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**Author:** Małgorzata Zalewska-Bujak

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Małgorzata Zalewska-Bujak

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3313-3438>

University of Silesia, Poland

[malgorzata.zalewska-bujak@us.edu.pl](mailto:malgorzata.zalewska-bujak@us.edu.pl)

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE TEACHER'S SUCCUMBING TO SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE AS SUFFERED BY THE STUDENT

UCZNIOWSKIE KONSEKWENCJE ULEGANIA  
PRZEZ NAUCZYCIELI *PRZEMOCY SYMBOLICZNEJ*

#### Keywords:

student, teacher,  
teacher domination,  
school hierarchy,  
symbolic violence at  
school, subordination  
of teachers

#### Słowa kluczowe:

uczeń, nauczyciel, na-  
uczycielska domina-  
cja, szkolna hierarchia,  
*przemoc symboliczna*  
w szkole, podporząd-  
kowanie nauczycieli

**Summary:** The main aim of this study is to show – on the basis of teachers' narratives – the consequences that a teacher's succumbing to symbolic violence in the educational *field* has on the student. This goal is accompanied by the need to highlight how the surveyed teachers describe the logic of the operation of this *field*, how they see their own position in it and what they perceive as their obligations related to it, all of which influences the way the students function within it.

**Streszczenie:** Zasadniczym celem niniejszego opracowania jest pokazanie zrekonstruowanych (na podstawie nauczycielskich narracji) uczniowskich konsekwencji ulegania przez nauczycieli *przemocy symbolicznej* w edukacyjnym *polu*. Dążności tej towarzyszy konieczność naświetlenia, jak badane nauczycielki opisują logikę działania tego *polu*, jak odczytują własne w nim położenie oraz co postrzegają jako swoje powinności z nim związane, które nie pozostają bez konsekwencji dla funkcjonowania w nim uczniów.

## Introduction

The school has invariably been perceived as a tool for maintaining the existing social order, transmitting cultural heritage and modeling a kind of identity that fits it (Klus-Stańska, 2008). Thus directed, it seems to have lost any real contact with what is happening in the world (Kwiatkowska, 2007), and due to its high regard for schematic rituals and reproductivity, it has moved away from the student and their individuality (Dudzikowa, 2010). However, it should be noted that as an institution that grows out of society and is firmly embedded in it, the school does not constitute an independently existing organism but (as shown by Polish and foreign school researchers) it is subject to various external influences of both a macro- (global) and micro-social (e.g. state) character. As various researchers attest, there is a tendency to subordinate school education to political<sup>1</sup> and cultural influences of both “local” and global nature expressed, for example, in hidden tendencies to make it dependent on neoliberal<sup>2</sup> interventionism. Thus, the school is a field of activity for external powers that want to decide about its shape and actions undertaken. Subordinate and dominated, it likewise assigns such roles to its teachers and students. Subjecting teachers to manipulation and control with

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Bogusław Śliwerski has been thoroughly analyzing the constant transformations of the Polish system of education for many years. He points out that the subsequent ruling formations in our country have always tried to gain a dominant influence on education. By introducing new reforms (or rather “de-forms”), without consulting them with professionals such as educators, school principals or teachers, they have made education in Poland permanently destabilized (Śliwerski, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Neoliberal culture influences virtually all spheres of life – including education – both for individuals and societies. It carries with it certain ideologized rules by which it tries to enforce specific actions. When characterizing neoliberal culture, Joanna Rutkowiak (2007) cites a hypothesis about the implementation of an educational program of corporate economics within its framework which entails the validity of economic rationality. The implementation of this program allows for the exertion of a persuasive pressure of a psychological and ideological nature in connection with interactions having a material dimension. The manifestation of the program implementation is the general tendency toward market education, resulting in, among others, the formation of minds subject to the influence of consumer culture; promoting information teaching focused mainly on the transfer of atomized and encyclopedic information while requiring that students assimilate, rather than understand, interpret or contextualize it; enhanced standardization manifested mainly in the introduction of tests as a measure of student achievement and as a tool for assessing the performance of teachers; increasing competition between educational entities; and intensification of selection processes in schools (Rutkowiak, 2009).

regard to compliance with top-down regulations has serious consequences for the functioning of students at school.

Looking at the school from the perspective of teacher narratives (woven as part of qualitative interviews), I try to show in this study how the surveyed female teachers recognize their own place within the school environment and what powers they feel subjected to in their professional activity. The main goal of this paper, however, is to show the consequences that appear as a result of the logic of the school *field* – in which the teacher's subordination to external pressures plays an important role – and which are taken by students.

To interpret the phenomena revealed by the narrators, I use selected elements of Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory; therefore, the following, introductory part of this study focuses on their brief characterization.

The reason why I interpret the teachers' stories in terms of *symbolic violence* is that the women make it clear that the violation they experience is not recognized by them as such. Although they feel external pressure and are able to recognize the sources of coercion applied to them in the school *field*, the very fact of succumbing to symbolic violence is hardly visible to them. The exerted violence seems to be rationalized by them thanks to embodied cognitive structures – that is, *habitus* – prompting their submission to “higher powers” operating in the *field*. For this reason, certain ways of looking at the teaching profession which are forced on the teachers (specifically in terms of professional duties), as well as ensuing behaviors, are seen as “obvious” obligations constituting a network of overlapping necessities that should be accepted and endured due to the structure of the *field*. As a result, the teachers themselves take part in school activities which are oppressive and violent. Consequently, they also contribute to the effectiveness of these activities and influence their outcomes, to the extent that they themselves model the determinants of these actions, in accordance with the categories of perception imposed on them.

## Theoretical Interpretive Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is determined by selected elements of Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory or, more precisely, such concepts as *field*, *symbolic violence*, *strategies* and *illusio*. In this paper, they are used to describe and interpret the daily experiences of the surveyed teachers as revealed in their narratives which emerged in the course of the interviews conducted. For the

sake of clarity of the analyses that follow, I will now briefly characterize the theoretical constructs used in them.

In Bourdieu's theory, a *field* is a setting in which agents – and their capital – are located. The theorist distinguished such *fields* as educational, cultural, and economic *fields*, within which other subfields may be specified (e.g., in the cultural *field* there are artistic, literary, scientific, etc. subfields). Individuals can function simultaneously in many social spaces (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001). According to Bourdieu, in these separated areas of social life, based on the rules in force within them, a battle is fought for capital and position in the structure of its distribution, determining the opportunities and limitations of the given *field* participants (Sztandar-Sztanderska, 2010). A *field* is, therefore, often an arena of rivalry and conflicts largely caused by its structure, related to the unequal distribution of various types of capital, limiting favorable positions and the profits they bring. In order to gain or maintain a privileged social location, *field* participants use appropriate *strategies*. Bourdieu sees them as the “combination of the individuals' own actions” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001), created as if spontaneously (i.e., without conscious calculation and intentionality) on the canvas of rules and principles read as valid in the *field*. Strategies appear as a result of the dispositions shaped on the basis of necessities characteristic for a given *field*, which are aimed at adjusting to the prevailing requirements. Bourdieu's concept assumes that the members of a given *field* have the so-called *feel for the game* that drives their strategies. It is related to the practical prediction of what is going to happen and how to act to make it happen (Bourdieu, 2006). However, various factors determine the choice of strategy (one of them is the distribution and size of all capital in the *field*). They shape the distribution of power between individual agents and institutions and determine their position. In the language of the French sociologist, one can, therefore, say that the *field* imposes specific *strategies* and forms of struggle on social agents (Strzyczkowski, 2011).

Bourdieu devoted a lot of attention to the analysis of the educational *field* and the characterization of school as a kind of space that contributes to the reproduction of the distribution of cultural capital and, thus, to duplicating and recreating the structure of social space (Bourdieu, 2008). The sociologist is, therefore, convinced that the school (due to its pedagogical activity, the specificity of which is subordinated to the symbolic and material interests of the privileged classes striving to replicate the mechanisms of distribution of cultural capital) is a tool of *reproducing* social reality and consolidating the

division into the privileged and the excluded (De Certeau, 2008). As an institution managed by the state, it shapes social mental structures, that is, the frames of perception, understanding and memory shared by the participants of this *subfield*. Thus, it equips the state “[...] with the special power of forming souls, the strength of which lies in the fact that it is not perceived as power” (Sztandar-Sztanderska, 2010, p. 54). The school’s reproductive activities are supported by the so-called *destiny effect* caused by the myth of “innate talent” by which the privileged or excluded social position of individuals is adjudicated. In this process, only the formal form of intelligence is taken into account, whereas diversity is ignored. This results in the *destiny effect* (Bourdieu, 2006) which divides individuals into those who have innate talent and those who are not gifted with it. This solution makes it possible to rationalize the position of individual agents – it shows the “naturalness” of the privileged position to some and explains to others that their exclusion and failure stem from their lack of intelligence, talent and potential. A simple example may be one’s professional career perceived as a consequence of education, resulting, in turn, from one’s intelligence and the effort put into studying (Sztandar-Sztanderska, 2010). As a result, a *symbolic order* is created, maintained and perceived as something natural and right (Bourdieu, 2009).

From Bourdieu’s perspective, the school is an arena of *symbolic violence* in which the veiled essence of rape is inscribed, consisting in the fact that the people experiencing it are not aware (Sztandar-Sztanderska, 2010) of being forced to take certain actions or perceive certain activities and behaviors as obvious or necessary. It can be said that they accept the world as it is, on the basis of pre-reflective assumptions and using the “cognitive measures” produced in it (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001, p. 162).

The nature of the *symbolic violence* that the French sociologist speaks of is not simple. According to him, it can manifest itself in its being exerted, exercised or imposed. However, it is not a type of action or relationship, but rather a kind of “primary entanglement in what is social” (Jacyno, 1997, p. 69). It assumes a specific participation of an individual in its interactions, manifested in the fact that he or she succumbs to situations related to compulsion and in their inability to oppose it due to the pattern of perceiving and assessing their position (as a dominated person) and relations with others (who are dominant). Bourdieu explains that a person succumbing to symbolic violence “can only use instruments of knowledge that they have in common with the dominator, which, being merely the incorporated form of the structure of the relation of

domination, make this relation appear as natural; or, in other words, when the schemes they implement in order to perceive and evaluate themselves or to perceive and evaluate the dominators (high/low, male/female, white/black, etc.) are the product of the incorporation of the (thus naturalized) classifications which their social being is the product” (Bourdieu, 2006, p. 242). It can thus be said that by incorporating existing social constructs and universal cognitive structures, an individual is prone to surrender to symbolic violence, which often manifests itself in submission and obedience.

Bourdieu’s understanding of *symbolic violence* entails that the individual is unable to oppose it by an effort of will, as they automatically incorporate the social position. The logic of feelings of duty contributes to this, which is often mixed with the experience of respect, love or devotion.

This brief overview of the conceptual apparatus created by Bourdieu makes it possible to look at teachers as participants in the educational field who have knowledge of the rules and methods of behavior that serve to preserve and maintain their position. This sociologist describes this knowledge in various ways – sometimes as *practical intuition*, sometimes as *practical knowledge*, and sometimes as *learned ignorance*. Teachers active in the *field* of education are also characterized by their belief that staying in it makes sense, or that it is worth being a teacher. Bourdieu describes this as *illusio*, which is their “way of being in the world” (Bourdieu, 2006, p. 193), making them accept, *inter alia*, certain mandatory necessities. Thanks to *illusio*, the requirements of the *field* grow into the foundations of teachers’ pedagogical activity, make them more sensible and strengthened, without the need to justify and judge their rightness.

Bourdieu’s *illusio* describes investing in the game not so much with cold calculation as with routine: “things that are done, and that are done because they are things that one does and that have always been done that way” (Bourdieu, 2006, p. 145).

In the following part of this paper, I will move on to the analysis and interpretation of a segment of my research entirely devoted to the professional experience of teachers. In doing so, I use Bourdieu’s concepts that are appropriate from the point of view of the chosen research problem.

## Methods

The considerations presented here are related to succumbing to the pressure of the dominant powers and external pressures, which can be interpreted as



*symbolic violence*, revealed during the analysis of the research material collected through qualitative interviews with female teachers. It turns out that they undertake certain types of actions which are, in fact, a reaction to the so-called *state of the field* and their position in it. Obligated to implement top-down directives, they undertake specific actions which (in the light of the analyses) have certain consequences for their students' functioning in the educational *field*. Accordingly, the main goal of this study is to answer the question of the consequences that the teachers' succumbing to *symbolic violence* has for students.

However, before I proceed to highlighting the phenomena indicated, I would like to briefly characterize the methodological basis of the fragmentary analyses of the collected data presented here which are part of the material obtained through the realization of a much larger research project that I discuss in a comprehensive way in *Teacher in the School Field – in the Light of Pierre Bourdieu's Theory and Teachers' Narratives* (Zalewska-Bujak, 2017). It is worth adding that the main aim of this project was to gain an insight into teachers' everyday experiences, and to try to understand how they interpret them and what meanings they give them. This, however, was not based on a faithful reflection of the professional reality of the respondents, but on reaching its manifestations in the experiences they described – both those from the more recent and more distant past – and to constructing its interpretative image on this basis (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2015, p. 34). The best way<sup>3</sup> to reach these experiences was through qualitative interviews – also known as informal (Stemplewska-Żakowicz, 2005, p. 53) or in-depth interviews (Konecki, 2000, p. 169) – with nineteen teachers from various schools of different levels (primary, junior high and high school). They work in small towns, large cities and rural areas in the Śląskie and Małopolskie voivodships. They teach different subjects or are teachers of integrated early childhood education.

To reach the respondents, I applied the snowball method (Babbie, 2008, p. 213): after each interview, the interviewees proposed another person who would likely agree to participate in the research. These recommendations not only allowed me to reach out to teachers, but also made me appear as less of a stranger being a researcher who does not come from the teachers' professional circle. My intention was to find various types of teaching experiences in order to saturate the emerging research categories. Therefore, over time, people who

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<sup>3</sup> The indicated method of data collection enables penetration into the world of everyday life experienced by the respondents (Lebenswelt) (Kvale, 2004, p. 63).



differed from the previous respondents (e.g., as regards their work experience, professional promotion or school in which they taught) were sought and interviewed. On the other hand, the number of respondents was determined by the interpretative paradigm of conducted explorations within which the depletion of the result field is inscribed (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2000, p. 52) and the aforementioned saturation of categories appearing in the course of analyses. Following the above principles led to the termination of interviews when new threads ceased to appear in them, which would trigger the need to introduce new analytical spaces or explanations.

I started the analysis of the collected research material already at the stage of transcribing the interviews by creating structured, computer text files (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006, p. 158). Sharing the position that the researcher should avoid freedom in this process and stick to the need to apply certain rules (Stemplewska-Żakowicz, 2005, p. 49), I decided to use the analytical tools created by Graham Gibbs (2011). The entire process of analysis was reduced to three main stages – the coding of meanings, their condensation and interpretation (Kvale, 2004, p. 171).

### Teachers' Readings of the Sources of *Symbolic Violence*

The teachers located in the educational *field* recognize in a somewhat automatic way the mechanisms controlling it. They interpret necessities inscribed within the *field* as their obligations – which they fulfill due to their willingness (*illusio*) to maintain their professional position even if they see them as burdensome. In the light of their narratives, the order of the school *subfield* became apparent, according to which, people subordinated to the ruling powers bend under their pressure. The duality of the teachers' position is also revealed; namely, they are both dominated – by the school principal, educational authorities at various levels, etc. – and dominant – over the student. The school, therefore, can be seen as a place where *symbolic violence* is exerted, associated in this case with imposing on the members of the *field* a pattern of the perception of their position and related duties. Due to the nature of *symbolic violence*, the respondents do not recognize it as such, although they are able to indicate the sources of the pressure they experience. By making cross-sectional analyses of the interviews, I have identified the following sources exerting external pressure on the respondents and imposing both perception and action patterns on them: superior forces dominating in the educational

field, the policy of the central education authorities, the work of school supervisory authorities (education boards), local authorities administering education, and the school principal as a guardian of the teachers' appraisal system. It is possible to indicate specific forms of each of the sources of *symbolic violence* revealed by the respondents. The superior forces dominating in the *field* of education require adapting the work of schools as public institutions to the specificity of the operation of a private sector enterprise. They do this by creating, for example, the need to strive for advertising the competitiveness of the school, or to use marketing gimmicks, which is illustrated by the statements made by the interviewees:<sup>4</sup>

Schools must compete with each other, they must, er, students to each other... [attract]. There must be picnics, and before the picnics, there must be "weeks of humanities," mathematics and natural sciences, there must be... competition after competition. [...] But, as I say, it all got mixed up a little bit and it is caused by all this marketing, the way of managing education that we now have. One school shows another that you have to put on such a show, to which you have to invite the mayor, and, if possible, God knows who else, and to show parents that the school is attractive, so that they would like to enroll their children in this school, because sometimes your job depends on it. [...] I have to do shows for officials, I have to, er, [...]. Actually, the lessons are on a distant, very distant plane, and what you become a teacher for, that is, the student and teaching them something [...] is at the far end. [a Polish teacher in junior high school]

The above statement shows that due to the influence of powers dominant in the educational *field*, there is an attempt to change the perception and actions of teachers: instead of focusing on supporting the cognitive processes of students, they are to ensure the competitiveness and attractiveness of schools. Due to these powers, schools are also compared based on the exam results obtained by students (creating school rankings):

Such pressure. You compare schools, right? In this school, the results are this, in this one, the results are that, and it is also such a sad thing, not entirely true; these statistics somewhere say that this municipality, this city, this school has such and such a result. [an English teacher in middle school]

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<sup>4</sup> When selecting the excerpts from the teachers' statements, I was guided by the "illustrative power" of the presented analyses and interpretations. Therefore, they were not subject to linguistic correction.

The policy of the central education authorities and the work of school supervisory bodies (education boards) introduce centralized standardization and the requirement of a rigid and controlled implementation of the curriculum:

Of course, this core curriculum is standard, then it has to be implemented, but sometimes it would also be interesting to discuss some other texts of a given poet to make this image of the poet more comprehensive. Well, there is no time for that at all. So, there are only those flagship texts that young people are often not really interested in, so it is also so detached from reality. [a Polish language teacher at secondary school]

It is worth noting that the words of the teacher quoted here confirm the opinion of Dorota Klus-Stańska, a long-time researcher of the school, who in her publications argues that the school is always dated and does not correspond to reality (Klus-Stańska, 2008). A manifestation of this is the persistent ossification of the teaching content in the form of obligatory readings to be discussed with students during Polish language classes, while ignoring the students' cognitive interests and the changing world in which young people are embedded. In the light of the analyzed data, the interviewees are determined to implement what is prescribed in advance and they commonly reveal the belief that the teacher cannot ultimately decide to adapt the content to, for example, cultural changes that are manifested by the evolution of language over the years.

The policy of the central education authorities and the work of school governing bodies cause one of the biggest problems my narrators talk about, namely, the steadily increasing amount of documentation required, which makes their profession resemble the work of a clerk rather than a teacher and an educator of children and youth:

Excessive demands on the part of, I would say, the authorities who created such a system that forces us to do a second job, I don't know, we call it a secretary's job, because it really is when, instead of spending time preparing attractive classes, coming up with an experiment, I don't know, a didactic game, no matter what, we have to take these papers home and, using our own equipment, er, in our own home, perform a number of tasks that I think are unnecessary. [...] I must honestly say that this documentation, this paperwork, is just starting to overwhelm us, not only me, but probably all of us slowly, yes. [a teacher of integrated early childhood education]

The respondents accuse the local education administration bodies of saving on education and creating unsatisfactory working conditions (e.g., creating too many classes, avoiding granting the status of integrated classes to student teams that require it, and not employing teaching assistants).

[...] now there are classes of 32 students and it is a terrible job. 32 students in the fourth grade is a lot, there are no such classes – 20, 24; 32 is too... the individual approach is dead. But you can't make four out of these three classes because you don't have the money for it. The municipality will never agree to such a thing, money is important to them and the economic bill. Nothing else. All those plans that you submit to the board do not seem to pass later. I don't know, doesn't it depend on the standing of the director?  
[a Polish teacher in junior high school]

According to the interviewees, the education administration authorities are also responsible for using only standardized tools in measuring the quality of teachers' and schools' work, and for exerting pressure on school principals and teachers:

The exam is the determinant of the lesson, although I believe it shouldn't be that way, but (-) it's sad what's going on – those rankings that are just between schools. And I will say that when, for example, it happens that the school has such a lower position because of these exams, the principal is immediately held responsible for it (-) by the mayor and I then, you know, understand the principal that he then puts pressure on teachers, because there is such pressure from the municipality that the municipality should be in the highest position, and then, unfortunately, these teachers are blackmailed. There are also unpleasant misunderstandings between teachers from different schools, even to the point that these teachers want to show how they can reach a higher position in front of each other. I don't think it's cool, because it affects young people. The school should not just prepare a child for the exam, but unfortunately these days are like this and I honestly say that this is how it is done, God forbid if the school was in a lower position, then this teacher is blamed. [a Polish language teacher in primary and junior high schools]

In light of the narratives, the school principal is often someone adopting an authoritarian style of managing the institution and dominating the teacher. Being accountable to superior bodies themselves, they also become the supervisor and controller of the teaching – students' results obtained from external

exams, fulfilling bureaucratic duties, implementing other top-down orders and guidelines, etc.

The principal, er, imposes certain obligations, which are also not created by him, but by, er ... they are imposed from above, only now it depends on the principal whether he just throws everything on others – “I don’t have to do anything here” – or tries to do the task with us and do something that has to be done. [a math teacher in junior high school]

The surveyed teachers, wanting to maintain their position in the educational *field* (despite the professional inconvenience it creates), decide to fulfill the obligations. In the next subsection, I focus on highlighting, based on the analyzed research material, what consequences it brings for them and for the students.

### The Consequences that the Teacher's Submission Has for the Student

By succumbing to pressure exerted by the powers that dominate them, as well as external pressures that can be interpreted as forms of symbolic *violence*, my interlocutors undertake certain types of actions which are a reaction to the so-called *state of the field* and their own position. In order to fulfill the obligations imposed on them, they resort to specific *strategies*<sup>5</sup> of professional activity, which are not without consequences for students’ functioning in the educational *field*. One of them is the strategy of “doing what they tell you”, which is reflected in the most visible and emphasized obligation to ruthlessly implement the program:

I mean, you know, the core curriculum is sacred to us, right. The core curriculum is sacred, because we are checked by the management, who check whether we do tests frequently enough, and what these tests are for, everything must be described this way. [a Polish language teacher in primary and junior high schools]

They appraise us and there must always be a subject, lesson number, and topic recorded – everything in accordance with the core curriculum, which is just (-) must be like this [a Polish teacher in junior high school]

<sup>5</sup> Analyzing the cross-sectional narratives of the respondents, I selected the following teaching *strategies*: the *strategy* of “learning through tests and for the sake of tests,” the *strategy* of “achievements and proving oneself,” the *strategy* of “with parents’ help,” the *strategy* of “doing what they say,” the *strategy* of “helping the student out,” the *strategy* of “caring for the attractiveness of the school,” and the *strategy* of “wooing the student.” I analyze all these strategies in the previously mentioned, wider study (Zalewska-Bujak, 2017).

In light of the conducted analyses, it turns out that this necessity<sup>6</sup> becomes the *illusio* woven into the basis of the teachers' actions, that is, the belief that by fulfilling this *field* requirement, they will retain their professional position in it.

The main consequence of the necessities inscribed within the educational *field* and rationalized by the teachers is the loss of the status of the subject experienced both by the teachers and their students. This is visible in the fact that they perceive themselves only as executors or implementers of existing curricula based on the applicable core curriculum. Commonly, the narrators do not put themselves in the role of an architect or even a program modifier, although their statements are rich in critical remarks about the programs, largely due to the fact that they constrain and limit their professional activities:

[...] The program is unfortunately prepared in the way it is and not otherwise; it limits the teacher very much, and so we have (-). We have to [...] implement what has been assigned to us from above, regardless of whether we always agree or disagree with it [...]. [a math teacher in junior high school]

Sometimes you want to do something different with these children, right. [...] We are within such a rigid framework. [...] however, we do not have enough time to sit down with these children calmly and do something in our own way, my own activities. And I still have to check the timetable. Oh Jesus! We still haven't done this, haven't done that. For God's sake! Spring is coming, right, the first day of spring, and I still have so many exercises to do before the first day of spring, and that's it. And that's what it is ... I think the teacher has too few possibilities to do something their own way, so as not to limit them with such a framework, but we have the timetable, and we have to stick to the material and so on. [a teacher of integrated early childhood education]

It can be said that the respondents, who decide to be subject to the external regulations and guidelines related to the mechanical acceptance of programs<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> British social researcher and economist Guy Standing explains this process. He is convinced of the widespread loss of teaching autonomy with regard to the content taught. Teachers recognize that they are unable to influence the agreed curriculum content because of external supervision and control. They experience the constant evaluation of their work and the constant setting of new goals and methods of external verification of their achievements. Concentrating on their implementation, they neglect, for example, educational tasks – including providing young people with values (Standing, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> This is confirmed, among others, by the results of research carried out by Agnieszka Nowak-Łojewska. It asserts that teachers focus on the curriculum, i.e. a handbook of meanings and knowledge about reality (Nowak-Łojewska, 2011).

commissioned to them, see themselves as the objects, rather than subjects, of professional functioning:

[...] there is no time for any more free learning of the language, and the fact that we are somehow held accountable for these materials, for the programs we implement, because there is an exam and it must be done, [...] and no one asks if it is right or not, or is it necessary – it is so, and we are just some gears in the machine and we have to do it. [an English teacher in middle school]

The teachers also put their students in a similar position, as they very rarely withdraw from discussing pre-determined content with them (which they explain by referring to the excess of curriculum content necessary to be implemented in too short of a time) in favor of those related to the students' interests and internal cognitive needs. This is particularly evident in the narrative of one of the interviewees who describes how she finds only two lesson hours per semester to enable her students to focus on content that is close to them:

And for these students to be satisfied, I always propose two-hour classes before the summer break during which they ... of course, I always try to make them prepare it in an interesting way, sometimes I tell them how, possibly, they can prepare a presentation about a book that made them tremendously happy, that they liked or which, for example, touched them, and they have the right to present such a book to the class. So, it is not just the readings imposed by the ministry, but I try to please them in this way. And these are, I will say, the best lessons, because kids talk about something that interests them. They say incredibly interesting things. I give them 5 minutes, because sometimes a class has 20 students, and I don't have time to spend 20 hours for a student to talk about a book for 45 minutes. But they have 5 to 6 minutes for such a presentation and it is really not enough for these kids then. [a Polish language teacher in primary and junior high school]

Although the teacher is able to notice the advantages of lessons based on the interests of her students, she gives them only a five-minute chance to express themselves once a semester on a topic that interests them, in an attempt to implement a program overloaded with content. Such concentration on the implementation of the pre-determined content is accompanied by the narrators' high regard for the expository methods of teaching, which put the student in the role of a passive recipient of the conveyed content. This is illustrated in the words of Dorota Klus-Stańska, who, referring to Renata Michalak's research, writes about what the student usually does at school: "They sit at their desks



for hours, listen to the teacher or guess the correct answer, fill out work cards, typing single characters into windows and loops. They do not talk to their colleagues, do not discuss anything, do not come up with anything, do not create concepts, do not play didactic games, do not solve problems, do not carry out practical projects, do not conduct experiments, do not work or research. It is quiet during the lesson, [...] motionless and deathly boring” (Klus-Stańska, 2014, pp. 53–54).

Cross-sectional analyses of the interviews conducted make it possible to confirm the universality of the deterministic treatment of the obligation to stick to the prescribed program content. All respondents at different moments of their narratives admit that they focus primarily on the implementation of arbitrarily set requirements related to what the teacher is to teach students at a given stage of education, without taking into account what they already know and want to know.<sup>8</sup> Only one of the interviewees seems to be trying to take into account the cognitive needs of students and meet their interests, creating a bridge between what is ordered from above and what interests her students. Below is an excerpt from her story about the efforts she made:

First of all, I have my own vision and a program that I have to follow, which I have to stick to, but very often these are children's interests [...]. They themselves suggest topics. After all, these cavemen only showed up because we were preparing a troglodyte show for the parents [...] and that came from “Do you know what a troglodyte is anyway?” No. And from this a whole week of classes developed. It was completely unplanned, outside of the textbook, uh, very spontaneously, lots of material brought by the children, also by me. And this is how it is born somewhere out there, but in all of this, of course, I have to keep an eye on these basic skills, i.e., reading, writing, counting, you know, they have to put everything into it somewhere and make sure that it develops. [a teacher of integrated early childhood education]

In the light of the analyzed narratives, it is worth noting that the main consequence the student suffers when their teacher bends under the pressure of ruthless and unreflective implementation of the program seems to be the

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<sup>8</sup> This is in line with similar findings by Dorota Klus-Stańska, who addresses these issues in the study entitled “Disintegration of Identity and Knowledge as a Process and Effect of Early Childhood Education.” The author states, *inter alia*, that the knowledge offered to students by the school and teachers (while constantly ignoring their personal knowledge) is anti-developmental in nature, as it is “culturally inadequate, and often absurd or false” (2014, p. 43).

loss of the chance to participate in the creation of their own cognitive activity. There is also no hope that the postulate of individualizing students' knowledge and taking into account their personal preferences will be realized in pedagogy. It should be added that as a result, the possibility of experiencing a sense of agency and self-worth – and thus the key components of shaping the student's "I" (Bruner, 2006) – is blocked.

When analyzing the statements of the surveyed teachers about their students, I noticed that apart from losing their status of a subject in the educational *field*, they also lose the will to act. Unfortunately, this starts at the initial stage of education, when teachers – focused on the implementation of the assigned teaching material within the designated time – often block, for example, the verbal activity of students and make them accustomed to passivity:

I like how active children are, and in these numerous classes I regret that I kind of kill this activity at times. Because when my children are eager to answer, I should have time to give them a chance to speak out, right. And I have to stop them. (-) Only a group of children will speak to me and I have to stop others, unfortunately, because it is impossible to stretch so that for four lessons I will go on with such free statements, but I have to have it planned; so, unfortunately, I also have to stick to it ... there are some rules and time provided [...]. [a teacher of integrated early childhood education]

Often, at the higher stages of education, the student's will to act at school is so dormant that the narrators who teach in the older grades of primary school or middle and high schools complain that the majority of students are passive and it is difficult to activate them. The lack of willingness to actively engage not only in lessons, but also in other types of activity such as organizing occasional events or participating in performances and commemorative meetings is often interpreted as a symptom of laziness of the young people:

I always tell them: "So clever and so lazy." Well, yes, as I say, it's a bit hard to motivate a high school student, because they don't see why they should do it. They must have fun in it [...]. [a math teacher in junior high school]

I don't know, it seems to me that there is such an attitude that if there is a task to do, if you do it at school, it is inherently boring. This is my impression. And everything that is outside is, let's say, fascinating. The school seems to be out of tune somehow, despite the willingness of teachers, we are not able to fully interest young people [...]. [Polish language teacher at secondary school]

In the last excerpt, there is a search for an answer to the question of why it is difficult for schools and teachers to interest students in the content taught. The teacher quoted here is not alone, as some of the other narrators also ask themselves this question. Looking for answers, they fail to notice that a student deprived of the possibility of active participation in the process of their own education and of deciding what and how to learn loses interest in the teaching offer and the willingness to participate in activities that are not initiated or modeled by them but usually imposed on them.

And there is another consequence of surrendering to the dominant powers in the educational *field*, namely, the negation of school and teachers. It is particularly visible in the narratives of the female interviewees who teach in high school and former junior high school, when they talk about the widespread absenteeism, educational problems and outright hostile behavior students show towards them:

[...] a teacher for a junior high school student is generally someone not to say an enemy, because it is not always the case of an enemy, but they are not... well, they are opponents. And it is always felt – even among students who have no problems with learning or behavior. [a math teacher in junior high school]

Another consequence of surrendering to the necessities inscribed in the *field* is the loss of students' faith in their own potential and abilities. The respondents' narratives are rich in stories about students perceived as "weak" and unable to cope with school duties. They explain the impairment of their educational opportunities by various types of deficits and problems as well as the lack of family capital. The narrators do not believe in the abilities of these students, and often reveal a tendency to treat them indulgently and lower their educational expectations towards them. Students perceived and characterized in this way rarely meet standardized requirements, experience frequent school failures, adopt the optics of their teacher and lose faith in their ability to undertake intellectual effort and overcome the educational challenges and difficulties they encounter:<sup>9</sup>

Often they live in such a world and then it is difficult, since they often do not want to learn the simplest things because they assume that everything I say is too difficult for them, and even when we are doing very difficult topics

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<sup>9</sup> These and other features of lower secondary school students are shown in the results of the research conducted by Elżbieta Kołodziejka (2007).

at the moment, regarding some arithmetic mean, some median or a modal value, for them it is just... They don't listen right away because they know it's too difficult for them. [a math teacher in junior high school]

Losing faith in one's own intellectual potential and abilities seems to be fraught with consequences and provokes a temporary decrease in students' motivation to learn or the negation of schools and teachers discussed above. In the future, however, it may be the cause of educational failures which have little to do with the genuine lack of individual students' potential which, as it turns out, may be overlooked or even lost. The squandering of students' potential is present in the teachers' narratives. This is not only due to the obligation of young people to acquire only the "right" knowledge, but is also a result of establishing other types of regulations – for example, creating (at the municipal level) too many classes in which the teacher is not able (according to my narrators) to help both "weak" and "gifted" students:

[...] therapy for exceptionally gifted children is already being conducted, because they are discouraged, they sit, because nothing happens for six months, and they can read and there is just such depression, lack of enthusiasm, anything, because what do they have to do? [a French teacher in primary and middle school]

I have so many gifted children. I would like to devote more time to these gifted children. Read with them, go a little beyond the program. Simply develop them, the talents they have, and I cannot afford it, because I have to devote all the time I have to these weaker students [...]. [a teacher of integrated early childhood education]

Losing pupils' potential or the lack of its development seems to also appear as a consequence of other rationales present in the educational *field*, such as the aforementioned necessity to strive for advertising and school competitiveness, or to use marketing tricks.

The conducted analyses point to yet another consequence of the teachers' bending under the pressure of meeting the requirements of the *field*, namely the regression of students systematically subjected to schematic and unifying influences. This is so, for example, due to the fact that teachers focus solely on preparing students for exams, that is, on developing their automatism in solving schematically constructed tasks. Taught (to a greater or lesser extent)

mainly what the core curriculum dictates, young people, in the opinion of the interviewees, are unable to go beyond the standard patterns, have problems with logical and independent thinking and are unable to solve non-stereotypical problems. Although the respondents notice the effects of their own influence on the students, they avoid any verbal reflection which would make them realize it:

There are more gifted children who work beyond the program, who are children who think and cope well. They can cope with these tasks, but there are very few of them, unfortunately. Mostly, the core curriculum is learned, a bit more, more than that, but when a new task comes, it's already hard for them. [a teacher of integrated early childhood education]

## Conclusions

The presented analyses show that school structures are based on a hierarchical system of dominance of one group over the other. This confirms the thesis put forward by Bogusław Śliwerski who, on the basis of thorough exploration of the educational *field*, states that the school is an institution in which “[...] there are people who exercise power (headmaster, teacher, administration) and people who are subjected to it (some teachers, students, parents, some administration employees)” (Śliwerski, 2015, p. 261). The school also imposes certain cognitive structures and patterns of action on educational subjects (mainly students and teachers), which means that it can also be referred to as an arena of *symbolic violence*. In Bourdieu's terms, as a place of implementation of the “right” culture, this institution supports the differentiation of participants in social life and divides them into those who exert violence and those who are the victims of it. It seems that teachers (similarly to school principals, which has been revealed in the research presented here) play a dual role of those who are both submitted to and exert violence (mainly towards their students).

What prompts the perception of the educational *field* as a space of *symbolic violence* is that the surveyed teachers do not recognize it as such. This is in line with its veiled character as discussed by Bourdieu. In the light of the narratives, however, one can speak of the external pressure they feel. The interlocutors also recognize its sources. However, wishing to maintain their position in the educational *field*, they submit to their superior agents and the powers operating in the field. These powers force them to look at their

profession in ways which are often different from the one they have. This is manifest in their perception of their professional duties and of the student, who seems to disappear from the center of the narrators' professional influence, giving way to the implementation of the goals and objectives set for them and externally rationalized obligations that must be fulfilled due to the structure of the *field*. As a consequence, the subject status of both teachers and their students is lost, showing that teachers perceive themselves only as executors of top-down tasks – mainly the transmission of the only correct and finite knowledge determined by the authorities exercising power and controlling the degree of its mastery by children and adolescents. In the case of students, this manifests itself in depriving them of the possibility of satisfying their individual cognitive needs and doesn't take their interests or personal contributions into account in the processes of learning and teaching. In view of the attachment of the respondents to transmission-based teaching, students also lose their ability to actively acquire knowledge and skills, which may result in, *inter alia*, the weakening of their sense of agency and self-worth as essential components of personality development. The narrators' statements also testify to the loss of the student's will to undertake educational activities. It seems that this is due to the prevalence of the teachers' activity in the lessons and getting students used to passivity, which is manifested in the necessity to recreate the knowledge they are learning. The deficit of young people's interest in the educational offer, noticed by the narrators, or even their negation of the school and teachers, seem to be a kind of response to limiting their active participation in the process of their own education and co-deciding what and how they learn.

The teacher's focus on fulfilling the requirements of the *field* also makes some students lose faith in their own abilities, which additionally decreases their learning motivation and makes them doubt their own educational potential. When subjected to systematic and unifying influences, young people even seem to lose their cognitive abilities at school. The learned content of the curriculum checked by external examinations, in the opinion of the respondents, shows deficiencies in independent and logical thinking.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that even though the surveyed teachers notice these disturbing problems of students, they do not perceive or interpret them as the consequences of their own – and the school's – actions.

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