

**Krystyna Janicka**  
**Institute of Philosophy and Sociology Polish**  
**Academy of Sciences**

# **Work situation as a learning situation**

**"Lifelong learning: Appropriate skills for sustaining better jobs"**

w ramach tematu

"Growth, employment and competitiveness in a knowledge society – the European  
case"

Spotkanie z cyklu PolSCA Meetings  
2010, November 23th

# **Institute of Philosophy and Sociology Polish Academy of Sciences (IFiS PAN): selected research projects currently conducted**

- *Integrated and United. A Quest for Citizenship in an 'ever closer Europe'*. University of Siena
- *OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)*
- *Przemiany struktury społecznej w Polsce: ogólnokrajowe badanie panelowe POLPAN 1988-2008* (Transformation of Polish Social Structure)
- *European Social Survey* (2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010)
- *Teacher Education and Development Study in Mathematics* (IEA - International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement)

Funding for these projects comes from: Polish scientific institutions: Committee for Scientific Research, Ministry of Science and Higher Education, Ministry of Education; foreign institution: 6 FP EU, American scientific institution

## Biographical note

Krystyna Janicka, Professor of Sociology at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences (*Research Group of Comparative Analysis of Social Inequalities*) and at the University in Zielona Góra.

Research interests: social mobility and stratification, social change, perception of social inequality and the role of gender in the process of stratification.

Author: *Intergenerational Mobility and its Correlates* (in Polish, 1976) and *Work Situation and Social Structure* (in Polish, 1997).

Co-author: *Mental Adjustment to the Post-Communist System in Poland* (1999) with K. M. Słomczyński, B. W. Mach and W. Zaborowski and editor *Social Differentiation and its Perception, 1965-1980* (in Polish, 1987).

Principal and co-principal investigator in several nationwide and cross-national projects on the Polish social structure changes and evolution over decades.

## **Contents:**

- Introductory remarks
- Lifelong learning in the broader context: objective assessment, public opinions and common perception of education system
- Learning activities in Polish population: basic informations
- Work situation as a learning situation
- Final suggestion

- ❖ In contemporary society knowledge and skills might be conceived as especially important stratifying factor.
- ❖ Personal and professional development more and more is conditioned by the ability and the opportunity to be learned and trained.
- ❖ Readiness to upgrading one's competence is the effective barrier against loosing the work and – by the same – is a kind of guarantee of being active on the labour market

- ❖ The term “lifelong learning” denotes the process of acquiring the education through various formal and informal channels during the whole adulthood (after having completed formal education during adolescent phase of life).
- ❖ Lifelong learning assumes and requires that adult persons reveal their own interests in getting the knowledge and demonstrate the active attitude toward learning and training. This readiness to learn and be trained through whole life is unequally distributed among the population. The research question „why it happens?” may be analyzed within the different theoretic perspectives.

## Theoretical perspective

- ❖ The theory linking the learning processes with location in social structure, occupational activity and the nature of work done deserves the special attention.
- ❖ Accordingly to this approach **the work situation – regarded as the learning environment – plays pivotal role in shaping personality.**
- ❖ The core issue of that conception is the notion of occupational self directedness theoretically and analytically clarified and developed by Kohn (1969, 1983, 1990, 2006).

# **Lifelong learning in the broader context: objective assessment, public opinions and self- evaluation of education**

A. Objective assessment of education system

B. How people perceive and assess the education system as sector of public domain.

C. Self-evaluation of education as one of domains of private life; Satisfaction of one's own education

- ❖ Regarding of lifelong learning it is worth to know what are the basic social and institutional frames within which this process occurs.

One of fundamental elements of formal learning infrastructure – on the country level – is the **functioning of national educational system.**

### **Objective assessment**

- ❖ In this point it should be mentioned:  
Project realized within the *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)*, started in 2000 under auspices OECD and repeated every 3 year. The objective of this research was the evaluation of the level of the instruction system in the European schools (*Michał Federowicz is the supervisor of the project in Poland*); The research was carried out on the nation-wide random sample representative for 15 years old pupils. Two-step sampling procedure was applied. Randomly chosen 160 schools and 4383 pupils were inquired.

- ❖ Results: Interesting results concern the impact of parental education (separately: mother and father) and socio-economic status of parents (HISEI) on pupils school competence observed in three domains:
  1. reading knowledge and skill;
  2. mathematics;
  3. science knowledge and skills and competence in mathematics.Basic data for various European countries are published in Polish “Poziom nauczania w szkołach europejskich. Wyniki badania PISA 2003”, IFiS PAN, 2007 (vide especially Tables 11-13).

# **Social convictions and self-evaluation of education**

## **Satisfaction with the education system**

- ❖ Survey under auspices of *European Foundation on Improvement of Quality of Life*, realized in 2003 on nation-wide representative samples in 25 countries EU and 3 candidate-countries (Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey).
- ❖ One of the investigated issues was the level of general satisfaction with the functioning of the education system in the country (at country level). Applying the scale from 1 (very poor) to 10 (very good) the average assessment of educational system in 15 old EU member countries, was 6,2 while in Poland the estimate was 5,8. It is noteworthy to know, that the assessment made by various segments of the population was similar (i.e. in various group of respondents their opinions didn't reveal any significant differentiation). The only exception is the category of oldest respondents (65 and older), whose evaluation of the national education system is more positive. A similar pattern of assessment can be observed in other countries under study. This means that elderly people in general are inclined to rate highly the functioning of the educational system in their countries.

B. How people perceive and assess the education system

- ❖ **Data** from the other European Study (*European Social Survey* - 2004, IFiS PAN 2006) show, that in Poland the respondents with highest education (more than 18 years of schooling) are most skeptical about state of education in the country. Among them only 6,7% declare satisfaction, while this proportion for Poland as a whole amounts to 15,5%. It is interesting that the segment of respondents declaring satisfaction with state of education on the country level – computed for all European countries (25) – is very similar (as high as 14,5%).

## Satisfaction with own education

- ❖ In the European study on *Quality of life* (mentioned above) the respondents were asked to assess the level of satisfaction with their own education (using the scale from 1- very unsatisfied to 10- very satisfied). The average estimate for Poland had value 6,2 while the analogous index in the old UE countries was as high as 6,9. The residents in countryside and respondents from households living in the poor material conditions (25% lowest income per capita) less frequently and quite realistically declare their satisfaction with personal education (respectively: 5,9 and 5,6).

## **Learning activities in Polish population:**

basic data on participation – during last 12 months – in any courses, lectures, conferences due to acquiring more knowledge or upgrading professional skills.

In the study - *European Social Survey*- 2002 and 2004 the respondents were inquired - among others issues – for their participation - during last 12 months – in any courses, lectures, conferences due to gain more knowledge or upgrade their professional skill. Data from 2004 round of the survey show, that in Poland a little more than one fifth of respondents (22,4%) declared activity of that kind, while in the countries like Island, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, this proportion amounts respectively to: 51,9%; 47,8%; 47,7%; 45,8%.45,1%. It is worth to note, that in all countries – on average – 27,9% persons under study declared any learning activities. These simple data reveals the characteristic pattern of inter-country discrepancies and indicate how unevenly the lifelong learning is spread out through Europe.

In comparison to data received 2 year later, the inclination to learning activity in Poland tends to increase and became little more common (2002 – 18,9%).

Regarding the Polish case it is worth to stress, that participation in learning activities is strongly differentiated accordingly to level of formal education. For instance the people with basic education in 2002 declare none learning activity, but in 2004 it amounts to 2,6% while the respondents with tertiary education – in 2002 was active in 70%, and in 2004 - 80%. The data clearly show that the participation in learning activities strongly depends – as well - on the respondent's occupational position. Managers are 3 and half times more likely than workers to participate in learning activities (in 2004: respectively: 40, 4% vs. 14,0%). Two years earlier (in 2002) the spread between these two categories was bigger one: 47,0% vs.11,3%.

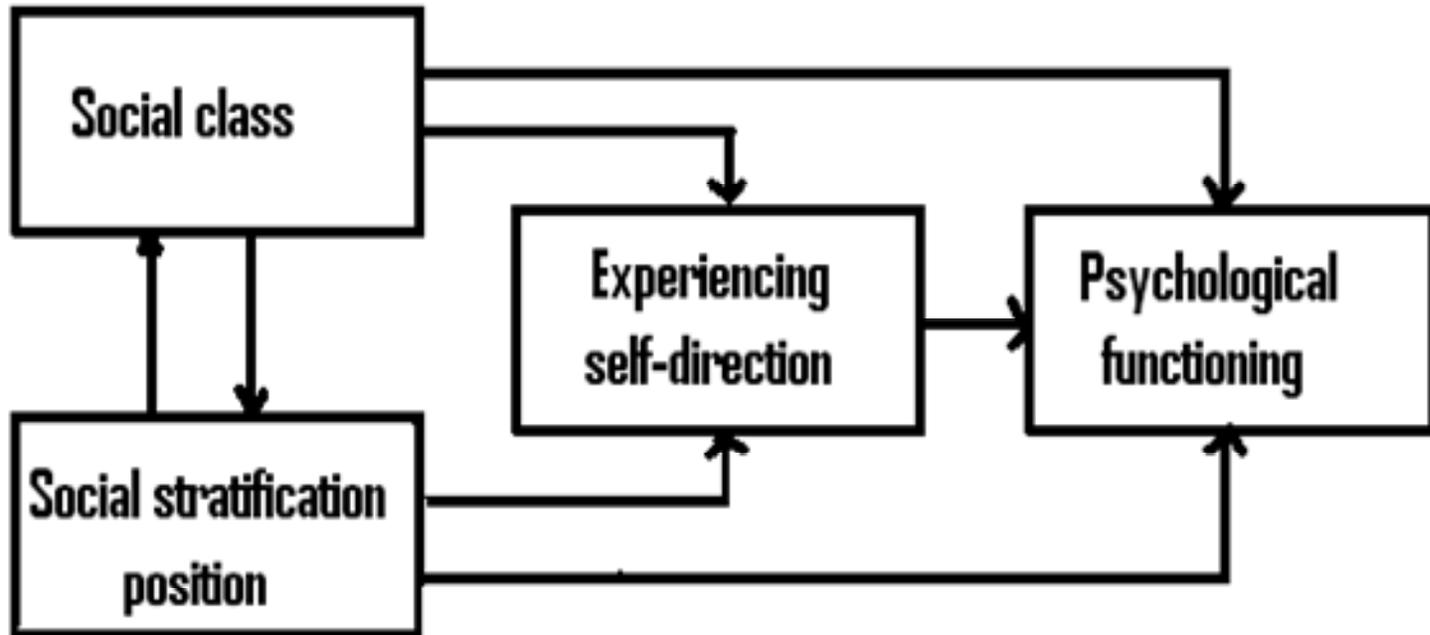
These simple statistic data seem to be instructive and useful when the project of future research will be prepared.

# **Work situation as a learning situation**

- ❖ Learning as the process based on the cognitive abilities and attitudes is stimulated and strengthened by experiences created in the context of working life. That's why the work activity is of special significance for individual's functioning in other spheres of life, not only as a working person.
- ❖ The content of work and way in which the job tasks are effectuated influence different forms of everyday learning of individual and impact his activity outside the work environment. This assumption on the role of working life as the learning situation is the key element of the theoretical reflection on the linkages between social class position and personality.

Work situation as a learning  
situation

## Basic model



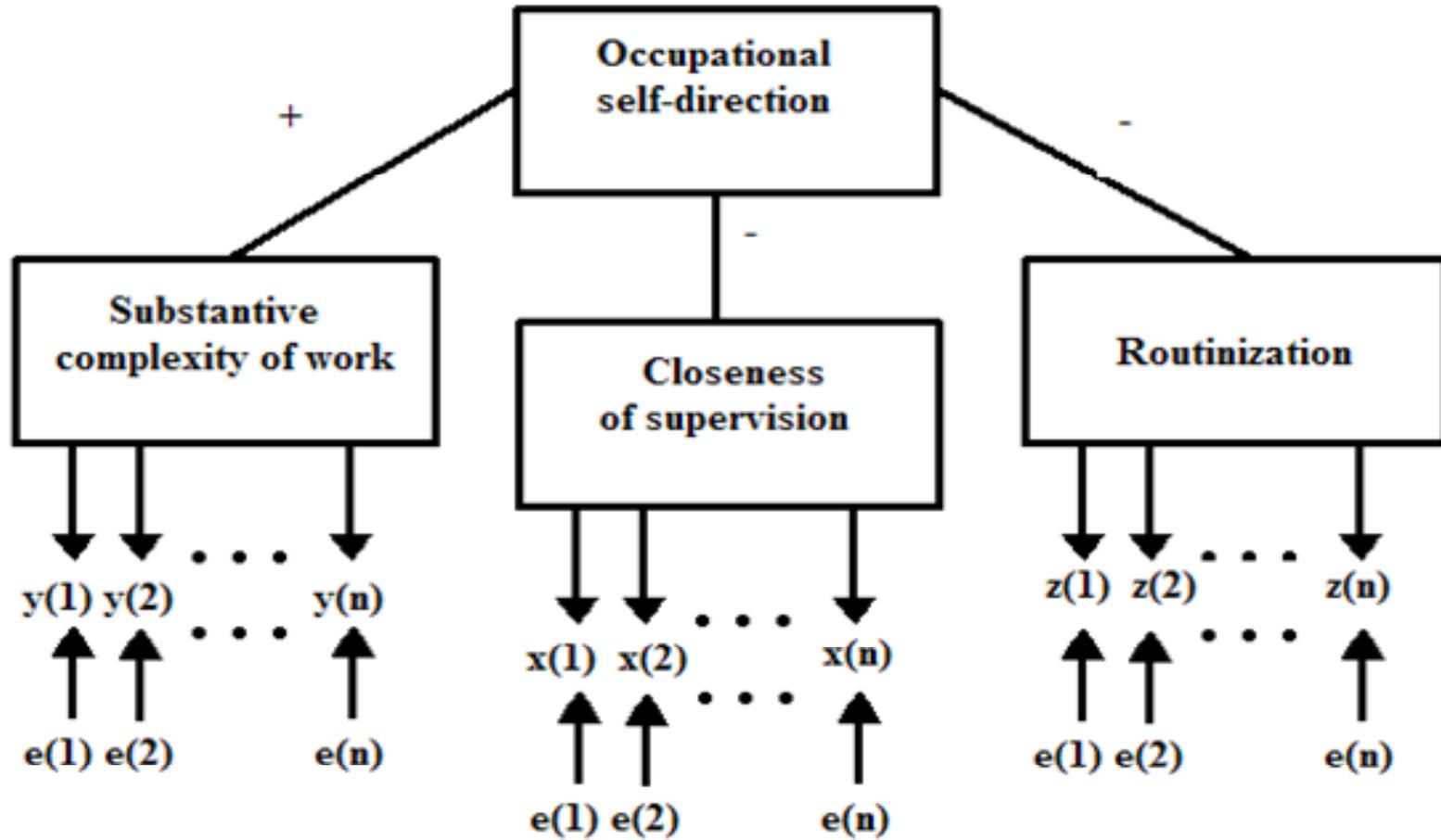
Work situation as a learning situation

- ❖ The research question about the nature of these relations has long tradition. It was formulated on the ground of American sociology in the half of XX centuries. The sociologists and socio-psychologists like Kornhouser, Centers, Adorno and theirs followers paid special attention to the role of every day experiences as the stimuli influencing the people's personality: theirs convictions and behavior.
- ❖ This approach has been developed through clarification the system of proper notions and theoretical constructs and elaborating the relevant procedure enable us to measure these notions and constructs (Kohn and his collaborators, 1983, 1990). One of the results of that conception was introducing into empirical research project the notion of occupational self-directedness and extending it on the other non-work activities.

- ❖ The main thesis formulated within his conception states that work situation defined in the terms of occupational of self-directedness regarded as a combination of overall complexity of task in job (according to schema: data- people- things), scope of autonomy at work and degree of routinization of task has essential impact on the peoples attitudes toward themselves, the orientation toward society and their intellectual activity. This hypothesis was very carefully verified in empirical researches conducted in various countries and in different cultural context (USA, Poland, Ukraine, Japan, China).

Work situation as a learning  
situation

# Experiencing self-direction



Work situation as a learning situation

❖ **Learning at work** as a precondition of the occupational self-directedness affect also the way of psychological functioning of the person: the feelings of well-being, attitudes toward self and society, and – what is most important from the point of view of lifelong learning – has significant impact on person's intellectual flexibility.

Work situation as a learning  
situation

## **Final suggestion**

- ❖ Regarding the special role of workplace as a learning environment, we should to consider a future project that investigates the circumstances responsible for social inequalities in access to knowledge and appropriation of new skills. With this connection a new important question arises: in contemporary society, to what extent does acquiring knowledge and skills throughout the life course reduce social inequalities or create new ones?

## Bibliography (selected)

### Books:

- M. L. Kohn. 1969. *Class and Conformity: A Study in Values* (2nd ed. 1977), University of Chicago Press..
- M. L. Kohn and C. Schooler. 1983. *Work and Personality: An Inquiry into the Impact of Social Stratification*. Norwood, New Jersey.
- M. L. Kohn and K. M. Slomczynski. 1990. *Social Structure and Self Direction: A Comparative Analysis of the United States and Poland* (Paperback eds. 1993, 2007), Basil Blackwell.
- M. L. Kohn. 2006. *Change and Stability: A Cross-National Analysis of Social Structure and Personality*, Paradigm Publisher, London.
- K. M. Słomczyński, K. Janicka, B. W. Mach and W. Zaborowski. 1999. *Mental Adjustment to the Post-Communist System in Poland*, Warszawa, Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN.
- K. Janicka. 1997. *Work Situation and Social Structure* (in Polish), Warszawa, Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN.