is threatened or even worse than the situation of the social financial welfare claimants. This is the fastest increasing group of people (ibid).

The authors of the research place among the strategies for solving the children's poverty the equalizing of the starting opportunities for all the children and they propose a free elementary school education , including

the food, and a more effective educational system that would make it possible for the children to attend school and help them as a way out of poverty (ibid).

We agree that poverty does not show itself only in the incomings and material differences, but also in the field of unequal educational possibilities, social isolation, access to health services, satisfying the cultural and other everyday needs. Despite the different official data, the experts that actually do fieldwork meet more and more poor people, there are also more people that see and judge themselves as poor. Regarding the last unofficial data, one third of the population in Slovenia is poor. By that, the question of responsibility rises, because we identify the appearance of poverty as a social problem, for which the state should take responsibility. Besides the fact that the right to an adequate life standard is every individual's civil right, most of the poor people understands poverty as the cause of their own failure and personal responsibility, which only augments the feeling of weakness and hopelessness.

The lack of material resources and insufficient social equipment lead an individual to powerlessness, hopelessness and despair. All this can manifest in socially acceptable ways of expressing the distress. In Slovenia we can definitely count among them alcohol abuse problems, suicides, increase of anxious-depressive disturbances and other mental health problems. The age limit of the young that start to take drugs is lowering, the drug abuse is definitely augmenting, the range of dependence is increasingly various. We have no doubts about the genuineness of the poverty phenomenon in our area, we are just warning about the necessity of taking into consideration the socio-psychological viewpoint of the poverty and social exclusion discussion, because the mental health problems are an inevitable consequence. Yes, to be poor means a lot more than just 'not having'.

The phenomena of poverty and social exclusion are still not enough researched, without fail the number of people that can be potentially pushed to the society margins, is augmenting. The today's society is a society of power in all the aspects and it threatens the already vulnerable groups of population. A low education level and unemployment are among the main causes of poverty and social exclusion, that's why we will present them in the continuation within some of the most vulnerable population groups.

Social vulnerability

The concept of *youth social vulnerability* is directly linked with the greatest risk of poverty and social exclusion for youth. The life individualization in today's pluralistic post-modern society brings, among other things, an augmenting social and cultural uncertainty, which is perceived especially by the young people that do not have an adequate economic and social support of their primary family. The youth searches for answers for many "existential questions", as defined by Giddens, in their every day's context. Regardless of the necessary family's more visible role, it is necessary to expose the basic integration of the social vulnerability into the large social sphere. The exposure to social solitude, productivity pressure, competition on numerous levels of the social life, negative self-image, low self-esteem, self-destructive relation with life are just some of the challenges that the young people have to confront with and that augment their vulnerability.

The social vulnerability is characteristic of the major part of the youth population as confirmed in the empiric study "The youth's social vulnerability" which was carried out in 1998 by the Center of social psychology – youth studies in the Faculty of Social Sciences. The research made on the pattern of 1687 elementary school's eight-graders showed that the youth's social vulnerability is influenced also by their so-called "interaction competences" (mutual activity possibilities) among which the authors of the research define a positive self-image, a relative emotional stability, communication abilities, language skills and knowledge, common knowledge (worldliness) and an active use of computer technology. Interaction competences are not only youth's characteristic or personal abilities, they are also influenced by family environment (primary socialization process) and the (in)accessibility of the sources in the large social environment (Ule et al., 2000: 214). Besides all that, the research showed that boys are much more equipped with interaction resources that are important for a good social inclusion than girls. The research also shows an alarmingly high level of (self-)destruction, feelings of insecurity, guilt and youth's demoralized relation with the world and life.

The parents' social, economic and cultural capital, directly linked with the attained education level, has a great influence on youth's social vulnerability. Education is very important for acquiring a status in the society that is why the school unsuccessfulness is the key factor of the youth's social exclusion.

The drop-outs have an important place among the unsuccessful students, because they do not finish their studies and they do not have

a formally obtained education, which reduce their employability and influence the social economic status in the society. The interruption of the school career has a lot of social consequences, in the opinion of researchers from different sociological and humanistic fields.

In Slovenia the first drop-outs happen already in elementary schools. On one hand we have people who redouble the year or drop out from the lower classes of elementary school and on the other hand we have individuals that finish elementary school but they do not continue their education in high school. In the last ten years, two to three thousands or 10% of the generation drop out of elementary school. These scholars are generally very young, from 15 to 16 years old, and they frequently have learning disabilities and a bad prior knowledge. Most of the time they come from bad social conditions, have inferior possibilities and are unmotivated for education (Klančičar, 2004: 60). The author does not mention whether the given marks (learning disabilities, bad prior knowledge, inferior possibilities, lack of motivation) are the cause of bad social conditions.

Numerous researchers confirmed the statistical connection between the low socio-economic status and poverty on one side and the growing drop-out on the other side. The national experts also state that all too much children who live in poverty start and then finish their studies with an education failure and the social exclusion. That is why further in life they are confronted with unemployment, poverty and diseases. Most of the time the strategies, knowledge, behavior and norms that poor children bring along into the school environment do not correspond to the ones expected by the school and so, they are a frequent reason for the education unsuccessfulness and social exclusion, says Milena Košak Babuder. Besides that, Babuder explains: "The results of the research, which studied the connection between poverty and children's educational success and social inclusion, show that in the major part of the observed variables children coming from families with a lower socio-economic status differentiate structurally from the group of children coming from families with a higher socio-economic status. The structural differences between the two groups of children indicate the differences in knowledge and strategies that children have at their entrance in the school environment. With other variables, that evaluate the basic conditions for a successful learning, educational success and social inclusion, there are statistically important differences between the two groups" (Košak Babuder, 2006: 94).

The socio-economic status is a composed variable that includes especially the parents' profession and education, the family's material

state and cultural level, mutual relationships within the family, the parents' aspirations regarding the child's intellectual and personal development, the child's encouragement and help with his studies and education style (Toličič and Zorman, 1977). In the western countries it is shown that the socio-economic status is one of the most important predictors of the child's school success, job's standpoint, assimilated values, professional career and his life orientation in general. Havighurst (1971, in Toličič and Zorman, 1977: 8) says that the socio-economic status generally enables a more precise prediction of the child's success and his/her behavior than any other single information, like the child's IQ or some other personal quality.

Jana Bezenšek (2003) studied the influence of poverty and social exclusion on the education of the talented. She analyzed the factors of the poverty and social exclusion's actual state and their influence on the education (in)efficiency and she warned about the increasing presence of this socially unwanted phenomenon, regarding which a poor talented child does not have the possibilities for an optimal development of his abilities. In the process she exposes the influence of some social factors on the individual's acquiring of education, among which she especially exposes the influence of one's family and the level of life standard, the locality where the family lives and the quality of providing for the family household members needs, which have an important influence on a person's educational success along with his (usual) individual talents. The author establishes that both the choice of the education program and the educational success depend also on the social origins, financial, social and cultural capital of the individual's family.

A higher income influences the choice and collaboration possibilities. The spectrum of choices widens, the fields that our status can reach are accessible: additional training, taking part in different courses, studying abroad, etc. The status selection in the Slovenian educational system in the nineties is increased by 'the external high school graduation exams, the classification of schools by the high school graduation exams points, the selected general high schools; introducing school fees, especially for the increasing number of self-paying scholars in colleges, an almost entire private solvency of postgraduate studies, augmentation of new school books and increase of their prices, which increases the private study expenses; and finally the augmentation of student rental's prices in the university cities in Slovenia (Kramberger, 1999: 115).

A better education means a higher income, a better material level, a stronger social power and a more quality life style. On this basis, a

person forms his own value system and other psychosocial differences that form between different social classes or groups, because of what stated above. A person's material status is not a decisive factor anymore for the defining of a social status. Knowledge is starting to become the instrument of development and the key possibility for the progressive climbing of the social scale.

The research Environment and scholars success, carried out by Ivan Toličič and Leon Zorman in 1977, showed the influence of the social origins on the children educational success. They established that there are bigger differences regarding the school marks than the tests among children that come from different social and economic classes. They also took into account the possibility of the teachers subjective grading, which may had different expectations for the children that were mostly in accordance with their origins. The research is pretty old, but the question of subjectivity still remains.

The research of the intellectual potentials realization of children from different socioeconomic classes, published in the book *Social inequality, schooling and talents* (Makarovič, 1984), confirmed the influence of social inequality. This inequality reflects in the lack of realization potentials of youth from lower social classes, the differences in the over-realization of less intelligent children from higher classes compared to children from lower social classes with the same abilities are obvious. Makarovič affirms that the children of a worker have inappropriately less possibilities to develop their intellectual possibilities than the children of capitalists (Makarovič, 1985: 17). The author states that there is a connection between the results of the intelligence measurement and the social origins, which is not very elevated. The results of the intelligence tests attained by the scholars coming from lower classes are on average lower than the results of scholars from higher classes (ibid: 21-24).

In the analysis of education mobility in Slovenia, Kramberger states that the influence of the families on the children's achievements was increasing until the end of the second World War, when the families wanted, by all means and with all the support, to increase their children's chances of success in schools in consequently later in life. But later, at the time of socialism, with the introduction of publicly accessible education, the influence of the families started to decrease. The role of the family and the parents influence on the children should have lowered with the institutionalization of the public schools, because the educational institutions and schools with daylong programs have taken over this role.

The families influence on the children can be once again perceived in critical periods, when the employment opportunities are low. This is why 'the meaning of the connection between a higher class family, a 'good school' and a good employment started once again to increase' (Kramberger, 1999: 117).

"The social selection in the Slovenian school territory, measured by the status influence of the original families, did not constantly decrease (...) but it was more like oscillating back and forth, ..., but mainly the intergeneration family energy, which wilfully supports the children and maintains the social selection in the school sphere, always redirects from lower, accessible educational levels to higher, more closed educational levels" (Kramberger, 1999: 116). Kramberger insists on the presence of the family influence on the children's education, although it's a common finding that it decreases in a long-run.

The connection between the reached education and the poverty risk still exists. The lower is a person's education, the higher is the risk of a life in poverty. We can find far the major number of poor people among the low educated (observed in 1993, 1997/1998, 1998, 1999), who represent almost 60% of the poor population. In 1999 the level of poverty in this group was high over the average - 26,8% (Klančičar, 2004: 36).

In the experts' opinion, unemployment also leads young people to social exclusion. The level of registered unemployment in Slovenia in 2007 was 4,9 %, thereof the highest was among young people, from 15 to 24 years; it was 10,4% (SURS, Active population, 2008).

The analysts from the Employment bureau believe that the biggest problem is finding jobs for unemployed people without education, because their percentage is always around 47% (Rapuš Pavel, 2005: 338). This information is also in line with the information that unschooled people cover almost 60% of the poor population. In 1999 the level of poverty in this group was high over the average - 26,8% (Klančičar, 2004: 36).

When we talk about the drop-outs and unemployment, it seems important, within the context of social exclusion, to point out the youth's social network, which in this case is getting thin. Jana Rapuš Pavel (2005) mentions numerous foreign studies (Coffield, 1986; Hutchens, 1994; EmlerinMcNamara, 1996; Donovan and Oddy, 1982; Paugam 1996), orientated to the analysis of the increasing problem of social isolation and the loss of social contacts, which accelerated and increased the risk of problems in the field of psychosocial health. In

France the uncertain employment situation of young people is closely linked to the losses in the social life, while the permanent work contributes to quality social networks and it is linked to the social and economic inclusion. In the study, the weak social contacts of young people appear in direct connection with the field of work. The young unemployed people in Scotland are “cut out” of numerous social contacts opportunities, which influence their social exclusion. In Great Britain the youth’s unemployment also contributes to the social contacts restriction; young unemployed people do not have the possibilities to establish as much social contacts in an active way as the would like to, and that contributes to the feeling of isolation and unhappiness (Rapuš Pavel, 2005: 347-349). Regarding different statements, Rapuš Pavel concludes that not all the young people lose important social contacts because of the uncertainty in the labor market (example of the developed Denmark), but without doubt the field of work represents one of the important social spheres, where young people have the possibility to establish new social contacts and connections.

Numerous studies in the United States of America, which researched the influence of poverty on children in different ages of development, state that children, faced with poverty in the preschool period and the early school years, are less likely to successfully finish their studies compared to the children and adolescents that fell into poverty more later. They do not develop the knowledge, abilities and skills necessary for a successful collaboration in the educational process, because of a discouraging environment in the preschool period. The effects of poverty are the most obvious with children under the age of three. The children’s school unsuccessfulness has immeasurable consequences in the life of young people and their emotional and mental health. All too much children, who live in poverty, start and conclude their childhood in the social exclusion and school unsuccessfulness and, later in life, they are confronted with unemployment, poverty, diseases, and featurelessness.

We do not affirm that an individual’s development depends only on the socio-economic status, we acknowledge the proved influence of other factors, but we believe that the discrimination of children and adolescents coming from poor families is inadmissible and that ours basic rights are equal possibilities and opportunities to education for all people.

The influence of the parents' education on the children's education results

We cannot discuss the children's and young people's poverty and social exclusion separately from the general increasing of their parents' poverty and social exclusion.

Besides the family's socio-economic status, there are also the parents' educations that influence the formation of differences in the obtained knowledge. Researches show that the parents' education has more influence on the children's integration in further education after elementary school than the family financial state, which is even more intensified at the passage to higher education. Most of the scholars come from higher social classes, but not regarding the financial status as much as the parents' education level. At the same time we find out in literature that despite everything the family influence on the children's education results decreases in a long-term. In Kramberger's opinion (1999), there was a great contribution to it by the socialism with its aspiration for a systematic increase of the status independent accessibility to education and, in a smaller measure, in the nineties, it was also the consequence of new selective mechanisms like secondary school admission tests and the possibility to enrol for continuing education based on the high school graduation exams points.

The international and new Slovenian researches confirm the recognition of differences from the preschool period on. Zupančič (2003) finds out important differences in understanding the conceptions, language knowledge, common knowledge, attention and concentration among preschool children from poor families with a high socio-economic status (Kavkler 2004, : 125). Rožanc (2000) indicates some important differences in the vocabulary of fourth graders from poor families and those from families with a high socio-economic status. The parents' education is the factor that has the most influence on the differentiation of seven-years-old children successfulness in mathematics. In Vončina's research (2003) we can see the clear differences in the automation of arithmetic knowledge and the procedures and abilities to solve verbal problems among seventh graders from poor families and those from families with a high socio-economic status (Košak Babuder, 2006: 94).

The final report of the project Identification of the criteria for the evaluation of impartiality in education (Razdevšek Pučko and others, 2003), elaborated and based on the analyses of statistic data, confirms that the children's achievements in elementary school and their enrolment in high school programs with different length and difficulty are,

statistically speaking, significantly linked to the parents education. Children with low educated parents achieve more often low education results and they frequently enrol in less difficult high school programs in contrast to children with more educated parents. This kind of researches cannot be performed since 1997, because of the protection of personal data.

Despite everything the education opportunities are improving. Every next generation has a higher education average. From 1968 until today, the share of highly educate people increased three times as much, but despite that we still cannot reach the European Union's requests, that is 25% of the active population with finished undergraduate or postgraduate studies. This year, there is already half of all the people between the age of 19 and 23 that are enrolled in higher professional programs or university programs. Only six years ago, less than a third of the people from the previously mentioned group were enrolled in the tertiary education (SURS, Student registration in tertiary education in the school year 2007/08, 2008). Regarding the number of people registered at the faculties, this limit could be exceeded, but the share of dropping out at the faculties is too high. A lot of scholars actually drop out also because of high expenses that they alone or with the help of their families cannot cover, despite the present forms of governmental help (scholarships, subsidized services, tax relief, child benefits, possibilities of earning money with part-time jobs).

The influence of the educational system on the class reproduction

The possibility of choosing the formal or informal education is increasing, but at the same time the possibilities of accessibility for all are decreasing, which in a postmodern society, that is based on knowledge, increases the possibility of social exclusion and poverty.

The education institutions are losing the monopoly over the children and youth education that is why the offer and the market of informal education offers and extracurricular activities are strengthening. The pressure on parents to start the education of their children already in the preschool period is strengthening. The activity of the school institution alone is also passing into childhood. This process has its own negative effects in the overloading of children and stress because of the unsuccessfulness feelings (Ule and Renner, 2007: 12).

The reform or the renovation of school (9 year elementary school) also went this way. We acknowledge numerous organizational, positive changes introduced by the nine-year elementary school, but we have serious doubts about contents innovation.

If we take into consideration the Scandinavian countries, we can easily notice the difference between our and their complimentary schooling. For them a complimentary schooling means also free transport for the children, free textbooks, free alimentation. Here, even with the introduction of the nine-year program, things stay the same, a burden for the parents. It is true that we have the so-called textbook founds and the possibility to have subsidized food in school, but in spite of all that the costs of obligatory schooling are still high and they frequently represent the biggest family expense.

We see in grades or grading an ineffective external motivator which slows down creativity and our children's personal growth, works destructively on them, contributes to an unhealthy rivalry and it mostly prevents children from learning for themselves and not for grades, teachers or parents. We agree that the grades and other sanctions are successful motivators at the time or for a short period of time, especially for the teachers work, but in no way they are suitable and effective in a long-term period, because they ruin important relationships for the child's development and success. We believe that people are intrinsically motivated beings on the inside and that we are successful and satisfied only when we successfully satisfy our basic psychological needs, which is not always possible for the children within the existing school system. Our common goal should be a successful, satisfied, happy and personally healthy student, because this is the only way he could grow up to be a healthy and responsible adult.

Descriptive grading does not mean a school without grades. That's why we support the descriptive grading, which requires from the teachers a more individualized work, a good familiarity with the children, watching their behavior, which contributes to the school quality. With this approach the teacher nicely describes the student's cognitive, emotional, social and motoric achievements from the point of view of reaching the set goals and education standards and in the light of his individual development. Besides the knowledge acquiring (cognitive competences), actually ignored social and emotional components are also included.

The problem with descriptive grading is the fact that here the tendency to molding also frequently prevails when the progress of one child is similarly described to the progress of another child, because of the teacher's lack of time or (psychological) knowledge. But we all are individuals and that should be taken into consideration also by the so-called differentiated schooling, which sadly keeps only on classifying the children (regarding the knowledge standards) and that additionally

stigmatizes, marks and prevents them from getting an equal education and inclusion into society.

School is an institution that should essentially contribute to the decrease of interpersonal differences. It is a place that should connect, include and encourage all the scholars, regardless of their socio-economic status, education and their parents influence. The basic duty of every school is to enable the growth and progress of all the children. We have to get rid of the jeopardy that comes along with the position loser – winner and work on the position winner – winner, which enables the progress of all the participants. Let's encourage the self-competitiveness, when the child with some self-estimation discovers where he was and where he is now; everything he learned, where did he make any progress; what is he doing differently now than before. The important mistake about competitiveness and comparison; when personally no one gains if someone else attains good results, and we still remain unsuccessful. Because of the fact, that a man is an internally motivated creature, we doubt the motivational effect of mutual rivalry.

Education is a process, within which the expectation of framed thinking and rigidity do not have any place nor the application of threats and critiques, because they destroy the creativity of every individual and of course his progress and development. In the existing educational system there is always too much of these destructive behavior. The excuse that it is only about a constructive critique does not stand, because a critique is a critique and it is destructive. We cause too much damage when we refer directly to a student for communicating him his mistakes (you are not right, you cannot do this, you are not capable...), even if by doing so we use the well-known and advised 'Me messages'. That way we communicate as well: 'I'm OK', 'you are not'; 'my way of saying and doing things is right', 'your way is not right'. Let not the school success also is a personal success. It would have much more sense and it would be more effective to focus on the child's product, behavior or whatever he did not do very well, because that way we do not destroy the relationship. We avoid the destructive insults, underestimation and other hurtful behavior.

We should be searching for knowledge and not for ignorance in a child, but the discrepancy between what we believe in and what we do is always big. All of this contributes to the reproduction of mutual differences and evaluation of individuals, feelings of guilt, weakness, and exclusion. Although the importance of the socio-psychological point of view in the modification of the school system is very stressed, sadly we

are finding out the opposite; more burden for the children and the increase of the differences.

If we resume quickly the international researches (TIMSS, PISA) results, in which the Slovenian schools took part, we can see that they are not very encouraging, because they show that the number of scholars that get joy from studying is decreasing; the percentage of scholars who do not like to study natural sciences is increasing; the knowledge is not useful, there is too much reproduction. Children are too burdened, the courses are not attractive. These are just some of the indicators of the actual school system unsuccessfulness, which show us, beside the increasing scholars' personal problems, also the need for new educational choices.

Conclusion

The strategic objectives of the program of fight against social exclusion and poverty in the field of education were integrated into the systematic and content's changes in the school sphere. With the reform of the school system, the Republic of Slovenia brought into education the mechanisms it needs to ensure equal possibilities in education, to increase the socio-integration role of the school, the levels of children, adolescents and adults inclusion into education, to increase the access to different programs, to lower the drop-outs, to increase the quality of achieved knowledge and to ensure the diversity of the education forms. The reformed study contents would be able to influence different spheres of the child's growth and the new introduced methods and forms of education should be able to enable a major educational role of the teacher.

The evaluation of the education curricular reform in the Republic of Slovenia (1993: 15) ensures that all the participants (teachers, scholars and parents) accepted positively the differentiated schooling and they have positive viewpoints about it. The evaluation pass the conclusion that the level differentiation of education in elementary school is a suitable novelty and it is necessary to carry it out with quality and to still study it.

The most common scholars' remark about grading is that in grading the differences between different levels are too large and because of that it is very difficult to get the highest grades, that grading is too strict and that it would be better to give just grades from 1 to 5. They are thinking about introducing the ten-level grading scale.

The surprising results about relationships between peers and friendship among scholars' shows that they managed to keep the friendships in the internal classes and to form good mutual relationships in the level groups. By all this they conclude that differentiated schooling in generally did not have a negative effect on the scholars' social life in the class.

The evaluation also states that the differentiated schooling did not have a negative influence on the scholars' self-image on the lower level of difficulty as these scholars conserved their self-image in a two-year period on the same level. With this statement they reject some people's frequent and, in our opinion, legitimate doubts that the scholars will be deprived exactly on the emotional sphere because of the differentiated schooling (ibid: 15-17).

The doubts about the individualized descriptive grading are confirmed by the certificates evaluation, which showed that in the first grade more than two thirds of the certificates (68,5%) have marks with individualized grades, in the second grade there is a little more than half of certificates (50.8 %) like that. More than 40% of the descriptive grades from the first and second grade are like that – among the certificates from the second grade there is almost half of them like that – from them *we cannot see the individual progress of a scholar when achieving goals or knowledge standards*; this shows a great percentage of unsuitable descriptive grading (*Evaluation of descriptive grading...*, 2004: 11).

By clashing the results they found out that in the whole pattern only a few more than a tenth (11,5%) of the certificates have individualized descriptive grading and the same time they describe (only) the scholar's progress in achieving goals or knowledge standards – therefore they give a quality grade, which suits the normative provisions of the regulations of knowledge grading. The evaluators found out that for the certificates with individualized grades it is more possible that the grade includes the evaluation of improvable goals and it describes the scholar's behavior and/or characteristics. The clashing of the results showed that 80,4% of the certificates with individualized grades include either the evaluation regarding one of the two criterion or the two together (ibid: 15).

The review of the certificates of departments as wholes showed that teachers "help" themselves at the final descriptive grades also with the preparation of a specific pattern for descriptive grades and they use these more or less adapted grades for a scholar's final grading. From the point of view of the adopted solutions it is this wrong, because the

starting-point for a grade composition with this pattern is not the scholar's individual knowledge. This procedure leads to less individualized descriptive marks, because the scholar's proved knowledge by this approach is graded by being "classified" in description of the reached goal or knowledge standard, prepared in advance. This kind of undefined descriptive grading turns into "judgments of value, which could stigmatize the children as much as what we tried to avoid by annulling the numerical grading" (ibid: 15-16). The stigmatization and evaluation of the child's personality within the school system is confirmed by the information that more than half of the certificates (55,6%) include, besides the description of the shown knowledge, also one or more notes about the student's qualities and/or behavior (restlessness, disturbing behavior, kindness...) and/or they give implicit judgments of value about the student (ibid: 13).

The efforts of the organizational and professional reforms, raising the level of knowledge and reaching the education objectives (in the European community passed "4 pillars": to know, to use the knowledge, to know how to live in a community, to know how to live with oneself and with one's identity), are realizable only with a rightful education system. In order to be able to call the school system rightful, it is necessary to formally ensure equal education possibilities and at the same time to even the objective differences among scholars. The school system cannot realize these requests only on a formal, institutional level, but it must intervene also on the relationships level. The educational approach must contribute to the increasing and equalizing of the possibilities and opportunities in education and by that contributing to lower the negative social factors connected to the social exclusion.

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