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Neoliberalism's Paradoxical Effect and European Doctoral Education Reforms in Post-socialist Europe

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Abstract

Building on examples from post-socialist Central Europe, this article addresses changes in European higher education policy and examines the 'paradoxical effect' (Foucault 2008) of neoliberal educational reforms on the doctoral level. We consider how economically driven policies oriented at building Europe's knowledge economy and market effectiveness, created possibilities for subjectification related to the extension of individual freedom – an aspect of neoliberalism that Foucault juxtaposed to other forms of governmentality. Drawing on our positioning as doctoral supervisors in the Polish and Czech academia during the period of intensive institutional restructuring, we illustrate how European higher education reforms opened the doors of doctoral education to practitioners-doctoral researchers who found themselves in the unique position to critically illuminate covert socio-economic and political mechanisms of their practice. We consider the potential of critical doctoral pedagogy methodologically informed by Foucault's concept of practical critique (1984), to create the conditions of possibility for the construction of subjectivity and emergence of new knowledges at the intersection of practical, academic and personal life trajectories under the conditions of neoliberal domination.



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Introduction

Doctoral programs in the field of Educational Studies in Poland and the Czech Republic have undergone deep structural changes since the beginning of the post-socialist socio-political and economic transformation after 1989 (Connelly, 2000; Dobbins & Knill, 2009; Dobbins & Kwiek, 2017; Kascak, 2017; Dopita, 2013). In the early 1990s, one saw a rather eclectic approach to higher education in the state and public university sector and the concurrent emergence of private educational institutions. These developments were very diverse across the countries of the region (Dobbins & Knill, 2009; Dobbins & Kwiek, 2017). However, the 1999 Bologna process initiated a period when the transformations in different EU-member states proceeded in a more coordinated manner, subject as they were to EU-wide educational policies.

The most significant changes launched by Bologna concerned the synchronization and massification of higher education systems in the European Union (Štech, 2011; Altbach, Becker, & Moretti, 2012). In post-socialist Europe, these changes were more intense than in the older EU member states (Pabian, Šima, & Kynčilová, 2011; Dobbins & Kwiek, 2017; Kascak, 2017). Poland and the Czech Republic signed the Bologna Declaration in 1999 and both countries experienced the doubling of the number of university students in the decade between 1995 and 2005. In Poland there were 794,000 university students in 1995 (MEN, 1996) and 1,954,000 in 2005 (GUS, 2010). In the Czech Republic there were 148,000 students in 1995 (ČSÚ, 2010a) and 297,000 in 2005 (ČSÚ, 2010b; ČSÚ, 2010c). The number of doctoral students rose even more sharply during this period – their numbers tripled from 10,500 in 1995 to 32,700 in 2005 in Poland and from 8,300 to 22,300 in the Czech Republic.

In this text, we reflect on the effects of these changes in higher education in Poland and the Czech Republic, focusing specifically on doctoral programs in the field of Educational Studies. We first introduce our conceptual framing, which situates the changes in doctoral education in the context of the expansion of neoliberal policy into the educational field. Through the framework of neoliberal governmentality (Foucault, 2008; Peters, 2007), we then consider the critical potential of these reforms, drawing on empirical examples from our recent doctoral supervisory practice. We are interested in certain unintended consequences, which we refer to, after Foucault, as the ‘paradoxical effect’ of neo-liberal governmentality. Manifestly aimed at supporting the development of Europe’s knowledge economy (OECD, 2013; Chou & Gornitzka, 2014) through the training of greater number of ‘knowledge workers’ (Lee & Boud, 2009), the reforms opened the doors of doctoral education to many non-traditional students whose primary motivation to study was related to their non-academic professional paths. The presence of these practitioner-researchers in doctoral studies, we argue, has had an important impact for academic institutions, individual students and the larger social context. Many universities were forced to shift their focus from the work in ‘closed laboratories’ to the space of public concern and many students – practitioners-researchers – developed critical subjectivities that informed their professional practice embedded in non-academic contexts.

In this paper we consider these changes in higher education in the broader circumstances of the expansion of neoliberalism into the educational field, which has introduced market-oriented modes of regulation and organization of educational policy and practice. One of the major features of neoliberalism has been the transfer of power away from democratically elected governments obliged to provide public services, towards private capital motivated primarily by further accumulation of capital (Richards 2013). As a result, instead of building conditions ensuring full employment and an inclusive social welfare system, governments shifted their focus toward

enhancing economic efficiency and international competitiveness, promoting such values as the individual, freedom of choice, *laissez faire*, and minimal government (Larner, 2000). Critical scholarship describes the negative effects of these neoliberal reforms for the educational sector, where they introduced processes of privatization (Lipman, 2011), market competition (Hill & Kumar, 2009; Pring, 1987), vocationalisation (Giroux, 2001; Kavka, 2017), massification (Altbach, Becker, & Moretti 2012), standardisation (Kempf, 2016), commercialization (Bok, 2003; Kleinman, Feinstein, & Downey, 2013), commodification (Miller, 2010), corporatisation (Kivisto, 2016; Broucker, De Wit, & Verhoeven 2017), managerialisation (Beckmann, Cooper, & Hill, 2009; Deem, Hillyard, & Reed, 2010; Štech, 2011), and centralization and control (Torrance, 1997). The majority of this existing research on neoliberalism and education focuses on policy analysis and the critique of neoliberal ideology (Apple, 2006a, 2006b; Hill & Kumar, 2009; Giroux, 2014). While we agree with the criticisms of the negative effects of neoliberal policies, we refer to governmentality as an alternative framework through which neoliberalism in education can be analysed and understood (Larner, 2000, Mitchell, 2006).

Drawing on Michel Foucault's analysis of American neoliberal governmentality and his description of the 'application of the economic grid' (Foucault, 2008, p. 240) to penal policy, we are interested in understanding how neoliberal subjectivity is produced as *homo oeconomicus*, who is no longer 'a partner of exchange' as in classical liberal theory, but 'an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself.' (Foucault, 2008, p. 226) Foucault approaches neoliberalism as 'an art of government,' which is neither ideology nor philosophy, but rather a 'set of doctrines concerned with a practice centred first and foremost on the exercise of political sovereignty' (Dean, 2018, p. 43), whereby the fundamental stress is put on the production of 'governable' subjectivity (Mirowski, 2013; Dardot & Laval, 2013). Focusing on the introduction of the new neoliberal policy in the American penal system in the 1970s, Foucault argues that neoliberalism approached crime as an economically based calculation of the risk of penalty (Foucault, 2008). This economically oriented neoliberal approach, in effect, adopted the point of view of the person committing the crime, instead of relying on psychopathology or criminal anthropology to determine the subjectivity of the offender. Foucault argues that the 'paradoxical effect' (Foucault, 2008, p. 249) of the new neoliberal penal policy introduced in the United States in the 19th century was that it opened the possibility of subjectification of the offender based on external ('environmental,' Foucault, 2008, p. 259) forms of subjugation rather than internal ones, which were dominant under disciplinary or biopolitical forms of governmentality. Foucault considered this 'paradoxical effect' to represent a significant extension of individual freedom. However, it would be mistaken to think of Foucault's approach as a fully appreciative account of neoliberal practices of subjectification or of neoliberal subjectivity. Such reading of Foucault, common among the proponents of the so-called 'seduction thesis,' over-interprets Foucault's discernment of the liberatory potential of neoliberal governmentality as straightforwardly positive and appreciative (Lagasnerie, 2012; Zamora, 2014). Such interpretation ignores Foucault's insistence on the neoliberal subjectification as embedded in continued subjugation (Dean, 2018).

In this article, we use the framework of governmentality to consider the 'paradoxical effect' – the unintended consequences of neoliberal reforms in doctoral training in Central Europe and their critical pedagogical potential. The neoliberal extension of freedom in education, based as it was on adopting the point of view of the person participating in education, was based on the calculation that the *homo oeconomicus* will choose the most effective solutions from the perspective of the market and knowledge economy (Gupta, 2019). However, this 'extension of freedom,' we argue, enabled through the pedagogical approach based on practical critique,

paradoxically produced critical subjectivities capable of discerning the neoliberal entanglement of practitioner-researchers' professional practice and their own role in the implementation of neoliberal policy. We will attempt here to illustrate this pedagogical process of subjectification within subjugation and the attempts to challenge it within the possibilities opened by neoliberal governmentality.

Changing Policy Context of Doctoral Training in Post-socialist Central Europe

Doctoral training in Poland and the Czech Republic has been changed by larger global trends whereby 'the doctorate has moved from a small, elite endeavour, designed primarily to replenish an academic-disciplinary workforce, to a strong and growing international enterprise and market' (Danby & Lee 2012, p. 3). Danby and Lee observe that in many developed countries, the number of doctoral students doubled within approximately a decade at the beginning of the 21st century. They point out that this growth is 'due to the doctorate's strong connection to policy rationalities associated with a globalised "knowledge economy," whereby doctoral education is understood as producing knowledge workers to replenish national and regional innovation systems and develop human capital in knowledge industries' (Danby & Lee, 2012; Callejo Pérez, Fain, Slater et al., 2011). Similarly, Louw and Muller (2014, p. 2) point to the following three motivations for the massive increase in doctorates: 'Sustaining the supply chain of researchers; preparation for employment of graduates; and internationalization, including, to a large degree, global competition for doctoral students.'

The increase in the number of doctoral candidates in the global knowledge economy is facilitated by specific policies on the state level, which, however, reflect the different political agendas and academic traditions of individual countries. While in the Salzburg II Recommendations, the diversity of doctoral programs in Europe is explicitly recognized as a strength (European University Association, 2010), this diversity often collides with EU's harmonization efforts. Poland and the Czech Republic, for example, never adopted the system of professional doctorates, which emerged in Western Europe in response to the logic and demand of EU's knowledge economy (Czerepaniak-Walczak & Wątróbski 2017). At the same time, however, these countries adopted policies and regulations which follow EU's logic of knowledge economy and which opened up doctoral training to non-traditional candidates, many of whom entered the universities as experienced professionals.

The Polish government laws – the Academic Degrees Act (2003) and the Higher Education Act (2005) – redefined doctoral training and provided clear and less rigorous rules for accrediting individual academic institutions with the rights to establish and/or continue doctoral studies. This allowed public and non-public universities to establish doctoral programs of study. This legal process was also accompanied by new funding regulations, which allocated funds for doctoral training to the accredited institutions on per-student basis, making it possible also for non-public universities to get access to public funds. In addition, the law followed Bologna recommendations and allowed students to enter doctoral studies in disciplines other than those in which they held their previous MA degrees. The new policy thus provided direct incentive for Polish institutions of higher learning to grow the number of their doctoral students to unprecedented levels, joining the global shift toward mass doctoral training. The number of doctoral students in Poland grew from 10,482 in 1995 (GUS 2013) to 32,725 in 2005 (GUS 2017) and 43,177 in 2015 (GUS 2017). This growth becomes even more significant when we consider the concurrent decrease in numbers

of first and second level students in Poland from 1,954,000 in 2005 (GUS 2010) to 1,405,000 in 2015 (GUS 2017).

The Czech Republic approved the new Higher Education Act in 1998 (ČR 1998) and Bologna recommendations were first applied in 2004, leading to a rapid increase in the number of students in tertiary education. In 1995, there were 8,259 students enrolled in doctoral studies at Czech universities (Prudký, Pabian, & Šima 2010, 37). By 2005, the number had almost tripled to 22,310. Since then, the growth has stabilized, with the Czech Statistical Office stating the number of doctoral students at 23,869 in 2015 (ČSÚ, 2017). Similarly, the statistics show a tripling in the number of students graduating with a doctoral degree (from 0.467 in 2001 to 1.181 in 2017 – per thousand in a population aged 25-34). (EU, 2019)

This increase in the number of doctoral students created new constellations and pressures in academic departments, leading some of them to redesign their doctoral programs to respond to the new type of students and their numbers (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 2013). In the following section we outline the larger international trend in the changing profile of doctoral students.

Changing Profiles of Doctoral Students

While in the Czech and Polish context, we observe the massification of doctoral education only after the end of state-socialism, in the Western world, academic doctoral programs have been opening up to the broader public for much longer (Gardner, 2009; Offerman, 2011; Graham & Massyn, 2019). In the process, the traditional model of the doctoral student – relatively young (under thirty), single, white, male, entering a fully-funded on-campus doctoral program immediately after graduation – has become less dominant. For example, in the context of the US academia, Gardner (2009) shows how the tremendous growth in the number of institutions offering doctoral degrees brought about a radical shift towards ‘non-traditional’ doctoral candidate models. In the 2003/2004 academic year, only 50.3% of the total US doctoral enrolment were full-time students, while in the field of Educational Studies this percentage was only 24.1% (Gardner, 2009, p. 35). Similarly, the representation of female students in doctoral studies grew from 22% in 1975 to 43% in 2000, and the median age grew from 31.7 in 1975 to 33.7 in 2000 (Gardner, 2009, p. 32). According to Graham and Massyn (2019, p. 192), ‘non-traditional students might be one or more of the following descriptors: older, part-time, married, female, fully employed, self-financed, and off-campus. Students from other cultures, countries, races and social classes may also be deemed non-traditional.’

In Europe, these trends have become a part of a broader process of implementation of the Bologna Declaration and the Salzburg Recommendations, which defined common principles for doctoral studies. According to Sursock and Smidt (2010, p. 44), there has been ‘significant progress with the implementation of the three-cycle degree structure. Reforms at doctoral level have been taken up, developed and promoted particularly actively by the sector itself.’ In 2015, the percentage of female doctoral students in the Czech Republic was 44% (ČSÚ, 2017), in Poland 55% (GUS, 2016). The proportion of doctoral students enrolled in part-time doctoral studies in the Czech Republic in 2005 was 55% (12,281) compared to 45% of full-time students, in 2010 it was 52% (13,404) part-time students compared to 48% of full-time students, and in 2015 it was 47% (11,153) part-time students compared to 53% of full-time students (ČSÚ, 2017).

In Poland, the number of part-time students grew from 3,703 in 1995 to 10,426 in 2010 (37% of overall number of doctoral students; GUS, 2016). While the statistics for 2015 show that the number decreased to 6,076 (18% of overall number of doctoral students; GUS, 2016), it must

be said that this does not necessarily reflect the real-life status of students, but may be a result of a certain manipulation in academic practices tied to the allocation of public funding. Since there were considerably more funds allocated to individual universities per full-time student compared to part-time student, universities frequently enrolled students who in reality studied only part-time alongside their daily jobs in full-time status. It is reasonable to assume that the actual situation in Poland will reflect that of Europe as a whole for which Sursock and Smidt (2010) estimate that around 50% of doctoral graduates are employed outside academia in both public and private sectors. The authors are also estimating that this trend toward non-academic employment of doctoral degree students will continue, supported by the development of new forms of doctorates, including professional and industrial doctorates (Sursock & Smidt, 2010, p. 44).

Contemporary doctoral students often enter doctoral studies after a significant period of break since their last degree, study part-time in addition to holding full-time jobs, live off-campus and struggle with the demands of ‘grown-up’ life. Moreover, their doctoral study motivations are not necessarily driven by the vision of a future academic career but by a complex set of reasons usually tied to externally required and/or internally felt need of professional development. Their presence in doctoral programs influences the dynamics of pedagogy in doctoral education (Danby & Lee, 2012) requiring different approaches to teaching and mentoring. In the following section, we will reflect on a pedagogical approach which we developed in our doctoral supervision practice that took place under the conditions of neoliberal educational transformation in Central Europe. We will draw on two concrete examples from our doctoral supervising practice, to illuminate the emancipatory potential of the pedagogical process inspired by practical critique in the circumstances of neoliberal governmentality and conditions of domination.

Neoliberalism and Pedagogy of Practical Critique

Our experience in doctoral supervision was situated in the post-Bologna conditions of expanded opportunities for doctoral study for non-traditional candidates (2013-2019). At the time, the three of us were located at Polish and Czech academic institutions (Cervinkova and Rasinski worked at the University of Lower Silesia, a non-public university in Poland where they were joined by Dopita as external supervisor from Palacky University in Olomouc, a state university in the Czech Republic) and we were deeply involved in the development of taught doctoral degree programs in Educational Studies open to practitioner-researchers in our universities. These initial programs were taught in the national languages (Polish and Czech), but eventually, encouraged by funding opportunities, we jointly developed a number of multi-lingual collaborative initiatives for international cooperation in doctoral education. The initial impetus was provided by the European Doctorate in Teacher Education – EDiTE (Horizon 2020 MSC ITN; <http://www.edite.eu>), a project which was specifically designed to establish a European doctoral training scheme geared toward practitioner-researchers in teacher education (Červinková, Schratz, Halász, Pol, & Tinoca, 2019). Cervinkova and Rasinski represented one of the five partner institutions in the project (University of Lower Silesia, Poland) and were in charge of developing an English-language taught curriculum in Educational Studies at their home institution. Once established, this English-language curriculum opened the possibility for Polish and non-Polish speakers to enter the doctoral program in Poland beyond the EDiTE project scheme. Because of overlapping interests and language competencies, Dopita, Cervinkova and Rasinski also developed a Czech-language doctoral school in Educational Studies in Poland, which attracted non-traditional students from the Czech Republic to tertiary education.

The students enrolled in these Polish, English and Czech-language doctoral programs in Educational Studies were overwhelmingly mature working professionals who could be described as non-traditional students (about 80% in the 2013-2019 period). As is common in the tradition of practitioner research, these professionals normally chose dissertation topics related to their everyday work. Practitioner research holds an important promise of bridging of the gap between theory and practice (Pilkington, 2009; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), a potential we wanted to explore in our doctoral supervision. The most significant challenge we faced was the tendency of our doctoral researchers to claim authority of knowledge based on their everyday work experience. The pedagogical journey of nurturing the researchers' critical subjectification and supporting their move toward critical inquiry into the conditions of their own practice became our central methodological preoccupation, in which we were inspired by Michel Foucault's concept of practical critique.

It was common that at the start, our doctoral researchers were quite convinced that they knew the answers to the questions of practice that laid at the basis of their inquiry, drawing on their confidence of practitioner's authority and treating their doctoral studies as a path to legitimation. So, for example, a Czech student who worked as a teacher at a correctional facility for adolescents wanted to write a critical account of the process of deinstitutionalization based on interviews with top administrators of the correctional facilities that were subject to closure under the ongoing Czech deinstitutionalization policy. Another Czech doctoral student who worked as a guard in prison wanted to write about the world of prisoners based on information collected among other prison guards. Or a Polish teacher wanted to write about teachers' difficult careers, because she 'loved teachers' and she wanted people who criticized teachers to realize 'how difficult their lives were.'

On the one hand, these practitioners as doctoral researchers had some important opportunities at the starting point. First of all, because of their professional positioning, they had immediate access to empirical research data. They had the chance to grasp issues from the depth of the insider's perspective and their research could also help them engage in transformative practice. On the other hand, the attaining of a critical research perspective was understandably quite challenging for these practitioner-researchers. Pat Drake and Linda Heath point to these complexities in practitioner doctoral training:

Researching in one's own workplace does bring special considerations which must be balanced against traditional doctoral research training ... The compromises necessarily inherent in practitioner research must be argued for, and doing so makes it a complex and demanding endeavour. The risks are high, for not engaging with this argument may render the doctoral research trivial or mundane. It is a very great challenge to do such research well, but when it is done well it has a transformative effect on both the practitioner researcher and their approach to their work. (Drake & Heath, 2011, p. 2-3)

Drake and Heath also argue against a bi-polar view of traditional/professional doctoral research, proposing instead a triadic positioning of doctoral-practitioner researchers whose research and its contribution to new knowledge grows out of the interlocking of the domains of professional practice, higher education practice and individual reflexive project:

Doctoral researchers necessarily create new knowledge. Our central proposal is that, for the insider, the newness of this knowledge comes not from a single research

domain but from combining understandings from professional practice, higher education practice and the researcher's individual reflexive project. This confluence is unique for each researcher, and so new knowledge is generated in the relations between these three domains. For this to happen, the practitioner researcher maintains a fluid and flexible stance with respect to each domain, behaving sometimes as a professional, sometimes as a researcher and at all times as an author who is making meaning out of the interactions and presenting them to an external audience. This can result in nearly impossible tensions, for example, relationships with colleagues may impose ethical constraints on how to analyse research data gathered from the workplace. We argue that viewing practitioner research in this way generates new methodologies for insider researchers. (Drake & Heath, 2011, p. 2)

Conscious of this triadic positioning of our practitioner-researchers and concerned with the larger socio-political effects of neoliberal governmentality in post-socialist Europe that impacted their world of practice, we came to intentionally structure our pedagogies to support the process of critical subjectification building on Foucault's concept of practical critique.

Foucault introduces the concept in his reflection on Enlightenment and modernity. He proposes to understand modernity as an *ethos*, an attitude towards the present, which could be defined as 'a permanent critique of our historical era' (Foucault, 1984, p. 42). 'A practical critique' involves 'analyzing and reflecting upon limits' (1984, p. 45), a 'historico-practical test of the limits we may go beyond' (1984, p. 47). Foucault transforms the Kantian negative task of critique (establishing the limits of reason) into the positive task of transgressing limitations through inquiring 'in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints' (Foucault, 1984, p. 45). In this way, the Kantian negative prohibition from crossing the boundaries of reason mutates into a positive reflection on 'a possible transgression' beyond what seemed necessary and inevitable. Foucault's practical critique gives up Kant's transcendentalism and universalism, but at the same time it opens up a certain space of freedom. As there is no escaping historicity, all critique, according to Foucault, is by necessity limited and largely contingent; it simply cannot be universal. This, however, fosters a realization that the constraints imposed on us, the situations in which we find ourselves, are, likewise, contingent rather than ultimate or universal. As a result, we are able to understand that thinking differently is possible, that by performing certain work on ourselves we are capable of achieving a degree of freedom. As such, Foucault's practical critique is an experimental attitude vis-à-vis one's limitations since understanding one's own situatedness in itself generates a possibility of freedom, a concrete freedom in which we 'grasp the points where change is possible and desirable' (Foucault, 1984, p. 46). A practical critique is, thus, focused on 'the self': it is a self-reflexive 'technology of the self' (Foucault, 1988) and presupposes a potential of individual self-creation vis-à-vis any power regime:

Critique doesn't have to be the premise of a deduction which concludes: this then is what needs to be done. It should be an instrument for those who fight, those who resist and refuse what is. Its use should be in processes of conflict and confrontation, essays in refusal. It doesn't have to lay down the law for the law. It isn't a stage of programming. It is a challenge directed to what is. (Foucault, 1991, p. 84)

Practical critique can be thus understood as an alternative to the predominant model of critique offered by critical theory, which in many ways preserves universalism and transcendentalism of the Kantian project (Biesta, 2012). Contemporary criticisms of critical theory (Walzer, 1998; Mouffe, 2000; Rasiński, 2012; Tully, 2008), especially in Habermas' variation, which focus on its normative, foundationalist, idealistic, and elitist dimensions, put stress on its inability to explain recent transformations in democratic societies. Focusing on the universal and rational dimensions of democratic politics, which are expressed in the concept of 'discourse ethics' (Habermas 1995), critical theory does not challenge neoliberal governmentality. It is unable to grasp and describe contemporary crisis of democracy manifested in people's lack of participation, aversion to democratic institutions and distrust towards politics and political representation, characteristic of populist and anti-elitist trends in our societies. Foucault's practical critique assumes the historicity and contingency of resistance against domination and domination itself. It emphasizes local and individual aspects of critique, putting stress on individual self-creation and subjectification. It presents an alternative view of democracy which includes the agonistic and irrational elements of democratic politics, making the critique of neoliberal governmentality possible.

In our pedagogies, we intentionally worked with Foucault's concept of practical critique in both content and method of our doctoral supervision. Through critical readings and discussions, we strived to support our students in discerning the political entanglement of the institutions in which they worked and carried out their research, and the policies that regulated the organizations' functioning. We also insisted on the imperative of gaining a critical understanding of the larger historical and political processes underlying the contemporary conditions in which their research and practice were situated. In this respect, the socio-economic and political aspects of post-socialist transformation were of primary importance, illuminating the historical appearance of neoliberal governmentality in the spaces previously occupied by state socialism. To elucidate this process of critical subjectification, we will, with their permission, draw on two examples of our former doctoral students – dr. Monika Rusnak and dr. Wieslaw Antosz. We chose these two researchers as illustrative cases of how non-traditional doctoral students as researcher-practitioners can successfully navigate the complex methodological, theoretical and empirical contexts in critically researching the world of their own professional practice. Both Monika and Wieslaw have been practitioners with many years of experience and their motivation for seeking doctoral degree was a desire to answer specific questions related to their practice. These questions were central to our supervisory relationship. In our pedagogy we focused on helping the researchers to expand the theoretical and conceptual scope of their projects toward understanding the historical and political contingency of their problem of practice and their own professional and personal positioning. In line with the idea of practical critique, we encouraged intellectual reflection on the researchers' own situatedness as a technology of the self and thus possibility of freedom.

Distrust as a Democratic Possibility

Monika Rusnak came to doctoral studies as an elementary school teacher with seventeen years of professional experience. From the start, she was interested in pursuing research on the relations between parents and teachers, and she held strong opinions about parents' negative role in the parent-teacher relationship. She argued that parents were increasingly demanding toward schools, while at the same time they were not willing to participate in school life and she saw this as a factor that contributed to teacher burnout, a condition that she confessed she was experiencing herself. She said from the start that her motivation to conduct doctoral research was to write about

demanding and unparticipating parents and she wanted to improve parent-teacher relations through a project grounded in participatory action research methodologies.

Monika was a member of a larger cohort of participants in the English language EDiTE project (2015-2019), all of whom were working professionals who were entering doctoral studies after years of working outside of the academia. Together, we engaged in shared readings and discussions of their research in the framework of an intensive ongoing doctoral seminar, intentionally designed as a process of critical subjectification. Toward the end of the first semester, Monika who was a fourth-grade headteacher at the time, launched a pilot action research project in her own class. She organized meetings with parents with the goal of identifying common issues of concern that parents and teachers would tackle in the course of the first action research cycle aimed at improving parent-teacher relations. The first steps that she made, however, left Monika frustrated. Parents did not want to share their views in public meetings with other parents, exhibiting distrust toward each other and the school, which left Monika feeling that her project, whose goal was to establish democratic teacher-parent cooperation through collective action, was a failure. This initial disappointment coincided with challenges related to her son's enrolment in the same school where she worked - she found herself in the complex position as a teacher, a parent and a researcher.

In the course of our seminar and individual supervisory meetings, we worked on disentangling Monika's intellectual impasse. In Monika's reflections, *distrust* kept emerging as a dominant obstacle to democratic teacher-parent collaboration and parents' participation in the school community. However, through historical analysis and philosophical conceptualization in the course of our seminar and her independent research, she eventually approached parents' distrust not primarily as a negative attitude but as an important expression of their civic agency and an element of democratic control and participation in the context of neoliberal reforms. In her final dissertation, she built on agonistic concepts of democracy, which stress that the vitality of democracy rests not exclusively on institutionalized forms of political participation but also on practices of counter-democracy (Mouffe, 2000; Rosanvallon, 2008; Rasiński, 2010) through which citizens dissent, protest, and exert pressures from below and from without the official political system. She ethnographically described how parents' distrust challenged neoliberal mechanisms of educational authority and control, which included ICT technologies of communication that disadvantaged parents with limited access and acted as a barrier to authentic parent-teacher interaction; she also showed how parents' mutual distrust toward each other was underpinned by growing social inequalities among families under the neoliberal political and economic conditions in post-socialist Poland. The way in which theory, practice and personal reflection came together in the pedagogical process of practical critique was empowering in opening up a space of freedom for both Monika as the teacher-researcher-parent and other parents who participated in her project. This is how Monika describes her triadic positioning in the research process and its transformative capacity:

My research grows out of a personal experience of a teacher who, as many others in the school, struggled daily with various challenges 'brought to the fore by parents' and the voiceless parent who was pushed to the margins by educators. Such experience, combined with the research knowledge offered within the [doctoral] program, provided me with the insight into the nature of the teaching profession and the concept of parent-teacher collaboration. Wearing the hats of a researcher, a parent and a teacher was a life-changing experience. ... The great discrepancy

between my professional understanding of education at the onset of my Ph.D. studies and the current perspective was possible due to the three years of involvement in [the doctoral program]. ... My teacher research enabled me to center the parental perspective to recognize how educational policies and school practices impede the building of trusting relations. It inspired my transformative experience which positively affected and changed my teaching practice. Therefore, change becomes another dimension of this dissertation. (Rusnak, 2019)

Disability and Discursive Subjectivity

Wiesław Antosz was a member of the Polish-language doctoral cohort that Rasinski and Cervinkova supervised between 2013-2019. The main motivation for Wiesław to enroll in doctoral studies grew out of a persistent problem of practice that haunted him throughout most of his career as a professional who worked as the founding director of daytime public workshops for adults with intellectual disabilities. At the start of his doctoral studies (2013), Wiesław was twenty years into his job and he felt he had failed in his objective to support the self-determination of people with whom he had worked. In our supervision, we encouraged Wiesław to tackle what seemed like an impossible problem of practice through research into the historical and political conditions in which social care and his institution of daytime public workshops for intellectually disabled adults were situated. In the critical research process, Wiesław came to recognize that what he perceived as his personal failure was embedded in the systemic conditions of neoliberalism implemented through state social aid policies in the post-socialist era. In his final doctoral dissertation, Wiesław built on Michel Foucault's reflection on power and subjectivity and Ernesto Laclau's and Chantal Mouffe's (2014) theory of discourse to illuminate how the mechanisms of neoliberal governmentality operated in his workplace and on the level of his professional practice. This allowed him to understand and speak about how his own work as a therapist had been used as a tool of neoliberal policy to extend and support the idea of restoring people with disabilities to society in the name of utilitarian exploitation and control of labor force.

The intellectual reflection inspired Wiesław to transform the approach to his own practice. He embedded his questions concerning the subjectivity of people with intellectual disabilities in a Foucauldian archeology and genealogy of the politics on social care in Poland after 1989. His historical analysis of the political and social transformation after the collapse of state socialism pointed to the strong neoliberal agenda in the national policies concerning people with disabilities. He came to understand his own professional positioning as a therapist in a state-supported institution through the framework of discursive identity construction, realizing the limitations imposed by specific state policies. This led him to the redefinition of his practice as well as the redefinition of the conditions for subjectivity of people with disabilities with whom he worked. Referring to the concepts of 'technologies of the self,' 'care of the self,' and 'pluralistic rationalities,' he introduced philosophical language into the activities of his institution, establishing original therapeutic projects focused on supporting self-reliance and responsibility of people with intellectual disabilities. It should be acknowledged that the projects introduced by Wiesław Antosz in the scope of his dissertation and afterwards, had practical effects that gained wide public recognition. Below is a citation from his published dissertation:

In my research into the conditions of appearance of discourse on disability in Poland I rely on Foucault's methodology. I use the archaeological method to analyse the period of systemic transformation in Poland post-1989 when liberal (neoliberal) capitalism was introduced and with it a new understanding of the role

of the state and its institutions. This new logic formed the context for the emergence of concepts of rehabilitation of people with disabilities that informed legal and institutional solutions developed during this time, including the establishment of protected workshops such as the one that I have directed in the city of Gorzow since 2000. Drawing on Foucault's analysis of moral actions based on the concept of care of the self, I argue that subjectivity of people with intellectual disability may be understood differently in the perspective of existing practices of their lives.... The analysis of practices in the protected workshops reveals the decisive systemic influence of post-1989 neoliberal governmentality on how the workshops as institutions of rehabilitation of people with intellectual disabilities function, excluding from the start the possibility of their self-determination. (Antosz, 2018, pp. 10-11)

Conclusion

In this article, we considered some of the latent effects of the European higher educational policy which opened doctoral programs to massification. The increase in the number of doctoral students who participated in academic training parallel to their professional involvement outside of universities has likely supported the official goal of neoliberal educational policy of increasing the pool of knowledge workers and Europe's knowledge economy. At the same time, however, the presence of non-traditional students in doctoral programs has created opportunities for academic pedagogies to consider the triadic positioning of doctoral students at the intersection of practical concerns, academic inquiry and personal reflection. Due to their professional engagement, the practitioner-doctoral researchers have been in the unique position to inform the world of practice with critical perspectives that could help shed light on the otherwise covert socio-economic and political mechanisms of neoliberal governmentality. We illustrated these possibilities by drawing on concrete examples from our doctoral supervision, in which we supported students to intellectually explore and exploit the 'paradoxical effect' of neoliberalism, whereby neoliberal policies ostensibly guided by economic market ideology can open up spaces for critical subjectivities.

Considering these 'paradoxical effects' of neoliberal educational policy in Central Europe as a potential point of resistance against negative effects of neoliberal politics gains special importance in the context of recent political development in Poland whereby the neoconservative populist government has introduced a new set of higher education reforms (2018). The new policies are based on an elitist centralised approach and they limit the number of students at Polish universities (the number of university students has diminished by 10% only within last two academic years). In doctoral studies, this reduction is much more dramatic – the number of doctoral students accepted for the first year of doctoral training in 2019-2020 dropped by more than 40% and further reduction is projected in the next couple of years (Tomala, 2019). These radical changes in higher education policy have been explained by the Polish Ministry as a reaction to the lowering of the quality of university training resulting from the massification of higher education. We are concerned that the neo-conservative trend, which reinstates doctoral education as an elitist endeavour, will close university gates to non-traditional students and practitioners, constricting the subversive possibilities of the 'paradoxical effects' of neoliberalism to generate spaces for critical subjectivity and freedom.

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