The meanings of contemporary parenting. Polish middle class parents in the learning process

Marta Wiatr, Akademia Pedagogiki Specjalnej, im. M. Grzegorzewskiej, Wydzial Nauk Pedagogicznych/
M. Grzegorzewska University of Special Pedagogy, Faculty of Education

Changing Family Relations – Gender and Generations. 8th ESFR Conference, Dortmund, 31st August – 3rd September 2016

RESEARCH CONTEXT

- After the political-socio-cultural changes of 89, Poles are confronted with the option/necessity to formulate their own life projects, including those related to parenthood.
- Beginning from the 90s there is increasing social pressure (laws and administrative arrangements) and individual parental need to become involved in their children’s education.
- The inception of parental initiative groups (representatives of the Bernstein’s ‘new middle class’) in 2012 in large Polish cities spurred the study which the groups became an important part of.
- The groups’ objective was to establish the first unschooling groups and so called quasi-schools (Uygur, Wiare, 2015):
  - Groups with no formal school status.
  - Founded based on the principles relevant for a joint homeschooling or unschooling project bringing together several tens of families (like the concept of Meighan’s ‘flexi-schooling’).
  - Drawing on progressivism, but also on the modern psychological and neurological concepts.

Currently, over 20 such establishments operate in Poland and more are about to start.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

The parental actions exemplify a particular kind of effort - to make sense of one’s own experience, which is a learning process in a wider socio-cultural context. This draws on neo-liberal ideology, with its discourse of individual choice and responsibility. It promotes values such as freedom, autonomy, being active, rationality and self-development (Rose, Olsen and others).

Parental discursive and non-discursive practices produce a particular family environment for living and educating the child.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

- Constructionism (Berger, Luckmann, 1966) and post-structuralism (M. Foucault, N. Rose)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1) How do the parents interpret their own parenting (mothering and fathering)?
2) How do they get involved in creating developmental and educational spaces for their children?
3) What is the relationship between the processes of learning, the experience of being in transit and the language /linguistic creation of self and the family environment?
4) What is the status of knowledge?

METHOD

WHERE? In a large Polish city
WHEN? From 2014
WHOM? 11 mothers and fathers of preschool and schoolchildren who actively seek or create (in their opinion) appropriate educational environments for their children. All the parents make up so called new middle class (Bernstein, 1977). Critical case sampling.

Data collection: HOW? In-depth, individual interview (Flick, 1995).
Data analysis: HOW? GTM (Charmaz, 2006, Clarke, 2005) and discourse analyze (Keller, 2012).

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

- Constructionism (Berger, Luckmann, 1966) and post-structuralism (M. Foucault, N. Rose)

PRERLIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

The readiness to create new learning environments is founded on three basic categories:

1) Being the parent/mother/father
2) Defining a child
3) Interpreting the school system

... the motherhood theme has fascinated me so much that whatever I did, I could do it always from the perspective of motherhood, and (…) when Olga was little, and I, also, I began to change myself, some kind of, interpersonal, I did this to be a good mom.” [03:01 / 65:17]

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