

School concept as an instrument of socio-cultural changes in Postmodern philosophy of education: from theory to practice

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Abstract. The article is dedicated to the analysis of the socio-cultural changes taking place in the sphere of modern American education. The authors analyze the transformation of the School concept, starting with understanding school as a formal social institution and up to understanding school as a self-sufficient educational environment and intercultural interaction base. According to the authors, the formation of this concept is connected with significant shifts in the field of culture, which has entered a phase of development, well known as postmodernism. The influence of the postmodernism ideas and deconstruction as its main idea determine the character of the alternative education in the United States of nowadays.

1. Introduction. The School Concept: Transformation of the Term.

Traditionally, the School concept dates back to the ancient Greek word σχολή (scholē), which literally means leisure, free time. Since the times of ancient Greek philosophy, the history of European education has been treating school as the educational space, in which we can see upbringing and "humanization" of a person. The school is understood as a kind of educational environment, an artificially created sphere of human culture. While the Russian pedagogy defines school as a social institution, teaching the individual social norms and behavior standards [1], the foreign pedagogy explains the School term as any educational environment where the individual learns something [2]. In the USA, "school" means any place where a person is trained. In this sense, both a college and a university are also "schools". In this perspective, the American educational system refers to any institution or training program as to "school".

A school in the United States is a continuous educational environment, the form and the process of self-organized education, providing the person's involvement into the construction of his/her own educational space. However, such understanding of a school as an individual educational environment is a result of a long historical transformation in the US system of education.

The development of school education in the USA in the twentieth century was changing significantly, which was followed by the changed interpretation of the School concept. As Ch.E. Bidwal says, from the beginning of the twentieth century, the US school was transformed into a tool of mass production, in which the learning

process was formalized, little attention was paid to the satisfaction of human needs which are related to the conditions of his/her real life. [3] Since the beginning of the century, the country was going through a rapid democratization of primary and secondary education and the development of mass public schools. The number of people who got secondary education was 30% among men and 40% among women who were born between 1896 and 1900. For people born in the period 1946-1950, the rate for both men and women was 80%. In 1992, it appeared to be 92%.

In the post-war period in the USA there was an active growth of the state's role in school financing, a change in its structure, an introduction of new teaching methods and changes in the content of education. High school was the most traditional area of state activity in the field of education. This approach to the school as to a sustainable state institution and as to the mechanism of liberal free market society's political values' transmission was connected with the specific socio-political context: during the 1950-ies the American nation experienced a period of relative prosperity and peace. However, as a result of the arms race between the USSR and the United States, the school had to become an essential element of public policies, environment for examination and evaluation of socio-cultural changes.

G. B. Conant, a former president of Harvard University, called for the reorganization of schools with some special emphasis on high quality. Admiral H. Rickover insisted on the fact that the main purpose of the education had to be the training of experts who can create technology and science and upon whom the modern nation victory in wars, both cold and open, depend on [4]. The "Law on education for the sake of national defense" contained some emphasis on science,

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mathematics, technology, foreign languages and high quality standards. In 1960-s in the United States there were some youth protest movements initiated at the universities and aimed at criticism of capitalist values and of the previous educational system. According to the protest movement representatives, education was an outdated and inefficient system, because it had the following disadvantages: the gap between theory and practice, training was carried out exclusively for the needs of capitalist society, the system provided no equal access to education for all citizens. The educational system became the core of the consumption society values' critics, because it is the education, which is the core system of the society, which primarily reacts to any socio-cultural changes.

The United States critics said that the recent educational reforms have failed or, at least, did not meet the prevailing needs; despite the fact that the College Council assessment showed that public schools significantly accelerated the growth of science. Some questions were raised about the relevance of the curriculum, about the individual needs of students and the role of schools in social changes.

In the 1970-ies, the fear of the ongoing war, the loss of faith in the government, the prospects of unemployment during the economy recession formed the people's uncertainty in the future. Citizens began to be interested in how to teach their children to cope with the energy crisis, environmental problems, depletion of natural resources, urban congestion, rising crime, the world population explosion and changes in the labour market. Others focused on developing creative and human needs of individual students, particularly of those children who were, to varying degrees, victims of the society and, consequently, of the school system.

These socio-cultural changes brought the idea that education and school, as a part of it, should become a continuous open environment, associated with real human needs, the environment, which would contribute to human adaptation in a changing world, which would be able to help the person succeed. In 80-ies of the 20th century in the American society, in the wake of student movements and the formation of nonconformist youth culture, a new generation of young people — the so-called x generation appeared. For them the understanding of culture and society as of some sustainable and formalized structure became ineffective. Traditional social institutions (such as the state, the family, the school) were no longer meeting the needs of a person. Free personal choice, free relations, leisure, communication, direct training became the main values. Training and education were no longer perceived as a social institution. They became an open environment, the base of communication.

Education is a continuous formation of a human, which continues throughout his/her life to provide the individual with the necessary skills to adapt to the society. Education should occur without any compulsion, so this is a self-organized process, which should be carried out independently, without any pressure, taking into account the principle of equality.

J. Fiterstojn in his book "Schools, where pupils learn" (1968) writes about "eccentricity" and wonders whether a school could build a more equitable society. J. Leonard considered the issue of the equality relevance in his publication "Education and Ecstasy" (1968). A book by N. Postman and Ch. Vingarnner "Teaching as a Diversion" (1969) focuses on the relevance of communication. Glasser's work "Schools of High Quality: Managing Students Without Coercion" (1998) focuses on humane, person-loving approach to all aspects of education in the age of conflicts.

The idea of abandoning school as a kind of social institution and the recognition of school as a diverse open environment, free from any external interventions (administrative, for example) reflected the crisis phenomenon that took place in the American society and were linked to the crisis of culture in general. Thus D. Garz in his article "Shift of Paradigms and a Crisis Consciousness. About a Modern View on Pedagogical Theory" [9] felt that the education in the late twentieth century reflected the crisis state of the society, which was manifested in destroying the concepts and notions, created by the classical culture, including classical pedagogy. Postmodernism became the reflection of the ideas of the society and culture crisis, which became an answer to the frailty of classical culture (culture of Art Nouveau) unable to adapt to the person's interests to the nature of changing reality.

According to postmodernists, the modern culture and society are in a state of crisis of theoretical concepts and philosophical definitions of goals and educational ideals. This is not only a pedagogical crisis, this is also a crisis of the entire ideology of Western European culture, which never tried to understand but tried to explain, to put a human into some frame. Hence, postmodernists put forward the idea of deconstruction, demolition of the former value system, including that in the field of education. Initially, the idea of deconstruction of culture in general and education in particular occurred in the French postmodernism, in the works of J. Derrida, J. Deleuze and F. Guattari [10,11, 12]. Let's consider the ideas of this project in the field of educational philosophy in more detail.

2. Postmodern Concept of the Culture and Education Deconstruction.

Postmodernism, which appeared in 80-ies of the 20th century was a widespread cultural and philosophical movement, which ideas were developed in the spheres of culture, education, literature, politics, and economics. In philosophy, its formation was associated with the evolution of structuralism ideas; therefore, Postmodernism is often identified with Post-structuralism.

Originally, structuralism appeared as a linguistic trend (F. de Saussure). The main concept of structuralism as viewed by F. de Saussure became a language concept, which he treated as not the totality of disparate texts or signs, but as a coherent structure. The founder of philosophical structuralism, K. Lévi-Strauss,

applied the idea of structure to the notion of society and culture in general. After K. Levi-Stross and R. Barth (who understood the society and history as an evolution of the iconic structures) there started a transition to post-structuralism. One of the representatives of post-structuralism is a French philosopher M. Foucault, who began to analyze the relationship between knowledge and authorities structures in several of his works [13.14].

Primarily, M. Foucault criticized the slogan of an English philosopher F. Bacon: "knowledge is power". According to Foucault, this slogan became a determinant for the development of the Western European society, as it proclaimed the authority of knowledge, as well as of those areas of culture, which were engaged in the cultivation of knowledge meaning science and education. Knowledge is a kind of control code, modifying an individual's or human groups behavior. This code creates the external constraints of a person's thought as if putting the man's thinking into some system of concepts that are offered from the outside.

This approach to training humans is nothing else than an act of violence. Throughout history society has been creating mechanisms and social institutions, repressing human individuality (prisons, psychiatric hospitals, schools). These social institutions have become the levers of power suppressing the person, the individuality, imposing the norms and attitudes. The idea of knowledge and power culture and power being related, became an anchor of post-modern representatives after Foucault.

Based on this idea, postmodernism, represented by J. Derrida, put forward the idea of deconstruction of culture: any social structures that are able to subjugate the man's thinking must be deconstructed. The culture of Art Nouveau postmodernists metaphorically compared to a tree, in which the barrel is centered and fields of knowledge form the branches. An example of such a "tree" can be a science that transfers the ideas of rationalism, the progress of scholarship into various branches of knowledge: medicine, biology, mathematics, etc.

Education could serve an example of such a "tree" forming the model of an educated enlightened person who interacts with reality on the basis of his ideas.

According to postmodernists, this educational system perfectly explains the person's essence, but does not understand his real needs and desires. A man is always associated with the surroundings, which is a complex multiple structure of social interaction. Knowledge does not come from the outside, it is born inside—this is the slogan of the post-modernists.

The model concept of reality as a reality of intercultural, interpersonal, inter-individual interactions is expressed in the concept of "Nomadology", proposed by the French postmodernists J. Deleuze and F. Guattari in their work "The logics of sense" [15]. On the one hand, nomadology represents some concept, a "plan" of reality of inter-subjective interactions (meanings, languages, interpretations, opinions). On the other hand, nomadology is a kind of direction leading to the designing of accented, discrete, differentiated space of interaction. To explain the principle of this space

operation, the postmodernists are turning to the notion of rhizomes.

Rhizome means abandoning any structures that may centralize or arrange culture. According to postmodernists, the whole previous culture was built on a binary basis. Any centralization means submission, usurpation of consciousness which is fundamentally unacceptable for post-modernists. Secondly, any oppositions in the network rhizome structure that contains many centers shall be canceled. Each center is a center of attraction for various, heterogeneous things. In this sense, any culture and any society are not free from violence that always represents the identification of unidentified, i.e. combining many aspects to some unity.

According to J. Deleuze, any opposition (man-woman, teacher-student, past-future) give reality some frozen forms, as if "block" the active space of co-creation of the reality by many participants. Reality as a space of interactions is always intersubjective, because the meaning is a clutch point fastening the manifold of other meanings that exist here and now. In the field of education, postmodernists call for abandoning the quest for universal theory of educational content in favor of multiple discreteness. The conceptual basis for this is the deconstruction of modernist principles of education, understanding of education as a rhizome integrity.

An example of realization of a deconstruction principle can be the process of learning as an equal interaction, the contents of which are continuously changing and restructuring. If according to the modernist model, the education is carried out through a rigid hierarchical "teacher-pupil" system, in which only one component was given the presumption of power — a teacher, then according to postmodernism, such a binary link as teacher and student must be destroyed. Not coincidentally, one of the main techniques in postmodernism is the technique of overcoming and even deliberate destruction of binary oppositions. Teacher and student can no longer be considered as binary oppositions that confront each other. They are equal components of a single learning process, constructing the interaction space together. This principle can be clearly traced back to the formation of alternative schools in the United States, which combined postmodernist ideas in philosophy of education, creating the concept of the school as a special educational environment.

3. Alternative Schools in the United States: Synthesis of Ideas.

The notion of "Alternative Education" in the United States is typically used in two cases: to determine the schools for children with disabilities and to identify innovative public and private educational programs optionally available to parents and students. Alternative schools (or school by choice) which appeared in 60-90 of the twentieth century in the United States, reflected one of the key ideas of postmodernism — non-centrism, abandoning the quest for a universal theory of educational content in favor of multiplicity. They developed individual training plans and implemented a

personalized training which allowed pupils to discover new opportunities, strengths and talents in themselves, to realize their potential; to associate logical and emotional learning, to consider facts not in isolation, but as part of something general, to develop empathy; to contextualize the content of education.

Modern alternative schools are special in a way that their students, parents and teachers voluntarily participate in the life of the school according to their choice. Studies confirm the safety conditions and lack of violence, vandalism and hooliganism training at these schools. The students and their families constantly say that they feel both physical and emotional security of studying in such schools. This positive effect is largely a result of the fact that alternative schools seek to humanize and individualize the learning process through the creation of small educational institutions, which corresponds to post-modern settings on cultural morphism, subjectivity, educational continuity and multiple paradigms. Moreover, over the past few decades, some educators and politicians argue that if there are students who are vulnerable to be incapable of learning at school, it is necessary to provide an alternative education they can succeed in.

M. Raywid [16] evaluates alternative schools as the best educational reform even though they have been existing in educational sphere for several decades. These programs, starting with the regular school and ending by programs within one school or one class began its development since the late 1960-ies and grew up into an educational reform, which includes millions of disciples. Among all the current talk about restructuring schools, alternative schools are the most clear example of what any restructured school should look like. They reflect the unconditional withdrawal from programmatic, institutional and behavioral charters, hindering the improvement of the school. Moreover, many of the reforms that are now taking place in traditional schools are the reduction of high school, selection of pupils and teachers, the school turning into a community, empowering staff, authentic assessment—all these are the practices, which were first applied by alternate schools.

The concept of alternative education, which first appeared as a radical idea, as a contra-argument to the public education, became the main approach, which can be found in almost every community in the United States and, increasingly, around the world. Alternative schools were one of the most important educational movements occurring in the United States. As soon as the first alternative public schools were identified and studied in the late 1960-ies, the definitions and characteristics of the schools of choice, underpinning the whole story, remained relatively unchanged. They include:

- Voluntary participation: students, parents and teachers choose to participate in the life of the school of their choice.

- The small size of the school: school of choice (aspire to humanize and individualize the learning process through the creation of small educational institutions. The average school attendance is about 250 students for over twenty years.

- Caring teachers with high requirements; because teachers voluntarily participate in the school life by choice. They have a strong motivation to work as a dominant, both for the achievements of students and for the success of the school as a whole.

Individual training plans/personalized learning: chosen schools offer to their students, parents and teachers an opportunity to participate in specialized programs with the additional value improvement. Public school students choose to learn about the Federal Government requirements for high school graduation by participating in training programs, designed in such a way as to motivate the student to learn and to share his/her spiritual experiences, and which deals with individual needs, interests and aspirations.

- A safe learning environment: studies confirm the absence of violence, vandalism and bullying in such self – chosen schools. Students and their families constantly confirm that they feel both physically and emotionally safe in such schools.

These five key components can be found in the schools of your choice. A study, conducted during the late 1990-ies, gave a further development of these fundamental characteristics in the complex of main components that represent the current range of established school models. The following features are added:

- emphasizing one-to-one interaction between teachers and students;
- creating a supportive environment;
- allowing opportunities for a students' success relevant to the students' future;
- allowing flexibility in structure and emphasis on student decision-making.

Of course, the modern alternative schools are the result of postmodern ideas and techniques of working with education as a multifunctional environment, in which every interaction act and every subject of interaction should have equal rights in the educational process. The key strategy of postmodernism fruitfully lay on the ground of creating alternative schools that embodied the idea of individual choice, free and active participation in the process of creating educational environment, the multiplicity of educational subjects. The physical environment of a school and its authorities support teachers and solve specific problems faced by the students.

In order to learn, to prosper, employees and students should feel safe. The school environment should be practically free of drugs, violence, sexual harassment, bullying, i.e. of anything that might undermine the normative human individuality. This corresponds to the postmodern concept of renunciation of the enslaved person who obeys all restrictions and taboos that may deprive the person of self-affirmation.

4. Conclusions.

1. The idea of a school as the individual educational environment got its development in the United States in 1980-ies and was associated with the significant socio-

cultural transformations, in particular with the development of a consumers society, non-conformist youth trends, as well as with the advent of postmodernism.

2. The basic principle of the postmodern philosophy of education has become the principle of deconstruction of education as a formal element of learning. Education should take into account the students' free choice, the human right to make his own choice, aiming at creating a diverse multifunctional educational environment. The alternative schools in the United States, which reflected the principles and ideas of postmodern philosophy of education, may serve the examples of such environment.

3. A positive aspect of postmodern education is its aspiration to create an open environment: alternative schools always attract all interested sides in the decision-making process. Such schools have a different number of students; therefore, the decision must be based on the context of the situation. The stakeholders are valuable members of the educational system, and their voice is just as important as the voice of the authority representative. Thus, the approach to the school as to a formalized social institution, transferring the system of knowledge is replaced with the environmental approach in the modern system of the USA education. Here the school is seen as part of the environment; a part of the reality, which people interact with. Only from this perspective, the school can become a favourable environment for education and training.

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