

Summary

This thesis addresses the issue of social classes in early childhood education. Its aim is to explore whether early childhood education teachers are aware of social class divisions and whether teachers' (un)awareness of class is reflected in their private pedagogical theories. The thesis consists of seven chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. In the introduction, I present the issue of social class and the social differences I have observed that are relevant to my topic. I also briefly present the individual chapters. The first two chapters are devoted to the issue of social classes. In the first chapter, I introduce Pierre Bourdieu's perspective on social classes, present his theory of socio-cultural reproduction, and discuss researches' critical reception of his theory. In the second chapter, I problematise the concept of social classes with reference to the Polish context. I also discuss Bourdieu's concept of class lifestyles, class educational styles, and the perception of social classes, especially the lower class, by those in privileged social positions. The third chapter focuses on educational inequalities. I problematise the issue of equality, discuss the Polish educational system and the selection mechanisms characteristic of different stages of education, and then move on to discuss the possibility of students' social mobility within the school system. I divide the narratives on students' social mobility into two groups: the first one is rather deterministic, blocking change, or possibly forcing the renunciation of one's class identity; the second one gives pupils more chance and hope for change. I see the change in lucky cases, emotional capital, students' resilience and their resistance. The fourth chapter is devoted to the methodological assumptions I adopted. I present the conceptual framework of my research, which I locate in the critical paradigm and place in a qualitative orientation. As the research strategy, I have chosen grounded theory and bricolage of interpretative approaches. A narrative interview and a non-standardised, semi-structured interview were the data collection methods. Fourteen early childhood education teachers, working in settings attended by students with diverse social backgrounds, participated in the research. Chapters five and six are analytical chapters. Chapter five deals with the teachers' awareness of class divisions, which I analyse drawing on their explicit and non-explicit statements. Based on the data collected, I distinguished four groups of teachers' class (un)awareness: a group of teachers who valorise social differentiation, those who observe social differentiation, those who do not perceive social differentiation, and a group of teachers 344 who have no class awareness. In Chapter six,

within the identified groups of teachers' (un)awareness of class divisions, I analyse the teachers' pedagogical reflection, looking particularly for themes related to class divisions and social inequalities. Based on their reflections, including their approaches to tackling inequalities, I have identified two types of private pedagogical theories, which I discuss in Chapter seven. The private pedagogical theories I have distinguished have an emancipatory potential and an adaptive character. In addition, I have distinguished subtypes of these theories. Theories with emancipatory potential are divided into reflection-oriented and action-oriented theories. Out of 14 research participants, I classified only two teachers' reflections as this type of pedagogical theory. The remaining narratives are adaptive, and among them, I distinguished six subtypes of these theories: of the colonizing helplessness character; soaking into the structure of the institution; escaping the system; making educational change without social change; being in the service of the neoliberal narrative, and upholding the social order. Teachers' adoption of the aforementioned adaptive theories leaves lower-class students with little or no opportunity to change their educational and social trajectory. Based on the literature and my own experience, I have also distinguished the third type of private pedagogical theories – oriented toward changing the student's situation. In the concluding part, I present a summary of the results obtained, and formulate conclusions and recommendations whose introduction into teacher training programmes could give hope for a change of the situation of students with a low class of origin