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Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik (ed.). *Elitist Secondary Education Systems in Western European Countries: Studies in Comparative Education*. Poznań 2015: Adam Mickiewicz University Press. Pp. 243.

Recently, higher education has been more and more accessible or the masses. It seems that it is desired that everyone should graduate from a university, which increases higher education metrics. On one hand this presents equal chances for everyone, but at the same time it may lead to a phenomenon of diploma inflation. This poses a question of elitism and egalitarianism in education.

What is an elitist school? What makes a school an elitist one? How can we confront the dynamics of tensions between elitism and egalitarianism in education, which arouse in various European countries? How is the elite identity created in schools which are considered to be elitist? Presented in this review one of the newest publications in this field edited by Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik will give you a complex answer for those questions. Based on the latest research and written by the specialists in comparative education, the collection of texts deals with the issue of social functions of elitist secondary education system.

Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik's book concentrates on the socialization and selection functions of elitist education systems. The author is a Professor at Adam Mickiewicz University (Faculty of Educational Studies) in Poznań. Her research focuses on the problem of equality/inequality of access to education, sociology of education and culture, comparative education and gender studies. She heads the Multicultural Education and Social Inequality Research Department at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań also is a of Committee for Educational Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik published her numerous articles in Polish and foreign academic journals. She is an author and co-author of following books: *Cribs, plagiarism, fake diplomas. Study in sociopathology of education* (GWP, Gdańsk 2007), *Popular culture and (re)constructions of identity (editor)* (Haf-druk, Poznań—Leszno 2007), *Education and Social (In)equality of Women. Dynamics of Access Study* (Impuls Publishing House, Cracow 2011), *Identity in contemporary society. Pop-cultural (re)interpretations* (editor jointly with Zbyszko Melosik) (Impuls Publishing House, Cracow 2012) and over sixty scientific papers devoted to her research interests. Co-author of introduction, and author of the Polish translation of the fundamental US work on gender studies—*Women, Men and Society* (C. Renzetti, D. Curran—multiple editions in the USA, two editions by PWN in

Poland, p. 692). Presented in this review title is surely based on long term experience in comparative education studies, which only makes it more congeneric.

The book contains an introduction written by Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik about various theoretical contexts of the titular issue, along with manifold kinds of classifications along with seven comprehensive chapters. Each of them is presented with a list of sources that can be useful to learn more about the subject matters. The first and the second chapter are focused on theoretical perspective of the contemporary elitist secondary education. The information is enriched with the nature of alternative education systems. Other chapters are concentrated on various examples from Western European Countries such as the UK, Spain, the Russian Federation, Sweden, The Netherlands, Germany and Norway. The articles describe solutions that are used in these states.

The main aim of the book is to present results of the National Science Centre research project conducted by the director Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik. The monograph *Elite secondary schooling. Between sociocultural reproduction and contest mobility* (Adam Mickiewicz University Press, Poznan 2015) is a complementary part of this programme. In this publication, however, thanks to Tomasz Gmerek, Jarema Drozdowicz, Dobrochna Hildebrandt-Wypych, Daria Hejwosz-Gromkowska and Karolina Domagalska-Nowak, all the theoretical background is fulfilled with specific inspirations from chosen European countries. The purpose of the study is stated and briefly explained to the reader in the introduction, where the language is very clear and at the same time scientifically precise and original. The author depicted both the historical and present situation of elitist education and marked a detailed description of their alumnus profiles. The character of a present-day elite is much more complex than in the past as more and more social groups (celebrities, sportsmen etc.) have achieved this status. Subsequently, the writer is describing this relation as *fluidized* by presenting common beliefs about social success. It is worth to mention that all the research conducted from the conflict theory perspective has proven that the popular belief that equal access to the general education and career success exists is to a great extent an illusion. The elite category is still socially strong which is explicitly illustrated by the present elitist secondary education. What is more, it is easier for alumni of those schools to be successful in the professional career. The author compares this situation to the *oil pipeline* when these people are automatically transported to the top of the social ladder with high-class a diploma and certain personality traits. Their parents as well as children are known for having very high educational aspirations because of the elite affiliation. All of those statements are covered in the first chapter and the following ones present a comparative approach.

The main idea of the first chapter is to continue thoughts and questions included in the opening. The author describes elitist secondary education systems in many aspects: historical, social and contemporaneous. Despite the fact that those specific systems around the world are different, there is always a stratifi-

cational element which is shared. The most important criterion when talking about the quality education should be high educational standards supported by positive results in national exams achieved by their students not the social position. The institutions in which the position is more important are characterised by the stratificational potential which makes such schools able to position their alumni up on the social ladder. The research shows that those people have higher aspirations to apply to the best Universities in comparison to other groups with lower scores achieved in the national tests. The author specifically highlights the importance of controlling the level of aspiration in terms of future educational decisions. It is also one of the most important factors forming interpretive and societal inequalities. This chapter is complemented with writer's personal experience about educational systems from around the world (the UK, the USA, France, Japan, Switzerland). Additionally, it contains quotations and concepts of P.W. Kingston, L.S. Lewis, D. Vidaver-Cohen, J.W. Meyer and R.A. Gaztambide-Fernandez. To summarize: the elitist secondary education is related to the several features of presented school systems, which are described in detail and categorised by author's criteria.

The Elitism of alternative schools is the topic of the next chapter written by Bogusław Śliwerski. He presents the essence of a social role of this kind of schools in the society. The main idea of an alternative education system is to give freedom to its creator—the teacher. This type of schooling allows teachers to be different, but at the same time stay true to themselves and be able to integrate their ideas to the educational system. There is a need in XXI century to let the public schools be more autonomous, which will improve the development of the society. Śliwerski emphasizes that every alternative school which opposes to the ordinariness can be called an elitist school. This part is nicely illustrated by many practical examples and the key terminology is clearly explained.

The third section is focused on elite secondary schools in the UK, Spain and Russia. In this part by Tomasz Gmerek, the author presents a critical analysis of this way of schooling in the above-mentioned countries. He concentrated on how elitist secondary education functions and its role in the proces of creating social structures. Three precisely presented case studies are devoted to those distinct countries in terms of patterning, economic and cultural conditioning. The writer tries to picture the reality of elite secondary schools mechanism from social stratification perspective. The chapter identifies and analyses the crucial issues for elite secondary schools in leading countries in Europe in a comprehensive and attractive way.

The same problem but from the perspective of Swedish reality is portrayed in chapter four. Jarema Drozdowicz describes the present concerns about multiculturalism and violence in Swedish schools, accession to the European Union and decentralisation of the school system. The primary doubt is if the elite secondary education can coexists with the ideal of equality. The greatest value of

this section is that it gives the general panorama of the past-to-present literature which has been chosen with great care.

The next part of this collection of texts is Dobrochna Hilderbrandt-Wypych's article about elite and egalitarian tendencies in the Dutch secondary education. According to the author, it is essential to fully understand changes in the particular system by learning the historical-religious reality which created the educational system in the Netherlands in the first place. The Dutch solution is an example of a very rare but effective form of secondary education. The author has revised subsequent and more recent literature which gives this component a quite unique position.

Problems of schooling and social inequity in Germany are presented in Daria Hejwosz-Gromkowska in chapter six. Its aim is to present secondary education as well as controversies and challenges in the contemporary German education. The author explains the reasons for its poor condition and together with Hartmann suggests three solutions to improve the functionality of this system. Apart from the elite education in Germany, the author marks also other problems of education for immigrants. That makes this part even more attractive. She highlighted significant results and achievements and explained their role in the formation of the German elite secondary school system.

Last section written by Karolina Domagalska-Nowak raises the question of the secondary schooling in Norway, which is believed to be the best country to live in. The Norwegian educational system was created in early XX century. Its major role was to link the urban and rural methods of education, in order to be able to have a strong and consistent formation for everyone. The idea of a Norwegian school has been to be equal for every child regardless of their background. Profound research and numerous notes make this part incredibly interesting and full of positive ideas which helped Norway to achieve one of the best educational results. Referring to the earliest and the most recent moments in the history of Norway, the author provides an extremely deep insight in their educational system achievements.

The book has a clear structure. Each section of the publication is comprehensive and diversified by its language and content. Studies are presented in a lucid way and the choice of the countries makes the book coherent. Indeed, the reader can be impressed by the authors' educational know-how. Education to a greater extent is a factor of social inequalities rather than „equalizing opportunities”. The topic of the book is a part of discussion regarding the above-mentioned statements. On the whole the book gives an opportunity to compare the role of elitist secondary education system in terms of forming biographies and a social structure.

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