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## CULTURAL ARBITRARINESS OF SCHOOL AND CHILDREN-STUDENTS' IDENTITY BEHAVIOURS\*

**Introduction:** The school as a cultural institution provides ready-made models of identity in direct and subliminal cultural messages, confronting the child-student on a daily basis with the necessity to (successfully) cope with the (mis)comprehension of meanings produced by the school culture.

**Research Aim:** In article the author makes an attempt to (re)cognize how the narratives conducted and/or imposed by the emerging school culture determine the (un)conscious acquisition by children of meanings that describe their school reality and build their identity as learners. The study was embedded in the theoretical framework of the reconstructed psychocultural concept of school culture according to Bruner and the theory of cultural reproduction developed by Bourdieu.

**Method:** Narrative interviews conducted with ten-year-old children from the risk group, fourth-grade students, are research material that has been analyzed and interpreted with the use of the hermeneutic-phenomenological method of coding.

**Results:** The results of the research relate to the perception of school by children who have crossed the second educational threshold in terms of school rules and norms. The research focuses on the process of implementing the child into the role of a student, indicating the oppressive nature of the school culture.

**Conclusions:** In the conclusions, the author tries to draw attention to the hidden beliefs about students who become a material, an object or a product of the school (culture) activity and contrast them with Korczak's idea of openness and sensitivity to the child's potential.

**Keywords:** school culture, children at risk, children's culture, identity, cultural reproduction, exclusion.

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## INTRODUCTION

The discovery of the relationship between the mind and culture, as discussed in the works of Bruner (1978, 2006), Vygotsky (1971, 1978), and Piaget (2005), draws attention to language (narrative) as a tool for learning and understanding culture. Thanks to narrative, we can (re)cognise the individual ways of understanding and interpreting the world by the human being (Trzebiński, 2002) and relate to the traditions of the world and to specific ways of thinking given by the culture (Tommasello, 2002, p. 31). In his psychocultural approach to education, Bruner points to the development of the ability to recognise human-made meanings and emphasized how important it may be for understanding how to place given considerations in a frame of reference for the interpretations created (Bruner, 2006, p. 29). School culture is a creation constructed in the narrative. It is the result of the integration of understanding the produced meanings by individual participants of education (personal cognitive representations), which complement each other and interact with the institutional version of the school world. It is a constructivist creation resulting from interactions with people (students, teachers, non-educational staff, etc.), objects (computers, books, maps, etc.), space, etc. This testifies to the active, (un)conscious individual's involvement in its co-creation (Bruner, 2006, pp. 37–38, 64–65, 181–185). The school is dependent on culture and creates culture itself (Bruner, 2006, p. 31, 49; Helsper, 2008). Therefore, the school culture is created at the boundary of the tension between what society expects, representing its systems of values, rights and power, which may refer to school rules, regulations, norms etc. (explicit as well as implicit), and what is needed by the student (child)/teacher/parent. In doing so, it aims to tap the individual's potential and develop his/her individual resources (talents, knowledge, beliefs) as well as creates opportunities and converts them into symbolic signs of prestige, status, thus, allowing for identity formation (Bruner, 2006, pp. 30–32, 45–47, 57–61). The individual builds his/her identity through the cognitive apparatus and the use of abstract thinking associated with reflecting on his/her own self and the surrounding reality. According to Ricoeur (1985), identity is a narrative, and an unfinished construct. It is created by language and in language, as well as in relation to “cultural products that constitute a kind of »story«” (Urbaniak, 2010, p. 220). An issue constructed as a narrative remains in relation to culture, which influences its cognitive content (Urbaniak, 2010, p. 221; Matysek, 2007, p. 48). An individual, therefore, gathers information about himself/herself as a result of a narrative, in which he/she negotiates the meanings generated with the environment. This also allows them to find their place in culture (Bruner, 2006, p. 68). Therefore, the school culture is not neutral in terms of the values, beliefs, norms, etc. it offers – it indicates also what kind of thinking, behaving, experiencing, and feeling is (un)desirable. This highlights its reproductive and arbitrary role (Bourdieu and Passeron, 2011; Bruner,

2006, p. 69). By reconstructing Bernstein's (1971, 1986) theory of language codes, the pedagogical implications of these barriers/difficulties can be seen in the statement that the understanding of context is conditioned by the culture which the individual comes from. The communication code is, therefore, a carrier of culture, and it creates in the child's mind orientations to certain values and relations that are relevant to his/her environment. Those orientations may differ from the ones promoted by a particular school (Bernstein, 1980, p. 558).

The confrontation between child culture and school culture happens at the level of language, which organises cognition and thinking (cf. Filipiak, 2007, pp. 5–6). Encountering the school culture, the child needs to understand it and learn to communicate using the same code to function in it. Viewing the child through the lens of his/her culture-forming capacity, accentuates the child's sense of agency and potential for self-creation (children culture), and imparts the right to have their own views, behaviours, rituals, etc. (cf. Corsaro, 2009; Dahlberg et al., 2007, pp. 48–52). Furthermore, it brings with it the need to recognise the child's philosophical distinctiveness mentioned by Korczak (Berding, 2020, Introduction, p. X). The child represents a "cultural enigma" (Mead, 2000, p. 96): on the one hand, culture constructs the role of childhood in society; on the other hand, it remains in dynamic relation to the personal and identity-related aspects characteristic of this developmental period (Miller, 1981, p. 260).

Children know how to mark their presence in the world and take a stand in the face of the ongoing socio-cultural changes (Koźyczkowska and Młynarczuk-Sokołowska, 2018, pp. 43–44). As they do so, they often use the cultural repertoire of their family homes (adult culture), constituting its *habitus*, and informing their coping strategies in interactions with individuals and institutions, including school (Bourdieu and Passeron, 2011, p. 13). The theory of cultural reproduction makes it possible to look at school as a space ("field") in which the participants involved ("agents") give meanings to school situations (as a result of *illusio* and "game"), presenting specific models of behaviour and thought. These are their cultural equipment received in their primary environment (*habitus*). *Habitus* is: a way of thinking, acting, feeling, and being, which is embedded in culture (Maton, 2014, pp. 51–52) and reflecting the relationship between the social and the individual (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 127). *Habitus* also corresponds to automatic reactions to specific situations, thus, maintaining the appearance of conscious action. Children-students, teachers, and parents also use "capitals" that make it possible to obtain individually relevant gains (cf. Bourdieu, 2008). The school institution, existing in a culture, gives specific tasks and functions to its participants and informs (more or less explicitly) about their values: respect and position (status) (Bruner, 2006, p. 50). The individual (child) produces meanings in response to the encounter with the surrounding world, situated in specific cultural contexts, to understand their meaning. Locating meanings in the culture makes it

possible to negotiate and communicate them, and they constitute the basis for cultural exchanges (Bruner, 2006, p. 16). Education in the cultural world of the school “provides skills, ways of thinking, experiencing and expressing” (Bruner, 2006, p. 45), which the student can exchange for specific goods, including the acquisition of identity models. The school in the psychocultural approach is seen as a “market of distinctions” (Bruner, 2006, p. 49, 116), which, referring to Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*, is a source of the exchange of symbolic capitals for values, needs, and social positions recognised by children, and teachers. The capitals refer to particular chances and opportunities which also allow for success and preparation for functioning in adult life (Bourdieu, 2002, pp. 17–24). Each school, with its “cultural market of distinctions”, also defines its categories of values (often unarticulated) that it wants/needs to develop in children.

Considering the relationship between the mind, education and culture which shapes and conditions the mind’s functioning (Bruner, 1978, p. 228, 230, 235), it may be concluded that society has tools to control the reproduction of culture (cf. Bourdieu and Passeron, 2011). This can also account for the dysfunctionality of education (Lewowicki, 1997, pp. 32–37). School culture confronts the child-student on a daily basis with the necessity to (successfully) cope with the (mis)comprehension of meanings produced by the school culture.

Bruner, based on culturalism, points out that learning and thinking are situated in a cultural environment, i.e. culture is transmitted through learning, in the form of (re)negotiation of meanings (Bruner, 2006, p. 27). Being sensitive to the existence of potential differences between ways of thinking about the (individual’s) surrounding reality, allows us to see both the potential and the dangers involved in their meeting on real ground – in a particular school and its emerging culture, which are the issues I want to address in this article.

## RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTION

In the article I make an attempt to (re)cognize how narrations conducted and/or imposed by the emerging school culture determine the (un)conscious acquisition by children of meanings that describe their school reality and build their identity as learners. The main problem I have been guided by is the question of the image of school in the perception of children at risk. I take perception to be the creation of cognitive representations by the child in relation to its cultural world (Bruner, 1978, 2006). On the other hand, in relation to the specific problem, I was interested in what knowledge of school rules, responsibilities, regulations have children at risk? I related the children’s attributed meanings in the narrative about school to its cultural aspects.

## RESEARCH METHOD AND SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

I selected the narrative interview as a tool to explore the children's perspective of teachers and school (the subject of research) that live in Bytom, currently undergoing revitalization. It is one of the most problematic cities in Poland: with a large scale of unemployment, a significant number of people on social assistance, low quality of socio-cultural life, low economic activity, which is a result of, among other things, the political and economic transformation of the 1990s. Current local government policy, however, is aimed at creating and developing projects related to: revitalization of neglected areas at risk of sustaining phenomena in the field of social pathologies, and increasing the social capital of residents. It is also a city with a rich tradition referring to the borderland and historical location between Silesia and Lesser Poland, as well as multiculturalism.

In the study, I used the qualitative strategy due to its potential to freely explore the meanings created by children (Denzin and Lincoln, 2014, p. 23). A total of 12 children between the ages of 10–14 participated in the study, however, due to the limited volume of the text and the emerging intervening perception of school in children after crossing the educational threshold, I decided to present it based on interviews of 6 children aged 10. Using the narrative interview, I wanted to highlight specific elements of the biographies of children from risk backgrounds related to the cognition and understanding of everyday school life, that constitutes the school culture. Children from four different schools in Bytom took part in the research to objectivise the image of school and teacher in children's perception. Narrative interviews were conducted with children at their place of residence, starting with a question-request: *Please, tell me about your school and teacher*. The research allowed, among other things, to discover knowledge related to the mechanisms of shaping the identity of children-students by assigning or imposing by the institution the interpretation of specific phenomena, behaviours, attitudes, etc.

The research group was purposely selected based on documents from families supported by the Municipal Family Assistance Centre in Bytom according to the criteria that make up the presence of risk factors in the family, such as: violence, dysfunctional care and child rearing practices, and challenges in running a household, addiction. The research material was carried out following the ethical standards of research (Nairn and Clarke, 2011).

I conducted the analysis and interpretation of the data obtained through narrative interviews using the hermeneutic-phenomenological method (cf. Gibbs, 2015; Kacprzak, 2016, pp. 283–284; Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012). The coding of the transcribed interviews took place in several stages: structural analysis of the text (the emergence of descriptive categories), categorial analysis (the extraction of categories at a higher level of abstraction – analytical categories), and graphical placement of mutual relations and connections by means of context maps (Pilch and Bauman, 2001, p. 348). The final stage of the analysis carried out was to locate

the resulting categories in well-established concepts, and theories together with the presentation of quotes from the interviews, explaining the choice of given theoretical models and research findings (Smith et. al., 2021).

## RESULTS

The presented research results constitute only a fragment of the research material developed as part of the doctoral dissertation *Teachers and School in the Perception of Children at Risk (on the Example of a Selected City in Upper Silesia)* and comprise one of the images of the total school culture. In the article, I present statements of children that make up the initial (descriptive) category, which I call “proper behaviour”. It refers to the broader analytical category defined as **school rules and norms**. The category of *proper behaviour* refers to students’ attitudes that are desirable, and so formatted by the school culture. At the same time, these behaviours draw attention to implicit beliefs, views about the student, involving culturally embedded meanings about the child in the adult discourse (Jarosz, 2013, p. 29). The fragments analysed and interpreted exemplify what the student is supposed to do, think and feel.

Woods (1983) noted that people in the school, who are involved in its everyday life, notice characteristic mechanisms that frame certain activities and influence specific patterns of behaviour (p. 28). In children’s narratives there is information related to the rituals that begin the lesson:

[Ch1]: **We are supposed to line up** in front of the room by **ourselves**, but if no one lines up, then she [makes us]. **She doesn’t let us** in because she has to wait until everyone is in pairs and does not play anymore and then, **when it’s quiet, we can enter the classroom** [...].

[Ch2]: When we enter the classroom, Miss said, please take a seat there or there, we sit down and they [students– author’s note] are already unpacking, and **Miss shouts that we are not supposed to unpack, but first say hello** and we have to unpack **and get ready again**. Now it’s a smaller number of students doing it wrong: the one who was absent, for example, is doing it wrong.

It is clear from the narrative that the interviewees are informed of their (fixed) place and the sequential, orderly and teacher-designated phases that some find difficult to remember. It is the teacher who decides on the chronology of the tasks and evaluates the quality of their completion, and who informs the students of his/her dissatisfaction, his/her irritation at their lack of progress through shouting. The adult also determines the space allocated to the child in the classroom. Questions arise about what cultural message is promoted by the school? What values,

competences, knowledge and skills does the institution want to impart, and what type of student identity does it favour?

The situation experienced by the narrators is new to them: they have recently crossed an educational threshold – they have become fourth-grade students. Educational thresholds metaphorically refer to a rite of passage, constructed in “an identity stalemate between freedom and enslavement [...] between one’s own search for the self and the institutional pattern of growing up” (Jaskulska, 2018, p. 9). It seems to be illustrated by the comparison of the two worlds contained in the narrator’s statement [Ch6] – the child’s world, characterised by play, spontaneity, and the adult/school world – indicating orderliness, discipline, rigidity (“**She doesn’t let us in because she has to wait until everyone is in pairs and does not play anymore and then when it’s quiet we can enter the classroom**”).

The subject-based system of education that they currently experience in opposition to integrated teaching, where the teacher managed the child’s time between learning, resting, and playing, makes it necessary for children to mobilise their resources to find themselves in a new reality (Michalak, 2013, pp. 12–13). It seems that what the child is involved in/may refer to the process of secondary enculturation. In this process, there is a confrontation of acquired skills, knowledge, linguistic predispositions, ways of thinking brought from the home environment, and school experiences from primary school grades I–III (*habitus*) with the renewed cultural heterogeneity of the school. In this situation, the individual often learns new behaviour patterns and interpretations of others’ actions. Enculturation reflects the products of socialisation – the internal and psychological elements of culture that are internalised (Matsumoto and Juang, 2007, p. 171). Thus, the effect of the process is the acquisition of cultural competencies, enabling effective communication and behaviour in a specific environment, manifested in accumulated knowledge and skills gained through experience (Davis, 1997).

In the interviews with the narrators, I find further fragments that indicate the student’s activity during the lesson, as postulated by the school:

[Ch3]: No, **there is simply a designated** [place to sit – author’s note] just like in Polish [...] Well, in Polish I am sitting by the wall, at the exit, by the door. **And there you have to sit during each lesson as it is in Polish.**

[K.K.-P. – the author]: And who made that rule?

[Ch3]: The [class – author’s note] teacher and the head teacher.

In the conversation, the child points to his/her place in the classroom, made on the basis of a rule established by the class teacher and the head teacher. The narrator seems to adapt (internalise) to the designated rules of the Polish language classes, which may indicate the maintenance of order in the school classroom, and doom the child again to the impossibility of making a choice. It seems interesting

to ask questions about the awareness and nature of the intentions that guide the pedagogues in making a particular rule.

The next statement contains a postulated pattern of a passive learner during the lesson, sustained by the teacher in the form of giving instructions:

[Ch2]: In Polish, **Miss keeps telling us what we're doing, what we have to do, what book we're going to read tomorrow, next month**, what book we're going to [talk about – author's note], **she is going to quiz us** or something. **Or something there or there. This is the most boring thing, that Miss doesn't do anything but talks and gives answers. She asks us questions**, which means she gives us **answers** [...]. In general, **we can't do anything in Polish, only listen to Miss and learn** [...].

The child informs about the behaviour of the teacher, who focuses on the on-going provision of instructions. The instruction captures what activities (responsibilities) are appropriate for the teacher/school and what will be controlled. The experience of boredom for the narrator in terms of the lack of activities undertaken by the teacher is also interesting. In the narrator's interpretation, talking and giving answers means both: "doing nothing" and placing the child in a passive position. I relate the hidden message contained in the meanings produced by the interviewee regarding teacher-student interaction to the directive: "the teacher speaks, the student listens", which highlights the nature of power exemplified in, e.g. the culture of silence of dominated groups (Freire, 2000). The instruction that appeared in the child's statement is complemented in the following narrative by the process of controlling the students' actions:

[Ch2]: **Miss is also constantly checking whether something is happening or not, whether something is happening here, whether something is happening there, whether something is happening there or there. And she keeps looking at us! She keeps asking and looking if something is going on there, or there, or there! She walks around and looks all the time** [the child imitates the teachers' facial expressions: opens the eyes wide and turns the head constantly – author's note] **whether something is happening, whether someone has written a note or not.**

It can be assumed that the observation in the meanings produced by the narrator is aimed at maintaining a certain order in the classroom. It seems that the teacher is constantly monitoring the students' work, obsessively paying attention to their behaviour, seemingly omnipresent, which is expressively emphasized by the student through multiple repetitions. A focus on the behavioural dimension of the children occurs in the remaining interviews:

[Ch4]: **I hate Science the most! I also hate Miss** in general, because Mrs. M. – the name itself is evil, and **she's always really, constantly, every minute saying** e.g. **"What are you doing?"** And **"what are you looking at?"**.



[Ch1]: M. is a good student, but sometimes, when J. talks to her a little, because she doesn't know something, later Miss turns to them and **J. has to explain that she wants to help her, that she did not know what to do there, even though [J.] is a good student.**

Watchful controlling can create strong and unpleasant emotional states in children and this applies to all students, even the "diligent and good" ones. Any disruption to the expected order must be explained, even if it is due to diligence or will to help out a classmate. One wonders why a child in need does not seek help from the teacher? Is this due to the nature of the hierarchy in place, is it an individual aspect of the student's personality, or is it a result of the rules prevailing in the classroom? Again, the context of *student silence*, which may be indicative of domination of the school culture comes to the surface.

In the psychocultural approach, what happens at school, in the school classroom, is firmly embedded in the cultural contexts of its participants. Children have "an astonishingly strong *cultural predisposition*, a sensitivity and willingness to adopt common, tradition-honoured ways of doing things" (Bruner, 2006, pp. 74–75). They are characterized by a keen interest in what adults and other children do, often repeating the ways of behaving, acquired through observation. People in interaction with children typically assume attitudes demonstrating certain cultural practices. The ways in which they instruct children depend on their beliefs about the child (learner) (Kruger and Tomasello, 1996, pp. 369–387).

It seems that in the above passages the children's behaviour (their bodies) is socially constructed and indicates the existence of a relationship of subordination. Teachers focus on what happens in the classroom without attempting to deepen the emotional and cognitive activity of the students. According to Goffman, the human body is a resource that the individual can manage, it is an intermediary between the personal and social identity (Goffman, 2005, p. 32). Nevertheless, bodies (reflected in gestures, attitudes, behaviour) are determined by external sources located in "Goffman's Body Idiom" or "Foucault's discourses" (Shilling, 2010, p. 101). The behaviour of the narrators may constitute a "reflection of the effects of power" which, among other things, has the task of socially constructing and managing the child-student (cf. Foucault, 1980, p. 58). Not only children's behaviours but also their ideas (cognitive aspects) are subject to verification, control and reinterpretation of reality:

[Ch5]: [...] there was a nice lesson, when we could draw our patron saint. I drew St. Karolina Kózkówna [a Polish martyr, recognised as blessed in the Catholic Church – author's note]. **I only signed it St. Karolina, and Miss wrote Kózkówna, because she got a little angry with me, because I only drew the head and, well, without the dress. I didn't draw the whole thing, only so far** [showing the torso – author's note]. **And Miss gave me a B. At least that.**

The passage above brings to view a hidden message that the teacher is (un) consciously giving the student – her own (from an adult position) idea of a (female) blessed figure. In this situation, the child experiences the anger of the pedagogue occasioned by the presentation of her understanding of meanings. The student learns/is taught what image of the patron might be desired by the teacher, and in the future evaluated for a higher mark. Referring to the psychocultural concept of education, the author points out that meanings are not only carried by the individual experiences of individuals but also by culturally appropriate ways of explaining reality (Bruner, 2006, p. 30). Therefore, it can be assumed that the child is confronted with the imposition of the image of a blessed figure presented by the teacher, without creating the opportunity to build different interpretations. It seems that the understanding of the representation of the figure presented by the teacher is the only and correct one, which entails questioning other (children's) meanings.

The imposition of meanings by the adult is also present in the child's narrative, which highlights the increase in demands relating to the drawing created in relation to the previous grade:

[Ch2]: **In third grade we also had Art, but easier, now we have to paint masterpieces. Miss says that we have to paint so that it's pretty: for the nicest we get As, for what's not bad we get Bs, what's weaker we get Cs, what's poor we get Ds, and what's weak we get Es, but no Fs. Because if someone is weak in art, they'd get only Fs, so Miss said she doesn't give Fs. And you can also sometimes get Es.**

In the interview, the narrator informs us that art classes come down to fulfilling the teacher's expectations: the teacher is supposed to like the children's drawings. This is the only way to get a good mark, but first and foremost, to be valued – to confirm one's own (in)abilities or (lack of) talent, which builds the child's identity. Students learn, and they are introduced to the “model of a nice drawing”.

In these cases, a finished work is evaluated in terms of whether it meets: the demands of taste, the teacher's preferences, and the criteria for the best work in the class, which can encourage a process of competition to obtain a “prize” (Meighan, 1993, p. 188). The verification of children's skills, aesthetic sensitivity, and imagination allows them to set particular directions for growth and development that are/will be the adult's domain in the future. Questions should be asked about whether there is a place in the school culture for the child and experiencing their childhood with them, and also how important is their individuality, creativity, and to what extent is it only a desire to recreate a pattern?

There are passages in the conversations that may suggest that the experience of particular school rules is alien to the children, evoking astonishment, which, understood in an anthropological and psychological sense, implies a sense of the meanings produced and an accentuation of borderline experiences (Szczepl-

ka-Pustkowska, 2011, p. 130). One such situation is the prohibition – in the boy's understanding – to play:

[Ch6]: Once I was bouncing a ball during the break and she [the teacher – author's note] said that she gives me minus points for bouncing because apparently, I can harm someone's health. **I don't understand it, either [...] It's just so strange, because it's also unfair to me, for example, to get points for bouncing a ball? That's probably what I didn't understand most about this teacher [...].**

Child's puzzlement and (in)comprehension refer to the situation of receiving minus points, which with plus points are awarded for specific activities and make up the pupils' behaviour mark for "bouncing a ball" during the break, which would involve, according to the teacher, "putting someone in danger". To further highlight the context of the event, it is reasonable to refer to the discovery of the art of philosophising that the child acquires: "At its core, we find not only an act of pure wonder but also the doubt that one experiences when their world loses its familiar character" (Szczepska-Pustkowska, 2011, p. 131). The creation of contradictory meanings for the activity of "bouncing a ball" by the student, for whom it is a form of fun, while for the teacher it is a dangerous situation, constitutes a collision of cultural worlds.

The conversations presented signal the potential position/role one plays in the school culture. The child's culture at the threshold of the fourth grade is again confronted with the arbitrariness of the school culture, which somehow seeks to produce a "cultural pattern of the learner" who is supposed to be passive and compliant. The child is gradually subjected to the processes of socialisation, then enculturation, where the child finally becomes a student. The student does not have a possibility to choose or take their own position in the face of the imposed culture, which becomes crucial for his future functioning in school and taking a particular place (position) in the structure. The knowledge that a child acquires about school culture as part of enculturation processes, shapes their way of moving around the school in relation to their *habitus* as well as the perception of other people through the prism of the imposed "cultural lenses" of the institution.

## DISCUSSION

The experience of school culture is a new experience for some children because they have just reached the second educational threshold: the change of space (they can "explore different floors of the school"), teachers, and rituals represent for them a "cultural clash". First of all, the functioning of a child in school involves (not) following a set of canonical rules and noticing and learning about cultural distances (teachers, students). It allows us to make analogies relating to the arbitrariness of school culture and Bourdieu's theory of reproduction. The symbolic

violence operating in hidden cultural messages and exemplified in the imposition of meanings, knowledge, and the formation of the same expectations and demands on all children, is also sustained by teachers. The confrontation of their *habitus* in the context of secondary socialisation, or even acculturation, takes place in isolation from their family culture and the child's culture. Adults thus outline the cultural framework for the child's actions, decide on values, shape the attribution of meanings to the reality around them, and make implicit selections. They remain deprived of their voice and an opportunity to be heard, thus, embodying the beliefs about being passive reproducers of culture (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 45).

Based on the analysed material, I have observed that children are deprived of the right to (co)create culture (cf. Szczepska-Pustowska, 2011). I observe that the child's "cultural learning" at school is reduced to behavioural aspects: what the student does ("produces" in the face of fulfilling institutional requirements) is all that is important and not what he/she feels and thinks (cf. Goffman, 2011, p. 28). The perception of a child in the category of a "product" that can be freely formed is a result of the adult's model of upbringing (Śliwerski, 2007, p. 102; Szczepska-Pustowska, 2011, pp. 67–79). Such a concept is manifested in upbringing that "is based on coercion, authority, commands, obedience, and inequality before law" (Śliwerski, 2007, p. 103). It allows creating a vision of the child based on the assumption of the child's lack of agency, which is crucial in the process of identity formation. Closing oneself off to "cultural difference" or marginalising/excluding children's cultures and their family cultures as a manifestation of the superiority of the dominant culture has an impact on the process of identity formation and meaning-making. It is a construct that requires constant development and space for autonomous action, and also involves the possibility of interrupting cultural reproductions. Apart from self-idealisation, it takes form in self-identification – the sense of identity understood as the uniqueness of oneself and the coherence and dynamics of one's self, by patterns of behaviour that are specific to the individual (Wróblewska, 2011, p. 177). Bruner draws attention to the dilemmas related to the objectives of school, which he places between reproduction and assimilation of cultural patterns and (risky) preparation for life in a world of constant change (Bruner, 2006, pp. 3–4). The process of cultural reproduction may lead to disturbances in the process of building the identity of the child-student-adult, who is deprived of the possibility to create oneself and the world (cf. Kwieciński, 2013, p. 201).

## CONCLUSIONS

Janusz Korczak, the great advocate of dialogue, saw in a conversation with a child a particular path leading from ignorance (about the child) to getting to know the child by constantly asking the question: "Who is he/she?". In his meetings with

children, he follows the idea of active and creative development of their identity. The comparison of children to foreigners who learn and discover the language of adults (Korczak, 1978, p. 69) is close to Bruner's model of a psychocultural approach to education. The child is an active subject who acts and thinks in a way that is specific to their childly cultural perceptions. Therefore, while meeting the child, especially in the context of socialisation and upbringing, it is crucial to together develop and deepen the awareness of the child's actions, motives, and means of realizing intentions (cf. Bruner, 2006, p. 119).

The child's interaction with the adult is the construction of an identity as a result of which children's questions and reflections arise. Korczak's view of the youngest constitutes a critique of adults' beliefs about their subordinate, service-oriented, passive role, which is emphasized by the use of symbolic violence in the practice of the "cultural right of adults" to appropriation (Smolińska-Theiss, 2013, p. 123).

The school culture exemplified in its narratives makes it possible to explore the implicit concepts about the child. The nature of beliefs about the child is linked to the culturally embedded meanings operating in adult discourse (Jarosz, 2013, p. 29). Perceiving the child as a "product" or a "project" that can be "culturally formed" can lead to both: marginalising the value of childhood and reproducing social inequalities.

## STUDY LIMITATIONS

The research was conducted with a very small sample of interviews, as data was collected from six children. This makes it impossible to develop guidelines for working with a child, including a child at risk, when the school supports him or her in conscious identity construction. However, the results can serve as an inspiration for further research projects centred around questions about the role and goals of educational institutions in socially marginalized environments (Bytom's local community) in the form of recognizing the culture of the school in the face of preventing the "production" of passive community members and deviant subcultures.

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## ARBITRALNOŚĆ KULTUROWA SZKOŁY A ZACHOWANIA TOŻSAMOŚCIOWE DZIECI-UCZNIÓW

**Wprowadzenie:** Szkoła jako instytucja kultury dostarcza gotowych modeli tożsamości w bezpośrednich i podprogowych przekazach kulturowych, codziennie konfrontując dziecko-ucznia z koniecznością (skutecznego) radzenia sobie z (błędnym) rozumieniem znaczeń wytwarzanych przez kulturę szkolną.

**Cel badania:** W artykule podejmuję próbę (roz)poznania, w jaki sposób narracje prowadzone i/lub narzucane przez wyłaniającą się kulturę szkolną determinują (nie)świadome nabywanie przez dzieci znaczeń opisujących ich szkolną rzeczywistość i budujących ich tożsamość jako uczniów. Badanie osadziłam w teoretycznych ramach zrekonstruowanej psychokulturowej koncepcji kultury szkolnej Brunera oraz teorii reprodukcji kulturowej Bourdieu.

**Metoda badań:** Materiałem badawczym, który analizuję i interpretuję w pracy z wykorzystaniem hermeneutyczno-fenomenologicznej metody kodowania, są wywiady narracyjne przeprowadzone z dziesięcioletnimi dziećmi z grupy ryzyka, które stały się uczniami klasy czwartej.

**Wyniki:** Wyniki badań odnoszą się do postrzegania szkoły przez dzieci, które przekroczyły II próg edukacyjny w zakresie zasad i norm szkolnych. Badania koncentrują się na procesie wdrażania dziecka do roli ucznia, wskazując na opresyjny charakter kultury szkoły.

**Wnioski:** W omówieniu wyników staram się zwrócić uwagę na ukryte przekonania dotyczące uczniów, którzy stają się materiałem, przedmiotem czy produktem działania szkoły (kultury) i przeciwstawić je korczakowskiej idei otwartości i wrażliwości na potencjał dziecka.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kultura szkoły, dzieci z układu ryzyka, kultura dziecięca, tożsamość, kulturowa reprodukcja, wykluczenie.