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Деконструкция и образование

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ситуация
культура

Аннотация:

Тематика статьи сформулирована в русле философии образования. Автор ставит цель эксплицировать философский потенциал постструктурализма в проекции на практику преподавания иностранного (английского) языка в школе. Отталкиваясь от базовых идей Ж. Деррида, Ж. Делеза и Р. Барта, автор показывает, что образование в рамках обучения иностранному языку должно быть направлено на культивирование такой модели личности, для которой бытийным основанием выступает конституирующая смысл сознательная деятельность. В статье демонстрируется, что данная модель личности реализуется с помощью создания в учебном процессе лично-ориентированной ситуации, включающей: педагога-психолога, ученика-интерпретатора и текст как социокультурный феномен. Данная модель, направленная на поиск и порождение учащимися смыслов и основанная на принципе диалога культур, отвечает сущностным потребностям человека в самопонимании и самовыражении.

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Post-structuralism, which emerged as a part of postmodernism, has long attracted attention of both Western and Russian philosophers. However, the refraction or explication of post-structuralist philosophical ideas through various sociocultural phenomena has been less studied. This is particularly relevant for education, therefore, on the next pages we will try to reveal the educational potential of post-structuralist philosophy. The term 'post-structuralism' itself shows that its philosophical space is dominated by the ideas intrinsic to structuralism as its ideological predecessor – language, sign, meaning and text. In this regard, it will be reasonable to turn to the ideas of Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Roland Barthes, since their theories most vividly present these ideas, especially from the point of view of education philosophy, which is of great interest to us.

Apparently, the main educational message of post-structuralist philosophy is revealed when it is placed against new European Enlightenment perception of an individual as the subject and bearer of reason. The formation of such subject is seen as the process of introducing a person to culture, with education playing the key role in it. It is through learning processes that instincts give way to reason, and nature obeys culture. The main requirement for the human mind is not let in anything that it would not be able to control, and not to perceive as its content anything that was not the result of its self-determination. We, therefore, speak here about autonomous and self-sufficient mind, which has been criticized by the post-structuralists. As we know, reflection is the main tool of achieving mind's autonomy and self-sufficiency. Reflexive procedures imply that

our mind is placed in some central position, the point of totality, for a general review of its own contents. However, for the post-structuralists this point is highly provisional and even fictional. For instance, according to Derrida, this illusion's stability can be explained by phonocentrism, intrinsic to Western European Culture. Mind's pursuit of reflective transparency means expanding the scope of self-accountability and establishing its content in the maximum openness and proximity to itself. Speech and voice turn out to be a convenient form of such proximity, the interiority of the content of consciousness. So, on the one hand, in the flow of speech the signifier (the word's acoustic image) dissolves, bringing to the forefront the signified – thought or concept in their fictitious self-giveness. On the other hand, speaking subjects are affected by their own expressive activity. They believe that the spoken words belong to them and actually never leave them [3: 94-115].

And yet, the point of the mind's external visibility of its content is more of an ideal, than a real outside-being position, which is more in line with a desired goal, rather than an actual result. For Derrida, «... a subject can hear or speak to himself ... and create the sphere of what is not 'his own'» [3:105]. In other words, a person taking a rational reflective stance can also be affected by implicit or unexplicated assumptions. Thus, following Derrida's logic, the meaning of educational efforts and practices lies not simply in replacing sincretic sensory-impulsive vision of the world with the differentiated speculative analysis, but in teaching students the skills of distancing within rational analysis. Here we are talking about the skill of looking behind a rationally constructed picture of the world to find the implicit presuppositions for this construction and understand their variability. One may say that the general purpose of education is to develop the need for and the skill of deconstruction – i.e., reassembling the foundations of cognition.

Moreover, as has already been said, post-structuralist philosophy is connected with the issues of sign, text and meaning. Let us discuss this aspect in more detail, as it is crucial for education. It is commonly known that, according to Ferdinand de Saussure, the language sign consists of two components: the signifier (an acoustic or graphic image of a word) and the signified (a thought or a concept). But while from the linguistic point of view, this unity of the signifier and the signified is a natural, self-evident fact, post-structuralists, such as Derrida, are led by the question of how such unity is possible. One of the answers to this question explored by Derrida was given by Edmund Husserl: the signifier and the signified form a single whole due to their intentionality. Being one of the basic properties of consciousness, intentionality is an act which synthesizes mental content, in this case, the signifier and the signified. As for Derrida, his critical perception of Husserl's theory of signs is due to the logocentrism of the latter. It is commonly known that logos is reason or cognition, and reason attaches meaning to something when it is blended into unity or the whole. It is logos that determines intentional relationships. In fact, according to Husserl, intentional relationships develop as movement from empty to full intentions – i.e., from something uncertain and vague to a definite, full meaning. It looks as if the consciousness was filled with hidden teleology, as if the meaning wanted to express and represent itself in its absolute, exhaustive presence. For Derrida, therefore, Husserl's interpretation of intentional relationships is derived from voluntaristic metaphysics, while the sign concept emphasizing its element of certainty and completeness refers to medieval theology, with God as absolute logos. Derrida's de-absolutization of logos complicates the process of finding meanings, which does not end with the discovery of some unifying unity or structural center in a set of elements. Finding such a center is followed by de-centering – i.e., showing that unifying unity or center occurs due to the cutting off or weakening of some elements (or links between them) in favour of others. So, the meaning is seen by Derrida as the 'identity' which a priori bears a mark of difference, or an 'object' involved in the process of 'becoming the self's other' [3: 50; 4: 445-446].

So, the educational dimension of the fundamental provisions of post-structuralist thought that have been discussed above can be summarized as follows: education is interaction between teaching and personality development, and therefore it should be aimed at cultivating a personality model centered around interpretation which constitutes meaning. At the same time, since post-structuralists see the nature of meaning as being marked by such characteristics as openness and incompleteness, establishing the constitution of meanings in the educational process is not a one-time act. The serial and projective nature of meaning suggests that the latter needs to be regularly recreated by individuals during learning. In this regard, the construction of meanings in the educational process should be seen as the basis for the constant internal movement of students, steadily stimulating their self-development and self-improvement during learning.

Given the increased interest of post-structuralist philosophers to language, let us now discuss some educational conditions which would center education around meanings and students' personalities. In our opinion, the most appropriate environment for creating such conditions is a student-centered learning situation. In education sciences, a student-oriented situation is usually understood as a special educational mechanism by which a teacher creates for the students some conditions that change the usual course of their life and require

some new behaviour patterns from them, which is inevitably accompanied by reflection and rethinking of the existing situation. In general, any generic model of a student-centered educational situation consists of three elements.

The first element is a teacher acting as a psychoeducator. We define the personal and professional position of a psychoeducator through the lens of post-structuralist philosophy. Within its frameworks, a teacher is not eager to reject the student's statements or correct them according to some criteria of a certain official academic language. The teacher's main task is to enable students to speak, and the main thing is to help them understand that they are not independent owners of the language, because socially and culturally programmed ways of using the language are deeply rooted in their speech, both verbal and written. Thus, psychoeducators' mission is to help students to question those connections between the signifier and the signified which seem natural and self-evident to them. A teacher can achieve this by several effective means, 'problematization' being one of them.

Which teacher's actions can be aimed at problematization? In our opinion, it would be misplaced to talk about the only possible problematization tactics. Instead, we should talk about variable strategies built by a teacher. We will list only some possibilities, bearing in mind that they mark the boundaries of possible actions and explorations of creatively thinking teachers. In particular, after presenting a text to the class and taking the students through the 'understanding process', you can offer those who wish to verbalize their understanding (or lack of understanding) to present their own interpretation of the text meaning, thereby inviting the rest of the students to get involved into the process of exchanging meanings through assembling their own positions of understanding. In addition, on the basis of a constructed situation of understanding (or the lack of understanding), the teacher can explicate the situation of posing sharp questions which "afflict the comfortable" and "make them think", creating a classroom context in which the students will clearly see the limitations, incompleteness and imperfection of their positions. And finally, when there are no statements, and when the student feels "unheard and misunderstood", which inevitably leads to the attitude of "I do not know" or "that's the way it was, but I don't care!" [1: 294], a teacher is able to provoke his or her students, for example, by giving them his or her own, rather radical, understanding of a text. Thus, the purpose of using problematization in teaching practice is not only to help students realize their own lack of understanding, but also to promote a thorough and intensive search for other possible means of understanding, which will eventually amplify their own understanding and place them in a position of understanding. It should be noted, however, that as the situation becomes saturated with various semantic positions of the students (formalized or undergoing formalization), the teacher proceeds with the next step, aimed at turning a chaotic, spontaneous and to a large degree fragmentary process of students' expressing their own understanding into a dialogue, opening up the possibility of free exchange and comparison of different positions of understanding. This is how intertextual space is formed, where the students' text-thoughts resonate, collide, and penetrate into each other. «It is impossible to establish any genealogical relationships or center in this textual chaos. As such, the communication of texts takes place not at a certain point, but in a virtual communication space. Communication elements become so – that is, acquire meaning – only at the moment of communication, which, in turn, is created by these elements. Meanings occur within semantic space constituted by meanings themselves» [5: 93].

We see a dialogue between a teacher and students as free and flexible interaction. The teacher does not formulate the problems, leaving it to the students. He or she is not looking for ready-made answers, which means that he or she does not take some objective external stance towards student, but through asking questions begins fitting into the space of student's experience.

Asking questions, the teacher refers to understanding generated by the student – i.e., to the living experience of the subject. With the help of these questions the teacher tries to trigger a strong emotional response in order to strengthen students' attention to certain aspects of their understanding. It requires enormous dialogue-building efforts from the teacher. Repeatedly asking questions, the teacher tries to stimulate the students' thoughts again and again, creating conditions which will help students to recapture what has already been experienced, to make a stop, to abandon the existing self and return to the point of void and uncertainty which can become the starting point for recreating the new understanding of meaning. In other words, psychoeducators help students move towards their creativity, and therefore shows them the way to a new experience.

Therefore, the second element of the student-centered educational situation is an interpreting student. Such subject is characterized by readiness to open a dialogue with the Other and, which is even more important, to go beyond the limits of one's native language into the sociocultural space of another language. The internal need for language as a means of self-actualization and self-expression encourages interpreting

students to supplement texts and breathe life into them through their own understanding.

Finally, the third element is text itself, as a procedural means of constituting situations of understanding. At the same time, it is necessary to take into account how the term 'text' is defined by post-structuralists, in particular, by Roland Barthes. This French philosopher once drew a line between 'text' and 'work.' According to Barthes, work is a set of signs fixed within space. It can be a book, a painting or a movie. In each of these cases we are talking about some tangible piece, localized in one or another part of space. Text, on the contrary, is not a real, but an ideal semantic structure, which exists only in the process of its generation and subsequent perception. The latter suggests that text cannot be isolated from the stream of meanings emanating from the reader, and that the reader's interpretation of text cannot be separated from the author's intentions. This brought Barthes to one of his most famous ideas - the idea of the 'death of the author.' «The author is reputed the father and the owner of his work ... as for the Text, it reads without the inscription of the Father... it is not that the Author's ghost may not 'come back' in the Text, in his text, but he then does so as a 'guest'» [2: 415]. Therefore, creating a personality-oriented situation means initiating a student's meeting with text as a culturally marked and dynamically transforming field of meanings.

Suffice it to say that such students' 'encountering' a text will not always lead to an unequivocal interpretation of meaning. It is reasonable to assume the possibility of various interpretations of the text. It is quite possible that some students will discover their own meanings and connotations in the text, while some will perceive the text from a single perspective, grasping the basic meaning and losing the diversity of possible connotations, and others will not be able to decipher the meaning of the text. Such difficult and contradictory conditions will require from a teacher to take a number of steps to amplify the student's understanding of the problem situation, which is contained in the text, or recognizing his or her lack of understanding. As has already been mentioned, teacher's movement in a specified direction should be driven by problematization as a special effort (of a teacher) aimed at identifying contradictions in the content of statements, methods of work and demonstrated goals (of a child) and building a personally meaningful problem situation (for a child). Therefore, teacher's problematization actions should be aimed at helping the students to assume a reflexive stance towards their own understanding and awareness of what was left beyond the boundaries of the understood. "Without it, – as A. Yu. Shemanov, who reflects on the problems of modern education, notes, – it turns out to be impossible for a student to develop an existentially responsible interest to the true knowledge [7]. Situations of misunderstanding are rather productive, since they prompt people's search for meaning. According to Vladimir Zinchenko, the points of people and culture development and growth, as well as the knowledge driving force lie within the opposition between understanding and misunderstanding [11: 43].

Finally, another aspect worth mentioning is that in order to assure the development of subject's interpretation skills through education process one should not only practice interpretation of texts, but also perceive the education process as a kind of text or narrative. Here we once again face the post-structuralist idea that language used in one's life is not just a neutral means of expressing thoughts or ideas. Language is active, and what is being said depends on the narrator. In order to understand education as a narrative one should turn to the ideas of an American philosopher Hayden White.

In 1973, White published his *Metahistory*, which is usually associated with a postmodernist linguistic shift in historical science [10]. It is commonly known that the task of historians is to study, describe and explain the past. Obviously, they can do this only indirectly, through historical sources or documents. At the same time, empirical data delivered by the source are not some ready-made entities, in which one needs to 'find', 'identify' or 'reveal' a story. Rather, they represent what can be called 'raw' material that requires semantic organization and alignment. The tools for organizing the events into a single plotline are determined by the language. In particular, White draws attention to the fact that since history unfolds as a narrative, certain models called narrative mode of representation form the basis for organizing events into a coherent story. Literary studies provide us with four such modes: novel, comedy, tragedy and satire. Therefore, the form and the meaning of a described event depend on the mode chosen by a historian.

We believe that education may well be considered an example of a phenomenon whose functioning is associated with narrative structures. Novel seems to be the primary narrative mode in terms of which education is understood and reproduced. Novel is a dramatic conflict of two forces – the fight between good and evil, the light side and the dark side. Moreover, good always defeats evil, and the light forces are always liberated from the dark forces. Indeed, since the ancient times, as evidenced by Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, education has been seen as an enlightening and liberating force. In the modern era, this notion becomes an essential element of so-called 'cultural narrative' telling a story of 'become a man.' One particular point is that the insufficiency and incompleteness of human beings are eliminated through their exposure to culture and through immersion in the learning process, which asserts the primacy of knowledge and reason over sensual inclinations and

instincts.

Basically, new European narrative still dominates the educational space, however, in the mass consciousness it is just a description of some external givenness, while in a philosopher's mind it is an act of constructing given reality on the basis of certain presuppositions. The main presupposition is seeing a teacher as a source of pure truth, free from any subjectivity. These presuppositions derive from the historically formed classical idea of scientific rationality as an objective reflection of reality, free from prior beliefs. Meanwhile, modern epistemological research challenges the possibility of scientific knowledge to provide an objective description, abstracted from the specific subject [8]. Laboratory science has demonstrated more than once that arguments and discussions are indispensable attributes of academic communication. Such discussions would not be necessary, if the criteria for empirical data reliability were established in advance, but these criteria are developed through discussions, together with the notion of the studied object's specific features.

There is one more important aspect. The laboratory helps not only to see the specific characteristics of the studied object, but also to understand the language used for describing this object. This language can undergo major changes when we move from laboratory protocols, journals and records to scientific reports and publications. Researchers say that usually those choices and decisions that guide the cognitive activities in the laboratory result from a broad and often quite random variety of circumstances (for example, a set of certain instruments or chemicals currently present at the laboratory, substances which can replace the missing materials, etc.). However, when readers turn to scientific texts, they enter a peculiar world, totally different from the laboratory microcosm: the sequence of procedures included into a scientific publication differs from the one which took place in the laboratory (with some links omitted and some elements rearranged), and the result looks as if it was reached along some straight trajectories that do not contain any choice points or problematic zones. Therefore, when we turn a research materials into a written text, contextuality and situationality, characteristic of the laboratory cognitive activities, disappear. Such decontextualization is most clearly seen in the model of knowledge moving from laboratory records and protocols to and academic publication. One crucial element of laboratory protocols and manuals is recording the workflow of experimental operations, reflecting the experience of several generations of researchers working in this particular laboratory. At the level of academic publication, this set of research traditions, making up a local experimental culture, is absent" [9].

Generally, in the light of all the above-mentioned factors, it is necessary to point out that a psychoeducator fits the educational environment better than a teacher as a lawmaker and regulator. Reflexive skills are crucial for psychoeducator's professional development, as evidenced, for example, by the widespread western practice of teachers' compiling Professional Development Portfolios (PDPs) [6]. PDP is a kind of diary where a teacher describes and analyzes his own teaching activities. Such PDPs are highly valuable, as they demonstrate the presuppositions used 'by default' by teachers in their professional capacity. This background includes models and images of an ideal teacher, student, and the process of pedagogical interaction between them. As a rule, these models and images are not the reflections of some universal predefined features of human nature, but the constructs which preform this nature through certain social, cultural, and ideological conditions and factors. As a result, teachers' awareness of their connection with the sociocultural and ideological context to which they belongs contributes to the formation of skill enabling them to perceive personalities in the deconstruction mode. Deconstruction implies understanding the artificialness (or artifactuality) of human nature, as well as the variability of foundations for this artifactuality. Thus, deconstruction teaches us sensitive perception and openness to the other, which brings dialogue and tolerance to the forefront of the education process.

Speaking about Professional Development Portfolio (PDP), it is important to mention one more thing. Self-reflection stimulated by such PDP can sometimes be rather painful for a teacher. Indeed, reflection, especially when it is carried out without using ready-made patterns or samples and reveals one's previously unknown sides, can cause contradictions, uncertainty and insecurity. At the same time, the ability of a subject to face such inconsistencies when discovering his or her new self (or 'oneself-as-another') is an integral part of the ability to participate in dialogues and one's openness to the new, surprising and unexpected.

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DECONSTRUCTION AND EDUCATION

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Summary:

The study is a contribution to the development of the philosophy of education. The author aims to articulate more explicitly the educational potential of poststructuralist's philosophy from the perspective of teaching a foreign language (English) at school. The author's English teaching experience has provided an empirical basis for the study. Starting from the basic ideas of Derrida, Deleuze and Barth, the author shows that the practice of teaching English should be aimed at cultivating a person as a source of meaning-making activity. The article demonstrates that this personality model is realized by creating a person-oriented situation in the learning process, that includes a psycho-education teacher, a student-interpreter, and text as a sociocultural phenomenon. This educational model based on the principle of interculturalism and aimed at students' searching for and generating meanings in the learning process meets the person's essential needs for self-understanding and self-expression.