

**Being a student during educational revolution:
Cognitive and non-cognitive consequences of the educational reform 2017**

PROJECT SUMMARY FOR GENERAL PUBLIC

Polish schools are about to undergo a revolution – elimination (or “extinguishing”) of middle schools, extension of elementary school to 8 years and, finally, change in curricular bases, educational curricula and course books themselves. Revolutions are often expensive – directly and metaphorically. Direct costs manifest themselves in funds necessary to cover the changes, and the possible social effects, such as lay-offs teachers fear so much. In the more metaphorical sense, the costs and the possible benefits of the reform will be borne by students who will be subjects of the reform.

The project, entitled “Being a student during educational revolution: Cognitive and non-cognitive consequences of the educational reform 2017” aims at empirically analyzing the consequences of the reform with respect to two cohorts of students – those who will be attending its first year, i.e. who will be beginning their 7th grade elementary school education in the school year of 2017/2018, and their one-year-older peers who will be beginning grade 2 middle school and who will become their reference group. For three years – namely to the beginning of secondary (or the so-called specialist) school attendance, we will be analyzing the changes that reformed and non-reformed education exerts on two key areas of students’ characteristics. First, these will be cognitive competences and school achievements. We will therefore be measuring the dynamics of changes in abilities (intelligence) and results on school achievement tests in a new elementary and eliminated middle schools. Second, changing schools (e.g. from elementary school to middle school) does not only associate with uncertainty and stress, but also with comparisons with peers from more demanding classes. Such comparisons, especially when the level of peer is indeed high, lead to the so-called “big-fish-little-pond” effect – loss of belief in one’s own capabilities that consequently becomes a factor of the risk of school failure. Extended elementary education has a chance to offset this effect. Consequently, we are dealing with a paradox: extending education in a moderately stimulating environment of an elementary school may inhibit the dynamics of the intellectual progression of children and youth, but it may also have positive consequences for students’ beliefs in their own capabilities and – finally – their school achievements. Which of these effects does in fact take place? Which – if both occur – is stronger? How does the dynamics of cognitive abilities and beliefs in one’s own capabilities in the course of education change? Does school develop or inhibit abilities? These are just some of the questions this project focuses on.

Overall, during the three years of this project, a total of almost 5,000 students from hundreds of elementary and middle school classes will undergo a four-wave cross-sequential study. We will not only measure their cognitive abilities (intelligence) and school achievements, but also their academic self-concept with respect to key school subjects as well as educational rationality – school and educational objectives as perceived by students and a number of potentially intervening factors, like school climate of instructional strategies.