

# Education in the narcissistic society: An analysis of the situation in some selected Slovenian primary schools

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## ABSTRACT

In this article, data gathered through participant-observation at a school is used and interviews with pedagogical workers are analysed to establish how the school, as the key institution of cultural transmission, shapes a narcissistic culture by favouring permissive educational praxis. The findings will be shown in the light of Slovenian primary education reform of the 9-year primary school. It will be attempted to show how changes in the educational system emphasise permissiveness (manifested as a greater choice of subjects, less repressive evaluation methods, less strict advancement terms, teaching methods designed for active and independent pupil participation, more democratic relations between pupils and teachers, practicing alternative punishments and a therapeutic approach instead of restrictive one) and therefore influence the development of narcissistic features in maturing young people. The study concludes that school is the key institution and instrument of capitalist society, which socializes and educates individuals for the narcissistic consumer society.

**KEYWORDS:** narcissism, narcissistic society, consumer society, permissive education, school reform in Slovenia

## Introduction

Through its socialization process, each society modifies its individuals so that they adapt to its prevailing social norms and thereby self-perpetuates. This article will show how the post-industrial consumer society and changes in the socialization process of individuals influence the growth of individuals' narcissistic features. The decline of parental authority and discipline favoured permissive educational techniques within the family as well as with in school socialization and education. Christopher Lasch in *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979) defines today's Western society as narcissist firstly due to its encouragement of success and public approval of pathologic narcissists, who are lauded in the media (praising momentary pleasure, fascination with fame, glitz, and material comfort). Sec-

only, Western society encourages the development of narcissistic features such as charm, false awareness of this condition, protective shallowness, avoidance of attachment, inability to experience empathy or grief and a fear of old age and death in each individual.

Presenting the educational changes in post-modern societies (that also served as the basic guideline for the recent primary school reform when introducing the nine-year primary school in Slovenia), the research will attempt to demonstrate how these changes stimulate narcissism. The focus will lie on the 'democratization' of education in post-modernism, favouring permissive instead of repressive education.

The study will use the data gathered through participant-observation at the school place and will analyse interviews with pedagogical workers to establish how the school as the key institution of cultural transmission shapes this culture by favouring permissive educational praxis, which is the opposite of what the school is expected to do. The findings will be shown in the light of a recent reform of Slovenian primary education. We will try to show how changes in the educational system put stress on permissiveness and therefore influence the development of narcissistic features of a growing up youth.

## **New educational trends in Slovenian primary schools: Theoretical backgrounds**

Kroflič (1997) emphasizes that pedagogical workers recognize, in today's schools, more and more pathologic narcissists who cannot be worked with according to classical school principles. Therefore, he believes that a different non-repressive way of working with them has to be used, because

[...] a pathological narcissist is simply no longer attracted by a pre-defined system of the symbolic school framework, as he did not internalize symbolic law or 'blind obedience' that has arisen by patriarchal upbringing as a fear from punishment (Kroflič 1997: 286).

Therefore, education should literally represent a new development basis quality for the new pedagogical paradigm in post-industrial society (Bergant 1994: 110). It should enable flexible organization of school work, a creative school environment, democratic relations, dialogue, cooperation between teachers and pupils, and at the same time encourage creative thinking (Novak 2002: 3). Bergant emphasizes that a permissive and democratic education should not be an extreme opposite of a repressive and authoritative education, which is however the outmost opposite of an 'all-allowing' (*laissez-faire*) education. It has to be stated that not every non-repressive education is automatically a permissive education. However, the fact is that the principles of permissiveness are in the practice often exercised wrongly and superficially, which often leads to an all-allowing education. Bergant (1994) sees the reasons for the all-allowing education in the society that dictates school politics, because the school authority follows a liberal capitalistic ideology and transfers popular ideas to school conditions (Bergant 1994: 112).

Contemporary school reforms strive for a more humane educational system, adapted to children's rights and needs. A holistic paradigm in the field of education on

which Slovenian school reforms have been building since the independence offers a connected and interwoven humanistic and naturalistic education, knowledge for life and personal knowledge evaluation. Therefore, the reforms are based on internal individualism and teaching differentiation, whereby the teaching goals should be oriented towards optimal development of an individual as much as possible. The educational system should be adapted to average children's abilities and in this way increase population's functional literacy. It should become more flexible, consider more parallel ways for achieving set purposes, and also be more true-to-life and connected with the environment. In the foreground, should be permissive teaching methods that arise from children's rights and serve children's interests. Unlike the scientific abstraction of a performance-oriented school, these directions, based on 'knowledge for life' are in practice carried out by reducing the overly extensive education programs, and by connecting and interweaving individual subject matter. To achieve such orientation, it is also important to train teachers who have to gain appropriate pedagogical erudition to be able to teach creatively and in dialogue, and direct students toward a problem-oriented learning and more democratic work forms, e.g. team work (ibid.: 164).

Next, the focus will lie on Slovenia's primary school reform in framework of which the nine-year primary school was introduced and a short examination of how concrete changes fulfil principles of pluralism and democracy in contemporary societies. This reform prolonged the compulsory education by one year, i.e. from eight to nine years, and children are one year younger when they start school. The nine-year primary school is divided into three educational periods: first, from 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> year; second, from 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> year and third, from 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> year. Because children are younger when they start school and differ in their individual developmental stages, in the first educational period the teaching of writing and arithmetic is adapted to the child's development stage and individualization of the program is attempted as much as possible.

In the first year, pupils are looked after by teachers who teach them the first three years and a childcare worker who tries to ease their transition from kindergarten to primary school with help of didactically designed games. Instead of marks, pupils receive a written evaluation in which the teacher describes their progress according to the set curricular goals. In the second educational period, pupils get marks as well as a written evaluation, and in the third educational period, they get only marks, whereby all subjects are marked, even the so-called optional subjects. The introduction of optional subjects (every pupil can select two or three) is an attempt to increase the plurality of knowledge and to offer children a bigger range of subjects in which they show interest. The subjects are more 'true-to-life', meaning that many popular areas were integrated into the courses of study offered by an educational institution.

The key change, introduced by the nine-year primary school, is the differentiation of pupils that adjusts the degree of difficulty by considering pupil's individuality as much as possible. It is especially important that the degree of difficulty be adjusted for pupils with special needs, for pupils with learning difficulties and for gifted pupils. During the first two educational periods of the nine-year primary school, pupils do not repeat a year while during the last three years; they take a re-examination if they did not pass the

subject. The year has to be repeated if a pupil does not pass the re-examination or has a negative mark in more than two subjects. Šebart Kovač emphasises that such advancement in the first six years of the primary school often leads to a “[...] too late discovery of child’s specific under-achievements and development specifics, and consequently misses the optimal time for corrections” (2002: 151).

In addition to changes to the system, defined by the school legislation, of key importance are the changes of didactical principles, which should enable achievement of statutory goals for a democratic and plural education, as well as accustom children to a life in a modern pluralistic society. An important task of a modern school, for which the teaching concept has to be changed, should be qualifying pupils for ‘lifelong learning’ with an emphasis on applicable knowledge for solving life’s concrete problems in new situations. The emphasis lies on switching from passive and static learning by which pupils only follows the teacher’s explanations to active, dynamic and experimental learning. This should gradually lead pupils from concrete experiences to abstract thinking and connecting knowledge. Corresponding to the democratization of learning, the teacher should accustom pupils to cooperation and teamwork, as engagement in social interactions enable exploration of different viewpoints and a better view of different thinking. For this reason, other forms of work are necessary, such as teamwork, co-operational learning, working in pairs, group discussions, dialogues, etc. In this sense, such process knowledge oriented towards finding new ways and strategies for problem solving is becoming increasingly important. Beside cognitive processes, the social and emotional view of learning and teaching is also becoming more important for pupils’ overall development, so they do not develop only their rational understanding (Novak 2005: 23). In this manner, a teacher in the nine-year primary school should become more of a coordinator of the learning process whose role is no longer that of a provider of knowledge; he rather has to accustom pupils to the plurality of ideas and knowledge of the post-modern society by using democratic didactic methods.

Nevertheless, the fact is that present conditions in the Slovenian educational system are due to the constant introduction of educational changes sliding increasingly into chaos. This will attempt to be shown by analysing material gained through anthropological field research. A good deal of responsibility for this has to be ascribed to the ‘permissive’ school legislation that largely enhanced pupils’ rights and restricted teachers’ disciplinary possibilities when pupils do not fulfil their duties, because administrating discipline causes teachers additional work, as they have to explain such measures in writing. Instead of punishment, schools pursue therapeutic practice by which pupils who do not respect norms and rules are treated by school’s counselling services, psychologists and social workers who by counselling, in Salecl’s opinion (1991: 109), interfere in proper family upbringing and take control over it.

In this way, school becomes the state’s tool in relationship between the state and family. In accordance with the performance-oriented school that is governed by a strict point system for evaluating primary school pupils for further education admission, only the achieved marks are becoming important to the pupils and their parents, instead of knowledge or critical thinking. For this reason, learning and knowledge are on a very low

level, as pupils only learn for tests and under the patronage of a state that protects children against an 'overfilled school programme'. Under the name of a democratic 'school fit for children', an all-allowing education is actually practiced in many cases. The result of such education is a very weak general knowledge, disrespect for learning and effort, giving importance only to success, regardless of the means, which often encourages fierce competition among pupils. The key problem of today's education is due to the increased aggressiveness of children and their inability to respect rules and norms; they lack of work motivation and poor discipline maintenance in classrooms.

Šebart Kovač (2002) states that the integration of school system changes into the social relations that correspond to consumer society's interests. In today's capitalistic society, success goes only those individuals who are capable of "[...] working in fast-changing environments, setting rules and not just blindly obeying them, and working in project groups, whereby they have to have the same 'personal chemistry' as other organization members" (2002: 225). According to those requirements, schoolwork is also changing due to the growing preference for mutual communication, negotiation and teamwork capability, which were presented as the key didactic principles when introducing the nine-year primary school. Apple (1992) similarly states that the key ideological component of the school is represented by actual practices and rituals transmitted by a hidden school curriculum with which the strongest society classes maintain ideological hegemony. It is a matter of "[...] continuous implicit learning of rules, values and propensities that simply goes together with teaching pupils at schools, their confrontation with institution's expectations and school work timetable" (Apple 1992: 28).

The second key point that indirectly influences the preservation of consumer society is the persistence of 'painless education', an education without tensions and conflicts, and the maintenance of 'commercial amiability' (Šebart Kovač 2002: 232), because only a permissive education based on maximum comfort can suit the narcissistic libidinal characteristics of an individual in the consumer capitalism. Therefore, Kroflič's findings find agreement that modern school's permissiveness is manifested as

[...] bigger choice of subjects, less repressive evaluation methods (written evaluation), less strict advancement terms (advancing to the next year with a negative mark), more modern teaching methods (which at least seem to be designed on a more active and independent pupil's participation) and at last as more democratic relations between pupils and teachers. All listed characteristics known under the name '*friendly school*' (unfortunately) do not solve the basic problem of the modern school socialization (school's educational function) which is manifested in growing vandalism, juvenile delinquency and general unwillingness of more and more juveniles to obey basic rules of the school order. It seems more and more that teachers are often unable to assure even a minimum authority for at least a bearable communication with pupils (1997: 269).

Kroflič sees such a school's state not as a reflection of teachers' incompetence, but rather as the result of society's permissiveness, which is linked with society's authority erosion. Kroflič also emphasizes the hidden authoritativeness of permissive education that had been brought into the education process as early as Rousseau (1997) and shows more subtle mechanisms for control over children. The author stresses out that education that wishes to arise from child's momentary needs can quickly turn into a very burdening and irrational authoritative educating situation or even manipulation (ibid: 282).

Therefore, this theoretical discourse on the recent Slovenian school reform, which is caught in a post-modern consumer society, will be concluded with that statement that the narcissistic society is the product of a permissive education and this statement will be tried to be proven on the basis of empirical data.

### **School as the ideological instrument of capitalist society: Empirical analysis**

The empirical research was performed to investigate if school as a basic institution of cultural transmission, from which it is generally expected to oppose the narcissist characteristics of consumer society, indirectly shapes this culture by favouring permissiveness. The analysis of empirically acquired facts followed two principal topics. Firstly, do school newcomers show narcissistic features and how these are manifested at school, and is this school system ready for the narcissistic socialized individuals of consumer society? Secondly, does school in fact represent an ideological instrument of consumer society? This research also followed the erosion of authority and autonomy of teachers, who are recently more exposed to the external pressures from parents, frequently dependent on capital pressures. I was interested in the consistency of punishment at school and the presence of therapeutic accession in solving conflicts. Further, in this research I tried to discover whether the school system presents an attitude to knowledge as a value or, contrary to that, encourages pupils only to gather marks. I was concerned with the relation of pedagogical workers to constant changes in the educational system and their opinion of increased bureaucracy in schoolwork. The central point of this research was to discover if school education complements the permissive or rather 'laissez-faire' upbringing in a family, which finally leads to development of narcissistic personal features, functional for the existence of consumer society.

As a basic method of research, participant-observation was used and practised in primary school where I work as a teacher and have been engaged in anthropological fieldwork. For two years, I have observed and registered what was happening in the classrooms, interested in relations between pupils and teachers and their interactions. I made efforts to record notes as objectively and descriptively as possible, although the subjectivity was implicated by the fact that I could only observe the interaction when the pupil was at the same time in interaction with me. Being a class teacher is very important because in this way I could learn about the family backgrounds of pupils, their relations with parents and was able to get an insight into family upbringing. Participant-observation in the upper forms of a primary school included, class lessons, cooperation with

parents in teacher-parents' meetings, meetings with pupils and parents as well as counseling service in special cases of violating rules, teachers' cooperation in informal discussions, on teachers' meetings and other professional forms of cooperation. In lower forms, the subjects of observation were: the after school activities in extended school stay (having lunch, writing homework, playing and creating things), all sorts of formal and informal talks with colleagues and everyday interaction with parents collecting their children from school. In addition, notes on educational teachers' meetings, seminars, workshops, projects and other forms of professional development for teachers have been written.

After two years of participant-observation, the chosen materials have been tested with colleagues engaged in education. Therefore, focus interviewing with seven pedagogical workers and in depth interviewing with 19 pedagogical workers of different profiles (class and subject teachers, counseling service, principals) and different ages, coming from different parts of Slovenia has been carried out. In this way, I have tried to include two perspectives: *emic*, inner insight of a viewer and *etic*, ideal-typical descriptions of those being interviewed in order to find out the relation between both perspectives.

## **Analysis of empirical results**

On the basis of participant-observation as well as opinions of interviewed pedagogical workers,<sup>1</sup> the data confirms that the teachers perceive more permissive, democratic family upbringing with lots of indulgence and inconsistency in cases of disobedience or rule violations. Many interviewees stated that as far as upbringing is concerned, parents are often confused and they mainly follow more democratic, permissive models, which lead to an abundance of permissiveness, an 'all-allowing' upbringing and confusion as a result:

There are a lot of democratic ways in terms of discussion so that children take part in making decisions, they are often asked their opinion and they are not being restricted. The adults should be the ones to take responsibilities and final decisions instead of indulging too much and being led by children's requests. The adults have lost much of their authority in the sense that children do not recognise paternal authority any more. On the contrary, they have become the centre of attention; they are the ones who state conditions. After entering the school, they expect the same treatment in the classroom. They do not have respect for adults, teachers and elderly people as we used to have (Interviewee 1).

In this sense, children acquire certain pattern of behaviour and asserting their requests already in the pre-school period, which turns out to be problematic. Being confronted with problems of subordination to school rules and cooperation in groups, most

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<sup>1</sup> In the analysis, I included statements of 19 interviewed pedagogical workers, who described the problems they are facing from their own point of view. The included statements are marked as Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2, etc.

of the school newcomers expect to be treated in school the same way as they are at home by their parents.

Some of the interviewed colleagues emphasize that the roles in a family are not clearly stated anymore, so children are actually not aware of their duties. Under the influence of a democratic and permissive upbringing, parents have developed friendly relations with their children, whereby there are no obvious rules and limits, but children are taken into consideration and asked their opinion. Because they are too young to be able to distinguish between right and wrong, this leads to confusion:

Families have developed more friendly relationships. Parents have gradually introduced a different style of upbringing, a kind of partnership – ‘we are friends’ attitude, where boundaries are blurred. The roles of individual family members are not clear anymore and family as such has lost its key role. The classical roles of individual family members have changed and this has brought about consequences in children’s behaviour (Interviewee 2).

An additional problem in the modern family is that children are not accustomed to work, e.g. tidying up or help with housework, their only duty is to learn which they find less and less motivating because they have not acquired any working habits:

I have a feeling that children needn’t do any work at home, that they do not tidy up their room, make their beds and the like. A lot of parents say all they have to do is their school and homework. But we all agree that, having acquired working habits, which is essential for primary education, they can do a lot more than that (Interviewee 3).

I agree with the majority of interviewed colleagues who, working at school, already perceive the negative consequences of permissive family upbringing. Nevertheless, parents still make many mistakes, such as inconsequential persistence in agreements, undeserved rewards, absence of punishment and the like. In one of the conversations with children it came out that they would like to have more rules and limits from their parents, they need their parents’ concern rather than indulgence out of fear to be resented.

All interviewees were asked if they noticed the presence of pathological narcissists at school. They do not explicitly use the term “narcissist” but rather describe children who often break the rules acting aggressively in order to be noticed and admired as egoistic, spoiled individuals. They mainly agree that the elements of pathologic narcissistic behaviour are limited to a small number of individuals, while some kind of narcissism is perceived with the majority. A few interviewees have noticed some elements of the narcissism even in certain parents:

Children often do not have any boundaries, they cannot distinguish between right and wrong, what they are or are not allowed to do. Such children are not willing to adapt, it is very hard to accustom them to certain behaviour because they are not used to do so at home (Interviewee 4).

Narcissistic behaviour at school has been observed by means of participant-observation and it has shown that most frequent forms are: contradiction and resistance to teachers, claiming their own demands, enforcing their wishes by sulking, crying and flattering. I have noticed different features of pathologic narcissists: grandiosity, superiority complex, infallibility and arrogance, which individuals show directly when praising their own abilities and at the same time neglecting every agreement, trying to enforce their own will without any compromise. Pathological narcissists are self-centred; they always try to be in the centre of attention and to draw everybody's attention to themselves. These attempts become especially imaginative and manipulative with older pupils, while the younger ones request direct confirmation of their superiority from their teachers. In their wishful thinking to be the first or the best, they are even capable of using contemptible means, which can prevent other pupils from being successful, no matter what the consequences or harm. They often tell lies without regret, are not capable of empathy and therefore aggressive to all who stand in their way to fulfil their wishes. They are anxious to get what they want and are easily hurt when somebody else tries to win recognition. In a group with more aggressive narcissistic individuals, conflicts are inevitable, because they are not able to conform. Such individuals begin to fight with all possible means, not being able to resist from their own selfishness or consider other people's wishes.

The interviewed colleagues have also stated that the individuals with narcissistic features represent a minority, i.e. only a few cases in each class:

In spite of this narcissistic trend in the last few years, I cannot say that extreme narcissism is an everyday phenomenon. It is present, it can be observed, but it has not grown to such an extent that we should all deal with it (Interviewee 5).

During the four years of research at school as a pedagogical worker, I have also drawn to the conclusion and, together with my colleagues, believe that narcissistic individuals are only exceptions, most of them not showing distinctive narcissistic features and therefore they could not represent such a problem. After analysing the findings for the second time, it appeared that most of the children are indeed narcissistic. This statement can be confirmed on the basis of participant-observation, which shows the turning point: a significant change in children's' behaviour at school. The majority of pupils are very uncritical in relation to their work. They do not want to make any effort in order to achieve something unless they are rewarded, praised, offered feelings of comfort and delight. They try to avoid rules and regulations or adapt them to their own benefit. Teacher use all kinds of 'tricks', such as positive motivation or even manipulation, in order to motivate them for learning and doing what they are supposed to do. At the same time, this is nonsense because we all know that children do not respect knowledge by itself but they consider it as means of achieving external rewards, which will, in the hierarchical system of education, eventually result in a well-paid job and consequently a better standard of living.

It is exactly pedagogical workers', progressively decreasing strictness towards that kind of behaviour that almost threatens to be accepted as 'normal' (socially accept-

able), which is, in our opinion, very problematic. The reasons for this are certain social trends: the increasing level of democratisation and liberalisation, the pursuit of a leisurely, effortless life, preoccupation with the outward appearance and material goods. There is also a general feeling of insecurity regarding employment in the adult world, which is why parents urge children to learn: they are trying to make sure their children will be able to provide for themselves with a good job, which will supply them with money, today's paramount value. Most of the interviewees pointed to a direct correlation of permissive upbringing with preoccupied parents. Such parents are too exhausted to spend their scarce free time in a quality manner with their children, so they try to appease their conscience by spoiling them with material goods and by being too permissive and yielding. Many children thus consider money and material wealth as the only virtue of and purpose in life; outward appearance, attained by costly material goods, becomes extremely significant to them:

When parents come home tired from work, they want all the best for their children without spending too much time with them and this leads to indulgence. Preoccupation and fatigue cause permissiveness because they just feel they cannot cope (Interviewee 6).

Parents think that if they provide material things for their children, they have taken good care of them, but children need more than that. They need time to talk with their parents, take a walk with them, spend their free time together. Children take time, which parents do not seem to have because of their working commitments (Interviewee 7).

Due to the fact that school is a part of the social environment, all interviewed colleagues have perceived that current social circumstances are reflected in school. Next, some concrete examples will be presented of how the school system directly continues the permissive and narcissistic family socialization and prepares children for life in consumer society.

On the basis of interviewed people's opinion and fieldwork results, it can be stated that the trends of permissive education are present at the contemporary school; they can easily be observed in school life and work, which includes children as partners in democratic decisions. Some of the interviewees have indicated the deliberate introduction of permissive educational tendencies into school legislation, which do not actually work in practice, but lead to unmanageable situations. They explicitly use the term democratic education as the ideal education, while the term permissive education implies a negative connotation for most of them, such as school without rules and regulations, i.e. an all-allowing education, which eventually leads to chaos. Most of the interviewees do not agree with permissive tendencies in a modern school; on the contrary, they are aware of the significance of clearly stated rules and limits to maintain order and discipline at school. Nevertheless, teachers have to follow the general permissive doctrine, stated in school legislation:

In my opinion, there have been tendencies to change the educational styles at school all the time. This was accompanied with school legislation and constant changes of subjects as well as programmes. I think there have been attempts to introduce new ways of raising children into schools (Interviewee 8).

Nowadays educational trends have become more permissive, that's a fact. I do not agree that children should be allowed everything. They should have limits in order to grow into responsible adults (Interviewee 9).

I claim that school has to function according to clearly stated rules, which children have to accept. Children often say that they do not feel comfortable in anarchy. In the so-called friendly school, where children can decide how much and when they learn, when and how they are going to be graded, this leads to anarchy, to an undesirable situation, where teachers are powerless and they can easily be accused of putting too much stress on children. I do not think this is OK (Interviewee 10).

The interviewed colleagues also share the opinion that the teacher's authority has been ruined as a consequence of inadequate evaluation of teacher's profession and the lack of 'a priori' respect for older people in contemporary society. They all stated that teacher's authority and reputation used to be on a much higher level than it is nowadays. Parents put pressure on teachers daily, threatening them with school investigation and prosecution, thus interfering with teachers' professional autonomy. Many parents show little respect for teachers by inappropriate behaviour towards them, and teachers' reputation consequently diminishes. Too rash and unverified changes in school legislation bring confusion, concern and disruption among pedagogical workers and into their work. Sometimes not being able to follow them can cause administrative problems due to external pressures from parents who threaten them with investigation and prosecution. Therefore, pedagogical work is becoming increasingly administrative, pedagogical workers are obliged to prepare many documents, which takes time and energy needed for genuine quality relations with their pupils.

Teachers are not admitted the authority they used to have once. Parents often interfere in teachers' work, teachers are constantly under parents' control and the later are sometimes even not aware of the fact that they are interfering in teachers' autonomy, authority and profession itself. In this way, teachers are losing and some have already lost their professional integrity, especially some younger colleagues or those who do not have a strong personality (Interviewee 11).

In order to protect democracy, we allow too much bureaucracy and because of this, the quality of human relations is generally degrading. And so is the human factor, which is very important in human relations (Interviewee 12).

Many pedagogical workers also expressed disagreement with administrative ways of discipline due to its inefficiency. With such punishment, teachers have additional work, because they have to explain such measures in writing; therefore, they are not consistently applied. The lack of teachers' consensus within the same school as well as on the state level – what are the general rules and values and when they are trespassed – leads to different sanctions. Some of the interviewees also think that feminization in the area of education is not a good thing, because women are often more indulgent and do not persist in discipline. One of the interviewees has also stated that by not having appropriate measures of discipline, teachers are not able to sanction minor offences in order to prevent the bigger ones, and therefore help develop future criminals. Due to additional work with the administration of discipline, teachers are usually not consistent in applying it. Insufficient legislation and its different interpretation along with inconsistency in carrying out discipline diminish its purpose and meaning, which consequently causes disrespect of school rules and regulations as well as new offences.

There are regulations, prepared and published by the Ministry of Education, according to which punishments should be carried out, but in praxis these punishments are not effective because the administrative punishments usually do not bring about the desired results (Interviewee 13).

The key instrument of school's counselling services for treating offences is discussion with pupils, their parents, directing them to other therapeutic institutions, which confirms the presumption of therapeutic praxis within schools. Some of the interviewees seem to use the counselling service as an emergency exit - when they are unable to cope with a certain child in a classroom, they send him or her to a counselling worker to calm him down. By doing this, teachers do not punish someone for his/her offence but rather try to discover the reason for his/her behaviour, often in co-operation with other experts in counselling or therapeutic institutions. Some of the interviewees mentioned restitution or even positive punishment as an alternative to the classical ways of punishment carried out at some schools, such as tidying the classroom, helping the classmates, becoming teachers' assistants, etc.:

We usually practice discussion, the class teacher with a child first, then the class teacher and counselling service with parents, who may also be directed to counselling institutions outside school (Interviewee 14).

In our school, we are working on a project called Restitution. The children are aware of what is going to happen if they break the rules. For example, if they cause a mess during the break in the school canteen, they know that they will have to tidy it up (Interviewee 15).

The annoying children who are known to cause problems should be involved in doing something good, i.e. we could trust them to be responsible for the keys or the like. Such children need some kind of confirmation in a positive sense. Some of them do not get this confirmation at home and the others get too much of it and therefore need the same treatment at school (Interviewee 16).

According to the facts stated above, it can be concluded that the therapeutic ways of solving problems in education as well as alternative or even 'positive' forms of punishment also practiced in schools strengthen the permissive trends in education. There is a question if such alternative forms of punishment are (not) actually more successful for narcissistic individuals who do not understand classic restrictive punishment as a consequence of an offence, have no knowledge of moral imperatives, but on the contrary, understand punishment as an attack on their personality. 'Positive punishment', on the other hand, does not invoke this in narcissists; rather than that, it even boosts their self-importance, which is why it might work better.

The findings of the research prove that pupils' attitude to learning and knowledge at the modern school has degraded. Pupils want to achieve good marks with minimum learning and effort, in a most favourable way, regardless of the means, which often encourages fierce competition among them. The struggle for better marks has become more important than learning and knowledge, which are devalued. Marks do not indicate the level of knowledge but represent the final goal. Pupils often suffer under their parents' pressure to achieve better marks needed for a better starting-point of their further education:

Knowledge is nowadays transformed into grades and points. There is no knowledge stored and available when needed. Pupils learn for a special purpose, namely for grades, this is their main goal. Once they are graded, it falls into oblivion (Interviewee 17).

I can also see a big problem in the fact that some parents not only expect but require from their children to be successful and they find it very hard to accept the simple fact that their child is average or even less able to learn. Knowing that only the most successful children can be enrolled into elite secondary schools, they put too much pressure on their children (Interviewee 18).

So far, the indirect connection between school and consumer society has been emphasized. Some interviewed colleagues explicitly stated the pressure of capitalism, (due to the reduced enrolment of children), by which the positions of teachers are threatened. This is believed to be the cause of tolerating bad behaviour as well as lowering knowledge standards, so that every pupil can achieve them, thus leading to lower general level of knowledge. Most of the interviewees emphasized the external pressure, threatening with investigation and prosecution from parents, their effectiveness deriving from possession of capital, power and prestige, as mentioned above. By trying to avoid a negative reputation, schools become subject to the influence of capital.

We all know that teachers are paid according to the number of pupils and this automatically means that they cannot afford to leave children behind; everybody has to pass, so that teachers can keep their jobs (Interviewee 19).

## Conclusions

According to everything stated above, the study leads to a conclusion that school is the key institution and the instrument of a capitalist society, which socializes and educates individuals for the consumer society. The erosion of the teachers' authority, due to parents' interference in the teacher's expert work, and the increase in therapeutic approach strengthens permissiveness in school education. With its inconsistency of discipline as well as emphasizing the importance of grades, our school system actually indirectly strengthens the narcissism of individuals and prepares them for life in a consumer society.

Another very problematic issue, the lack of perception of major narcissistic behaviour of pupils by pedagogical workers, is emphasised. In this respect, *emic* and *etic* perceptions are the opposites; although the data gathered through participant observation showed that majority of pupils in Slovenian primary schools are narcissistic, the pedagogical workers do not perceive this as a problem. They emphasized that pathological narcissists are just exceptions in the school population. That is the main point of this research, the fact that pedagogical workers do not perceive the presence of narcissistic behaviour of majority, indicates an important anthropological phenomena: narcissistic behaviour is becoming commonly accepted, i.e. 'normal'. In our opinion, that is very problematic.

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## **POVZETEK**

V prispevku bomo poskušali na podlagi podatkov pridobljenih z opazovanjem z neposredno udeležbo v šolskem prostoru ter ob analizi poglobljenih intervjujev s pedagoškimi delavci utemeljiti, kako šola, kot ključna institucija kulturne transmisije, oblikuje narcistično kulturo s favoriziranjem permisivnih vzgojnih praks. Naše ugotovitve bomo prikazali v luči reforme devetletne osnovne šole v Sloveniji. Poskušali bomo utemeljiti, kako spremembe v šolstvu (kot so večja izbirnost prdmetnov, manj restriktivne metode ocenjevanja ter napredovanja v višje razrede, metodološki pristopi, ki upoštevajo aktivnejšo vlogo učencev pri pouku, bolj demokratični odnosi med učitelji in učenci ter uporaba alternativnih kazni in terapevtskih pristopov) poudarjajo permisivnost in s tem vplivajo na razvoj narcističnih lastnosti odraščajoče mladine. Na podlagi zbranih podatkov lahko zaključimo, da je šola ključna institucija in instrument kapitalistične družbe, ki socializira in vzgaja posameznike za narcistično, potrošniško družbo.

**KLJUČNE BESEDE:** narcizem, patološki narcis, potrošniška družba, permisivna vzgoja, šolska reforma v Sloveniji