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Some troubles with defining pedagogical notions

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SOME TROUBLES WITH DEFINING PEDAGOGICAL NOTIONS

The fundamental task of logic broadly understood is, among others, the elimination of vagueness, instability and indistinctness of notions and thus, indirectly, the elimination of inconsistency of thinking. What is recommended in this case refers to all other branches of science regardless of their aims. Therefore, it also refers to practical sciences where the pedagogics is placed by most methodologists. Traditionally, the term 'pedagogics' is applied to label both the science describing the range of activities aiming at forming the personalities of people in different age and in various environments, and scientific researches and itellectual reflection concerning these activities. The investigations of various educational processes resulted in the separation from pedagogics some particular domains as didactics, education theory, education history, social pedagogics, all of which bear the same name of 'educational sciences' applied alternatively with the term 'pedagogics'.

Every science has its own object, methods, its particular theorems, and first of all, its characteristic set of concepts „Systematization of concepts and terminology of a given science facilitates the systematization of its problems, theorems, principles and its organizational and methodological issues"[1]. The mentioned methodological feature of science, and particularily, the degree of their preciseness indicates the level of development of the science. Methodologists have observed some regularity concerning the language of science, namely, that comparatively little developped sciences persistently neglect the prospects opened up when the language is made precise by definitions. Pedagogics, like other sciences, has borrowed the basic stock of words from a natural language striving, however, to present them with some specified meaning; which is necessary, since natural language is imperfect and brings

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[1] F. Korniszewski, *Pedagogika na usługach szkoły*, PZWS, Warszawa 1964, p. 44.

about various logical errors as equivocality and vagueness of concepts[2]. Most sciences make use of a mixed language containing the elements of both: natural and artificial languages.

It is generally accepted that the terminology of science should meet two fundamental requirements: of precision and of translatability. The former guarantees the effectiveness of communication, the latter, the possibility of translating the whole apparatus of concepts of a given science into the language of related sciences, which enables their cooperation; in our case pedagogics with educational sociology or psychology. To satisfy the condition of translatability it is necessary to apply within one science particular terms of another one preserving their meanings, which in case of pedagogics is defficult. The development of educational theories and their practical results depend to a great extent, on the linguistic relations and also on the premisses provided to pedagogics by cooperating: psychology, philosophy, sociology, ethics, logic with methodology, and other.

The terminology of pedagogics comprises such concepts as 'family', 'school', 'peer' environments originating with sociology: principle, method, organizational form borrowed from praxiology, and the concepts referring to psychic processes, mechanisms and dispositions taken from psychology. The specific concepts of pedagogics are: 'education', 'instruction', 'teaching', 'class-lesson system', 'lecture', 'lesson' and others, especially those that appear in the formulations of education and teaching objectives.

The most frequently used concepts in the pedagogics broadly understood are 'education', 'instruction', 'teaching'. „They refer to the object of their science and therefore they can be treted as its main concepts. Hence, their specification should be the point of departure in setting the language of pedagogics and establishing an order in its terminology"[3]. The language of educational science was criticised by: A. B. Dobrowolski, G. Kerschensteiner, B. Nawroczyński, W. W. Chartres, K. Sośnicki, F. Korniszewski, H. Muszyński, M. Krawczyk and others[4]. They claimed that the language of pedagogics is an everyday language and hence the meaning of different words is arbitrary, changeable and vague, which leads to obscurity and general character of statements. The immaturity of terminology results in the substantial and

[2] J. Gregorowicz, *Błędy logiczne wypowiedzi w językach naturalnych*, Łódź 1971.

[3] F. Korniszewski, *Pedagogika...*, p. 51.

[4] See: W. W. Chartres, *Dictionary of Education, Introduction*, New York 1945; A. B. Dobrowolski, *Mój życiorys naukowy*, „Nauka Polska", z. 9, 1928; G. Kerschensteiner, *Charakter jego pojęcia i wychowania*, Warszawa 1932; Korniszewski, *Pedagogika...*; M. Krawczyk, *Relacje między procesami wychowania w węższym i szerszym zakresie*, „Ruch Pedagogiczny" 1974; H. Muszyński, *Wstęp do metodologii pedagogiki*, Warszawa; B. Nawroczyński, *Zasady nauczania* (preface I edition), Warszawa 1947; K. Sośnicki, *Potrzeby współczesnej pedagogiki polskiej*, „Nowa Szkoła" 1959, nr 10.

logical inconsistency, which makes the language of pedagogics socially little communicative. The condition of communicativity is satisfied when the language of pedagogics is clear and comprehensible not only for educational theoreticians and practicians but also for a greater ammount of people.

In the last years the educationists have been mainly concerned with the problems of the actual status of pedagogics and the possibility of its scientific development and also its influence on the educational practice. On account of this, the postulate to define concepts accurately, to specify the scientific language of pedagogics, the application and reference to definitions has been generally ignored. To the present day the opinion of Kerschensteiner (one of the chief representatives of 'work school' which emerged in the result of criticism of traditional education) remains prevalent: „for the most part, the fights for a school are on because fighters dispute about vague concepts or because some of them unite a word with a concept totally different from that which others mean. Most of educational clichés concern conceptional symbols permitting varied commentaries, since those symbols were not investigated more precisely, or because our present knowledge on the spiritual life does not suffice to define them explicitely[5].

Kerschensteiner's 'conceptual symbols', being also today the subject of disputes, are the fundamental concepts of pedagogics. Taking one of them, 'education', as an example, we shall attempt to relate the difficulties of educationists trying to define this concept.

In educational considerations there are employed concepts of 'education', 'teaching' and 'instruction' although their contents vary depending on the author and although they have not been yet so defined to satisfy at least most of them. The theoreticians applying those concepts give different preferences thus causing temporary priority of some meaning and pushing others into the background. The definitions explaining term 'pedagogics' almost always take education as an object of its investigation. Most of the controversies and disputes concern the meaning and the range of the concept. Practically each author attempts to render its sense at his discretion, often paying no attention to what has been laid down before. This plethora of approaches and ways of applications of term 'education' results in difficulties in communication eqivocality and chaos in the discussions on pedagogics. The problem is often intensified by too strong dependance of sense of the term on the casual, cultural, social, political, and religions situations although both the educational concepts and theoretical pedagogics should easily dispense with the conditions mentioned.

Since the terms naming educational processes constitute the result of a long social experience and common educational practice, and they have come to the

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[5] K e r s c h e n s t e i n e r, *Charakter...*, p. 7.

educational vocabulary from a natural language where they still function, the majority of their explications ought to have the form of real definitions: analytical (lexical) or regulating.

The theory of definition is not a coherent part of logic; much discussion about it was carried on among logicians and most of it consisted in misunderstanding. The most thoroughly discussed problem of the opposition between definitions of things (real definitions) and those of names (nominal definitions) has been finally solved by dint of differentiating the language levels.

Starting with K. Ajdukiewicz, it has been adopted that ,,real definition of a certain object is the same as the univocal characteristic of this object, which is in fact an utterance about this object saying about it something that can be said only about this one object and not about any other conforming the truth"[6]. Such a definition requires solely a relativisation to an object, while a nominal definition is always a definition of some words or expressions and obviously, a relativisation to a defined word and to a language is demanded.

Methodology distinguishes many kinds of definitions categorizing them according to manifold criteria; when one of them is the purpose for which a definition is constructed it can be either analytic or synthetic (with regulating as its special case)[7]. Analitic definition is used to provide the meaning which a given expression already possesses in a language, whereas synthetic definition serves to introduce to a language novel (i.e. not existing earlier) expressions or to give a new meaning to old ones. The latter case involves the danger of equivocality unless it is stated clearly that the old meaning is removed from a given language or theory. Synthetic definitions are also handy to obtain univocal understanding of equivocal expressions. In the event of a vague expression, regulating definition is employed; it fixes the extention of an expression discarding the designate contradictory to the defined one. By way of recapitulation it can be stated that analytic definitions describe scientific language in its actual state, while synthetic ones change, modify and supplement it. ,,The definitions of scientific notion fulfil their function only when the sense of definiens does not imply any doubts. Defining a term by means of presentation in the definiens of features whose meaning is not sufficiently clear neither for us nor for any future reader of our definition, is useless and called 'ignotum per ignotum'. Moreover ,,terms occuring in definiens must be not only comprehensible for everybody who takes part in the process of scientific exchange, but also should be understood in the most

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[6] K. A j d u k i e w i c z, *Trzy pojęcia definicji*. [in:] *Język i poznanie*, z. 2, Warszawa 1985, p. 296.

[7] K. A j d u k i e w i c z, *Logika pragmatyczna*, Warszawa 1974.

similar way by all of them"[8]. Other informations concerning the conditions of correctness of definition and its various types can be easily found in the literature[9].

There are few educationists who having noticed the drawbacks of educational language endavour to find out the causes of such a state; it seems that they consist, among others, in a variety of approaches, ways of understanding, contexts and applications of fundamental notions referring to educational processes. The literature analysis and everyday educational practice point to twofold way of treating those concepts. The term 'education' appears in 1) everyday usage which is intuitive, practical and appeals to feelings; 2) theoretical usage – conceptual, recorded in definitions; being in agreement, or not, with colloquial language. Establishing the criteria of this division gives rise to some difficulties. For such we can consider the relativisation to a language and to a meaning fixed in it. In case 1) it would be a relativisation to a natural language, in 2) – to a mixed; scientific one. In a commonly used sense, meaning renders the sense of 'education' created by practice and everyday life; in the theoretical approach meaning is determined within the framework of a particular educational theory. Commonly used sense predominates among practicians (teachers, tutors), parents, guardians, pupils but is also used by some educationists – theoreticians, regardless the theory they defend although (in this group) the theoretical approach avails.

In the educational literature there exist distinct conceptions treating 'education' in broad and narrow ways. They stem from B. Nawroczyński. K. Sośnicki, M. Krawczyk, and others who understand 'education' in a broad sense as affecting whole personality, i.e., emotional, intellectual and motivational – volitional spheres of psychic life. Treating this concept in terms of educational processes one can state that its range includes the following elements: education in narrow sense, teaching and instructing. The ideas of the authors mentioned above differ as far as the way of interpreting 'education' in a narrow sense is concerned.

In the opinion of Nawroczyński ,,we reduce the field of education by excluding all that is called teaching"[10]. Such a definition was employed by the author to elaborate the theory of teaching.

According to Sośnicki, however, ,,education in a narrow sense is an education whose object constitutes an emotional, volitional, rational and active side of a human being"[11]. The definition thus understood confines the range of education to emotional and motivational – volitional aspects.

[8] S. N o w a k, *Metodologia badań społecznych*, Warszawa 1985, p. 138.

[9] A j d u k i e w i c z, *Trzy pojęcia...*

[10] N a w r o c z y ń s k i, *Zasady nauczania...*, p. 8.

[11] K. S o ś n i c k i, *Istota i cele wychowania*, Warszawa 1964. p. 34.

Both conceptions are repudiated by Krawczyk who claims that „there is no unique process of education treted in a narrow way"[12]. This term refers to all traditionally separate branches of education: intellectual, moral, aesthetic and physical. Each of them constitutes a part of all educational activities called 'education' in a broad sense. The application of term 'education' in the context of limiting adjective denotes a narrowed range of 'education'. The development of educational sciences leads to emerging the branches with still narrower scope than that adopted for traditional types of education. There exist feedbacks between all kinds of education in narrow and broad sense. Their interactions exert influence on the formation of whole personality. Distinguishing the types of education by their scope is of great methodological and substantical value since discovering features and regularities of every „education" in a narrow sense yields in consequence more adequate image of the entire educational reality.

Considering the discussed term on the semantic level it can by noticed that, on the one hand, it denotes educational process as a sequence of acts, on the other hand, the product of this process, parallely to the twofold meaning of „science", functional and productional.

In an everyday usage people can easily discern education as a process from its results. The process of education is treated as an act of education. „To educate in a common sense of this term means to inculcate the compliance with customs and the obedience of rules, to consolidate the inclinations to proper behaviour and good acts, to stimulate the development of sense of duty, and to undertake one's moral obligations towards ouerself and others so that the educated being could join the society without any obstacles"[13]. While the result of this process is treated as a certain way of being; manners combined with knowledge, for example. X can be said to be a man of learning but not well educated (i.e. with bad manners). The theoretical approach fitting the feelings is not always available or easy. Intuitions are most often similar but conceptual approaches fixed in definitions are usually quite various, often general, more or less inconsistent.

At present, the educationists are focussed on theoretical pedagogics[14]; they postulate to extend the traditionally acknowledged domain where the process of education was organized consciously, purposefully and institutionally with spontanous education occuring in the practice of social life, with self-education, self-improvement, i.e. self-creation of a man, and with an education treated as a development of a man during his life time. Hence the very way of organizing the process of education is fundamental for determining its kinds, the domains of pedagogics.

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[12] K r a w c z y k, *Relacje...*, p. 348.

[13] R. D o t t r e n s, *Wychowanie i kształcenie*, Warszawa 1966, p. 19.

[14] See: S. P a l k a, *W stronę pedagogiki teoretycznej*, „Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego" 1987, nr 6.

The above presentation of available approaches and usages of term 'education' needs complementing. Almost all the educationists maintain that education is an object of pedagogics' investigations, thus consequently, it seems that its main aim is, among others, to explain the mechanisms of formation of human psychic.

The heterogenous stock of meanings. usages, and approaches to the term 'education' (and probably terms 'teaching' and 'instruction' are in a similar situation) is one of the reasons of the lack of precission in the conceptual apparatus of educational sciences, of educational sciences, of multitude of various definitions, some being no longer feasible, some too general, some erronous. One of the few educationists who were not satisfied with the mere criticism of the language of pedagogics but who also put forward some remedial measures is F. Korniszewski[15]. His advise is, by means of specification of meanings and the range of main educational concepts, to follow some methodological directives and to consider only those meanings that are intuitively accepted to belong to the core of the genuine structure of educational processes in order to discover their immanent features. which permits a precise differentiation of these concepts. Performing the act of determining the processes of education and its real nature, one should remember about its polarized character: on the one hand the influence of educating persons or environment on educated individuals, on the other hand, activities it those individuals and charges occuring in their mental lives and whole personalities. 'Process of education'. when defined, should be treated in a thoroughgoing but not general way.

Terms can be defined variously, however, once a definition has been adopted, it must be constantly used, which is not always the case in pedagogics. What characterizes its definition decisions is that they are rather not obligatory and sometimes even their autors neglect them.

Opinions different from traditional ones (till the begining of 19th century) emerged in the so called 'new education'. Here 'education' is not comprehended as a 'moulding' (from rigorous one to extremely liberal, see Sośnicki[16]) but as 'unconstrained growth' viewed as by E. Clapared and other representatives of psychologism[17] or as „ingrowing of an individual into a social cousciousness of species" propagated by J. Dewey. the representative of pragmatism[18]. „If education cousciously aims at a fixed point disregarding inner situations and individuality of person being educated, and wants to obtain the results. that

[15] See: K o r n i s z e w s k i. *Pedagogika...*

[16] See: S o ś n i c k i. *Istota...*

[17] See: E. C l a p a r e d. *Wychowanie funkcjonalne*, Lwów.

[18] See: J. D e w e y. *Moje pedagogiczne credo*. cz. 1. Warszawa.

are to transform entirely his individuality, then it is a rigorous moulding"[19]. This is an ample of a conditional definition. Moulding can be replaced with „unconstrained growth which is founded on the innate makings lying in an organism and psyche of a child, natural laws steering this growth"[20]. The present attempts to make the term 'education' more precise fluctuate between 'moulding' and 'uncountrained growth'.

The hitherto going considerations tend towards the realization not only by educationists but also by ordinary people, of difficulties with which the theoreticians of pedagogics deal when they try to render their language precise. Many definitions of pedagogics have been formulated, one of them states that it is a „cousciously organized social activity whose purpose is to evoke intended changes of human personality"[21]. This definition gives too general idea of the concept of „education". Another proposition comes from B. Suchodolski: „The vital thing in a contemporary education is to shape people so that they could live in the conditions of modern civilization and could meet its requirements, so that they see the possibility of a cultural development it gives them and, finally, so that they know what objectives and ways to them to chose and from where to derive the joy of life"[22]. This explanation is more minute than the previous definition because is presented in terms of the effects of educational processes (of result, not action). Although both authors use the same concept, the definienses of their definitions vary, which results from their specializations: W. Okoń treats 'education' in more general terms since as a didactician he focussed on the problems of teaching and instruction. B. Suchodolski as a theoretician of pedagogics mentions many particular features. Still another definition of 'education' is provided by R. Wroczyński, a social educationist. From his angle 'education' is a „system of actions aiming at determined educational result"[23] but it is also a social process during which a man is under the influence of an organized environment aiming at his preparation to life and at the optimum development of his personality. Commonly adopted definition of 'education' says that „it is a purposeful and intended influence on human psyche, especially of adolescents in social terms"[24]. The last expression narrows the range of 'education' to 'intended influence' thus excluding all the domains of pedagogics mentioned earlier. The definitions quoted above characterize 'education' either as a process or as its effect.

[19] Sośnicki, *Potrzeby*..., p. 16.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[21] W. Okoń. *Słownik pedagogiczny*, Warszawa 1981, p. 347.

[22] B. Suchodolski, *Wychowanie dla przyszłości*, Warszawa 1959, p. 16.

[23] R. Wroczyński, *Wprowadzenie do pedagogiki społecznej*, Warszawa 1966, p. 9.

[24] H. Muszyński, *Zarys teorii wychowania*, Warszawa 1976, p. 23.

In the educational literature we come across many more definitions of this term, their formulations being strictly related to the educational theory, within which they function. The most often 'education' is defined in terms of a process, and less its effects. The judgement of logical correctness of a definition can be made only within the framework of a given educational theory. Therefore all those definitions can be hardly related. If we compare all these ways of understanding the concept of 'education' to the scale, we should place 'rigorous maulding' on one pole and 'inconstrained growth' on the other. Most definitions of the concept of 'education' in Polish post-war pedagogics would oscilate towards 'rigorous moulding'. Lately, however, there can be noticed a turn to 'unconstrained growth' and almost to 'anti-education' which is not completely elaborated, but already popular in the Western Europe.

Being confined to the limits and subject of the paper, we can only pose the problem of difficulties connected with the precise description of educational sciences concepts. The reflections concerning this matter, and especially the specification of concept of 'education' with use of the elements of logical theory of definition, are to enable the theoreticians of education to go beyond the considerations within the framework of general pedagogics as understood now, and to solve the linguistic problems on the basis of metatheory of education and self-education of a man which, according to S. Palka[25], should be theoretical pedagogics.

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O TRUDNOŚCIACH W PRECYZOWANIU POJĘĆ PEDAGOGIKI

Język nauk pedagogicznych wielokrotnie poddawany był krytyce. Jego porządkowanie należy rozpocząć od sprecyzowania pojęć: „wychowanie", „kształcenie" i „nauczanie", uważanych za podstawowe pojęcia pedagogiczne, a dotąd nieokreślone w sposób zyskujący aprobatę przynajmniej większości pedagogów. Większość kontrowersji i sporów dotyczy przede wszystkim treści i zakresu pojęcia „wychowanie". Różnorodność ujęć i sposobów użycia tego terminu powoduje trudności w porozumiewaniu się, wieloznaczność i chaos w dyskusjach i rozważaniach pedagogicznych. Analiza literatury ze zwróceniem szczególnej uwagi na definicje omawianego pojęcia i codzienna praktyka pedagogiczna pozwoliły na przeprowadzenie próby uświadomienia wszystkim posługującym się językiem nauk pedagogicznych trudności, z jakimi borykają się pedagodzy teoretycy w precyzowaniu swego języka.

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[25] See: P a l k a, *W stronę pedagogiki*...