
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34768/r1.2021.v471.01>

Anna Babicka-Wirkus*

Pomeranian University in Slupsk

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1292-7351>

e-mail: anna.babicka-wirkus@apsl.edu.pl

RESISTANCE AS AN ELEMENT OF CONTRADICTORY SCHOOL CULTURE

RESISTANCE AS AN ELEMENT OF CONTRADICTORY SCHOOL
CULTURE

Keywords: resistance, school culture, contradiction.

The article deals with the issue of school culture from the perspective of its inherent resistance. It is a manifestation of a contradictory nature of this culture. The text aims to analyze the oppositional manifestations of school culture located in different dimensions of its activity. Paradoxically, school culture is constructed from contradictions and thus, its full knowledge requires the diagnosis of the dualities that coexist in it. This article analyzes the clash of these dualities in normative, organizational, symbolic, spatial, temporal, aesthetic and interactive dimensions.

OPÓR JAKO ELEMENT KULTURY SZKOŁY PEŁNEJ SPRZECZNO-
ŚCI

Słowa kluczowe: opór, kultura szkoły, sprzeczność.

Artykuł podejmuje problematykę kultury szkolnej z perspektywy tkwiącego w niej oporu. Opór ten jest przejawem sprzeczności kultury szkolnej. Celem

* **Anna Babicka-Wirkus** – Ph. D. in social sciences in pedagogy; scientific interests: resistance in education, school culture, issues of respecting children's rights at school.

artykułu jest analiza przeciwstawnych przejawów kultury szkolnej mieszczących się w różnych obszarach jej oddziaływania. Paradoksalnie kultura szkolna oparta jest na sprzecznościach, a zatem jej pełne poznanie wymaga zdiagnozowania współistniejących w niej dwoistości. Przedmiotem niniejszego artykułu jest analiza zderzenia tych dwoistości w wymiarze normatywnym, organizacyjnym, symbolicznym, przestrzennym, czasowym, estetycznym i interakcyjnym.

Introduction

School culture is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon which is explored by researchers at different levels of its activity. Various metaphors and comparisons are used to describe the complexity of this culture, including among others: ‘the melting pot of flavours and aromas’ (Nowosad 2020), ‘cauldron with boiling water’ (Babicka-Wirkus 2020), ‘fortress’ (Dudzikowa, Jaskulska 2016), ‘war culture’ (Babicka-Wirkus 2018), ‘opportunity project’ (Freire, Giroux 1993). Some of these metaphors refer to the contradictions that co-create school culture and show its dynamic character.

School culture is a process rather than a state. It is variable and dependent on the location (geographical, architectural), time, social norms, socio-political and economic situation, and the specificity of social actors (students, parents, pedagogical and non-pedagogical staff), who simultaneously create and reproduce it. Czerepaniak-Walczak (2018, p. 82) stresses that “school culture is not a monolith. It is a structure in which there are different beliefs and views, values, styles and forms of communication, and other cultural elements. Some of them are coherent and complimentary, while others are oppositional and contrary to the others”. Resistance, inscribed in school culture, is an integral part of school activity and is manifested by the presence of different resistance cultures in everyday school life. The culture of resistance is a structure of actions resulting from the views, attitudes and relationships of opposition to the dominant order (Babicka-Wirkus 2019, p. 12). Its various manifestations are a constant element of school life and therefore, they deserve the attention of researchers and theorists.

The text aims to analyze the contradictions that exist in school culture and that occur at different levels of its activity. Opposing cultures can be found in the following dimensions: normative, organizational, spatial, temporal, symbolic, aesthetic and interactive. This article analyzes the contradictory qualities present in the various dimensions, referring to the

category of the ‘distribution of the sensible’ developed by Rancière (2007). The mechanism of the distribution of the sensible is expressed in the creation of a specific discourse, presenting the existing interpretations of everyday school life. It is an ‘all-inclusive’ (Biesta 2009) order that determines the identity and positions of all members of a specific community. Not everyone is involved in creating this order, but the order applies to everyone.

Dominant culture vs subordinate culture

The normative dimension of school culture is constituted by the opposition of domination and subordination. A dominant culture is a formal culture and its main goal is to recreate and maintain the established order and structure. It is a culture of conformity which uses symbolic violence as a tool of subordination. It is a space created by the police order¹, as defined by Rancière (1998). It is a hierarchical culture in which teachers are the privileged group and students are the dominated group.

The existence of a dominant discourse in school implies the co-occurrence of a subordinate culture because “the dominant culture is rarely omnipresent” (McLaren 2015, p. 251). A subordinate culture includes discourses that are different from the imposed one and based on different beliefs, views, values, and norms. This culture functions as an anti-structure which, as proposed by Turner (2010), creates opposition to the dominant structure. It is a space for the emergence of Rancière’s politics, which appears when the conflict arises. The conflict destroys the established order because it leads to the clash of the two worlds within one. “Politics is based [...] on a community of conflict which, unlike the community of freedom created by the police order, divides the citizens [author’s note: the participants in everyday school life] into two camps” (Babicka-Wirkus 2019, p. 122). The conflict disrupts the functioning of the order imposed on all actors of the school life, which masks the existence of opposition groups and creates the appearance of an undivided community.

The subordinate culture is in opposition to the dominant culture. The existence of the former is conditioned by the activity of the latter. Resistance is permanently inscribed in this relationship, since it is a typical element for both sides. The clash of the two orders within school culture proves its dynamic character.

¹The police order is both inclusive and exclusive. In Rancière’s view, the police have the possibility to create a binding discourse that determines the way and direction of interpretation of social reality. This mechanism imposes the existence of logical (consistent with the current line of interpretation) judgments and interpretations as well as illogical voices that are meaningless and therefore not taken into account in the discourse.

Formal culture vs informal culture

A formal culture and an informal culture clash in the organizational dimension of school culture. The first is based on official documents such as laws, regulations, rules. Its shape is dictated by directives, rules and principles established at the ministerial, regional and in-school level. "The formal culture is a function of the goals assumed by an institution – the norms, values, and rituals serve to maintain the official definition of the situation and create the best possible *atmosphere for education*" (Mikiewicz 2008, p. 90). Referring to the division proposed by Meighan (1993), one can say that it is a culture created by the official school program. However, it generates the existence of a hidden program i.e., the content, activities, and values that a student becomes acquainted with while staying in school and that are not included in the official documents. The informal culture, on the other hand, grows out of activities, values, non-formal and informal rules, which are an answer to the subjugating practices of the formal culture. Mikiewicz (2008) claims that the informal culture is a function of the values of young people, who create informal groups based on specific life models. It is a culture of the so-called 'second school life', which takes place mainly in corridors, playgrounds, and toilets. It is formed by unofficial, private interactions that result from personal feelings, values, norms, and worldviews. The informal culture concerns both aspects of school life that are not defined in any official regulations and those formal spaces that are not accepted by the participants of everyday school life.

The coexistence of these two cultures is important for the type of culture in a given school and determines the degree of its formality. The potential of the formal culture has a blocking character because it is based on a fossilized concept of school and education. Approaches such as the banking concept in education, rivalry, test mania, efficiency, culture of silence, and obedience are leading the way here. The potential of the informal culture has a liberating character (Czerepaniak-Walczak 2018). It is based on dialogue, cooperation, independence, and integration around common values.

Sacred culture vs profane culture

The contradictory nature of the culture of resistance in the spatial dimension is expressed in the coexistence of a sacred culture and a profane culture. The first one is connected with a sacred sphere, accessible only to the chosen ones. The second one is a secular, profaned, and generally accessible space. Eliade (1999, p. 10) claims that "*sacred* and *profane* are two modes of being in the world, two existential situations".

The sacred culture is based on an established order and defined boundaries. It is exemplified in the school reality by the teacher's room as well as by the classroom, which organizes space and activity in a certain manner. In the classroom, everyone has a designated place and the modes of action are regulated by formal and informal rules established by the master of the lesson ritual, i.e. the teacher. The classroom is a ritual space where the sacred time reigns. Eliade (1999, p. 55) notes that "by its very nature time is reversible in the sense that, properly speaking, it is a primordial mythical time made present". This time is renewed in the form of daily school rituals, especially in lessons, whose constant duration is determined by the sound of the bell.

The profane culture, on the other hand, is connected with a less ritualistic and more unpredictable space than the sacred culture. It is related to the secular, both in the space of elevated experiences (school classroom, school assembly) and the profane (the queue to the school shop, the toilet, the schoolyard). The profane space is a public, 'unclean' space. It is all the nooks and crannies of the school, the places favored by the students, the ones where you rarely meet any teachers. In this space, the students introduce the elements of an intimate space which remain under their authority.

Nalaskowski (2002) states that there are better (heights) and worse (valleys) spaces in the school. The former are reserved for experiences in the sacred sphere. The latter are reserved for experiences typical of the profane sphere. "They are heterotopias, far from the relatively safe classrooms or teacher's room. Within them, one must reckon with the danger of violating well-known and well-established interpretations" (Babicka-Wirkus 2019, p. 249).

Monochronic culture vs polychronic culture

Two concepts of time – monochronic and polychronic – clash in the temporal dimension of school culture (Hall 1999). The first one is typical for a traditional view of school where everyday life is determined by a strictly defined temporal order. The schedule is fixed and divided into specific parts, separated by the bell. This attitude to time is typical of the state of the student, which was discussed by McLaren (1999) who analyzed school rituals. It is imposed by the dominant culture, which is reproduced through repetitive practices and rituals, leading to a petrification of the hierarchical structure in the school.

The polychronic time occurs when the school order is being undermined. According to McLaren (1999), in everyday school life, it is typical for the occurrence of the signs of an anti-structure, which is the result of the student

entering the so-called 'street corner state'. This state is typical for life outside of school, which is full of unpredictable and exciting events. In the polychronic time, many events take place simultaneously. Therefore, the participants of these events feel that time passes quickly. The school reality does not drag on anymore and sometimes the participants lose a sense of time due to all these exciting activities that go beyond the accepted pattern of school life.

In school culture, monochromatic time and polychromatic time intertwine, even though they stand in contrast to each other. Their coexistence allows for changes in the school structure.

Petrified culture vs eventful culture

The symbolic dimension of school culture is co-created by the process of petrification and eventfulness. The first one is typical of the dominant, sacred culture which aims to consolidate and reproduce the imposed order. It is hierarchical and subordinated to the rituals of everyday school life. It is based on the prevailing schemes of interpreting symbols, which clearly defines the acceptable area of interpretation. It is a culture that grows based on the mechanism of police action and the distribution of the sensible, that is, defining what is visible and audible, as described by Rancière (1998).

The eventful culture, on the other hand, is unpredictable. It stems from the need of the moment and its situational character is often an expression of resistance. It depends on the context and a specific set of events. The interpretation of symbols remains in the hands of an individual, who can give new meanings to symbols through subversive actions (Cierniak 2012). This culture is based on improvisation and culture jamming. This makes it possible to reverse given meanings and block their reproduction. Events are spatial and temporal phenomena (Szlendak, Olechnicki 2017) which take place in specific circumstances. They are unique and may lead to the suspension or change of the established order.

The co-occurrence of the petrification process and event practices in school culture generates a certain level of dynamism and change.

High culture vs low culture

The dimension of aesthetics refers to the coexistence of a high culture and a low culture in the school reality. The analysis of the contradictory nature of this dimension refers to the traditional division into a high and low culture and Rancière's (1998) distribution of the sensible. The high culture is sublime and fossilized. It is based on values which are respected and imposed by the creators of the school order, i.e. the teachers. It is

a culture of decency, that is, maintaining and reproducing the imposed hierarchical divisions, rules, and norms. Conformism and obedience are typical for the high culture. Individuals who fit into the framework that this culture defines are socially rewarded. If there is any resistance, it is usually an opposition action that falls within a precisely defined margin. The manifestations of opposition actions are not scandalous or subversive, but use accepted elements of the dominant discourse.

The low culture is typical for students. It is based on values and principles outside the school that are understood and accepted by the students. It is worth emphasizing that the low culture is perceived as insufficiently good from the perspective of the creators and participants of the high culture. It grows from the values and principles rejected by the representatives of the high culture. It is also characterized by a different perception of aesthetics. Scandalous actions are typical for this type of culture (Franczak 2017) and they are visible examples of surprise, crossing established boundaries, or breaking taboos. This culture is also a manifestation of the culture of resistance in school, since it threatens the imposed structure by undermining it. “The work of resistance is [author’s note: in this case] about constantly investigating the boundaries between what is considered normal and what is considered subversive; between what is considered active, and therefore political, and what is considered passive and distant and therefore apolitical” (Rancière 2007, p. 158). Hence, the low culture is about blurring the defined boundaries of division in school and the possibility of participating in the creation and redefinition of the discourse.

The high culture and the low culture are contradictory, but at the same time, they compliment each other. One could not exist without the other because it would lose its frame of reference.

Transmissible culture vs transgressive culture

“School culture is an inherited culture. It has a shorter or longer history. That is why it is difficult to change. Especially for those who are settled in it and for whom all its elements are *obvious*” (Czerepaniak-Walczak 2018, p. 173). In terms of the grammar of a given school, we can distinguish the traditionally established culture of transmission and the culture of transgression, which carries the potential of liberation. The first one refers to the hierarchical relationship between teachers and students, in which adults are in a privileged position. This is a relationship that Rancière (1991) describes as stupefying because it is based on the assumption of an inequality of intelligence between teachers and pupils. Here, teachers are

seen as masters with the knowledge they can pass on to their students in the teaching process. However, the transmission process is unidirectional and it accustoms students to reproduce the acquired knowledge.

The transgressive culture is based on the assumption of equality of teacher's and student's intelligence towards the subject being studied. The statuses of both subjects are equal here, and students are not treated as recreators of the acquired knowledge, but as its active creators. Therefore, they are considered 'speakers' (Biesta 2013) because they use their voice in the process of cognition. They make an effort to think critically, which can lead to exceeding the established boundaries and breaking the existing rules.

Both cultures are in contradiction to each other. However, they can co-create school culture, and the advantage of one of them will determine the emancipation potential of a given school.

Summary

The article presents oppositional pairs of cultures. Each of the discussed pairs occurs in a different dimension of school culture. Their analysis reveals the presence of resistance as a central element of school culture. The analyzed pairs of the oppositional cultures contradict and compliment each other at the same time. This approach highlights the multidimensionality and complexity of school and its culture, and exemplifies Foucault's assumption (2000) that where there is domination (power), there is resistance. It also reflects the complexity of Rancière's distribution of the sensible, which indicates the existence of a dominant discourse and of resistance discourses that are relevant to the shape of the existing structure. The mainstream areas of school culture are the following cultures: dominant, formal, sacred, monochronic, petrified, high, and transmissible. Opposition cultures are the following: subordinate, informal, profane, polychronic, eventful, low, and transgressive.

Literatura | References

- BABICKA-WIRKUS A. (2018), Kultura szkoły w optyce metafory, "Parezja. Czasopismo Forum Młodych Pedagogów przy Komitecie Nauk Pedagogicznych PAN", 2, pp. 58-70.
- BABICKA-WIRKUS A. (2019), Kultury oporu w szkole. Działania – motywacje – przestrzeń, Wolters Kluwer, Warszawa.

- BABICKA-WIRKUS A. (2020), Kocioł z wrzącą wodą, czyli o sytuacji szkoły z perspektywy kultury oporu, "Czas Kultury", 1, pp. 21-28.
- BIESTA G. J. J. (2013), Uczący się, Student, Mówiący – o znaczeniu nazywania tych, których nauczamy, "Teraźniejszość – Człowiek – Edukacja", 3, pp. 7-22.
- BIESTA G. J. J. (2009), Sporadic Democracy. Education, democracy and the question of inclusion, [in:] Education, Democracy, and the Moral Life, (Eds.) M. S. Katz, S. Verducci, G. Biesta, Springer, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4020-8626-7_8, [access: 24.10.2020].
- CIERNIAK J. (2012), Subwersja, czyli sztuka inteligentnego oporu, <http://krytyka.org/subwersja-czyli-sztuka-inteligentnego-oporu/> [access: 13.03.2018].
- CZEREPIANIAK-WALCZAK M. (2018), Proces emancypacji kultury szkoły, Wolters Kluwer, Warszawa.
- DUDZIKOWA M., JASKULSKA S. (EDS.) (2016), Twierdza. Szkoła w metaforze militarnej. Co w zamian, Wolters Kluwer, Warszawa.
- ELIADE M. (1999), Sacrum i profanum. O istocie religijności, Wydawnictwo KR, Warszawa.
- FOUCAULT M. (2000), Historia seksualności, Wydawnictwo Czytelnik, Warszawa.
- FRANCZAK J. (2017). Błądzące słowa. Jacques Rancière i filozofia literatury, Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, Warszawa.
- FREIRE P., GIROUX H. A. (1993), Edukacja, polityka, ideologia, [in:] Nieobecne dyskursy, (Eds.) Z. Kwieciński, Part III, Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika, Toruń, pp. 44-60.
- HALL E. (1999), Taniec życia. Inny wymiar czasu, MUZA, Warszawa.
- MCLAREN P. (1999), Schooling as a Ritual Performance. Toward a Political Economy of Educational Symbols and Gestures. Third Edition, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. Lanham – Boulder – New York – Oxford.
- MCLAREN P. (2015), Życie w szkołach. Wprowadzenie do pedagogiki krytycznej, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej, Wrocław.
- MEIGHAN R. (1993), Socjologia edukacji, Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika, Toruń.
- MIKIEWICZ P. (2008), Nauczyciel jako istotny aktor społecznego świata szkoły, [in:] Nauczyciel: misja czy zawód? Społeczne i profesjonalne aspekty roli, (Eds.) P. Rudnicki, B. Kutrowska, M. Nowak-Dziemianowicz, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej, Wrocław, pp. 88-106.

- NALASKOWSKI A. (2002), *Przestrzenie i miejsca szkoły*. Impuls. Kraków.
- NOWOSAD I. (2020), *Kultura szkoły – w tyglu smaków i aromatów*, “Czas Kultury”, 1, pp. 7-12.
- RANCIÈRE J. (1991), *The Ignorant Schoolmaster. Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, Stanford.
- RANCIÈRE J. (1998), *Dis-agreement. Politics and Philosophy*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.
- RANCIÈRE J. (2007), *Dzielenie postrzegalnego. Estetyka i polityka*, Korporacja Ha!art, Kraków.
- RANCIÈRE J. (2007), *Estetyka jako polityka*. Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warszawa.
- SZLENDAK T., OLECHNICKI K. (2017), *Nowe praktyki kulturowe Polaków. Megaceremoniały i subświaty*, PWN, Warszawa.
- TURNER V. (2010), *Proces rytualny. Struktura i antystruktura*, PIW, Warszawa.