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## **Theory of educational forms of education: an unwritten chapter in Polish theory of education**

**Teoria form wychowania – niedopisany rozdział w polskiej teorii wychowania**

**Abstract:** In the article attention is drawn to fact that, opposite to the others extracted contents of a structure of educational process, such as educational values, aims, situations, relations and methods, in Polish theory of education the issue of an educational forms has no complex theoretical development in comparison to proposal presented in the 80s of the XX century by Heliodor Muszyński. The article discusses this approach, indicates its weaknesses and limitations, then presents arguments which supports the need of development of mentioned issue in the frames of educational theory understood as a subdiscipline of contemporary educational sciences. At the end the article proposes some possibility of direction for such development.

**Keywords:** theory of education, theory of a structure of educational process, educational action, contents of a structure of educational process, forms of education, theory of educational forms.

### **Introduction**

According to Polish pedagogical terminology the theory of education in the traditional sense, being one of the general subdisciplines of pedagogy (Tchorzewski, 2002, p. 10, 37), seeks to reconstruct, as well as provide an accurate conceptual reflection or depiction of the general structure, i.e. one which applies to all or to a specific proportion of the phenomena and objects that may legitimately be described as educational (cf.: Nowak, 2008, p. 101).

In particular, the goal is to arrive at such a characterization with respect to phenomena or objects that are either basic, elementary and crucial in that domain or, alternatively, the most representative or, finally, the most comprehensive, the „fullest”. The phenomenon of education can be categorized in various ways. However, the most commonly referred to category is the educational process, which is considered to be fundamental or at least one of the key general and universal manifestations of education. This process involves various elements such as activity, relation, event, encounter and act. Therefore, the processuality of any concrete education is an essential aspect of the educational phenomenon.

Thus, the theory of education may be seen – whether in its entirety or in significant part – as a theory of the overall structure of the educational process and its individual components, their properties, their interrelationships and the factors which substantially influence, define and shape them. As long as it does not increase the risk of misunderstandings resulting from the partial homonymy involved in the usage of „theory of education” (in a two-fold sense, i.e. a subdiscipline of pedagogy and a theoretical description and explanation of the phenomenon of education, whereby the semantic scopes of these designations are not identical or interchangeable; instead, despite the same wording, the relation between them is hierarchical and, and in some interpretations, intersectional), it would be appropriate to define the theory of the structure of the process of education as a macro-theory of education.

The manner of presenting the scope of inquiry and achievements of the theory of education in line with the approach outlined above may be found in a substantial majority of publications which, over the last several decades, were used in Poland to introduce persons studying pedagogy to the theory of education as a subdiscipline in the conglomerate of education sciences. However, the focus on the Polish publishing market is firstly due to the fact that in many linguistic traditions – unlike in Polish – no terminological and, consequently, source-related semantic distinction is adopted between this special part of education which is focused on personal formation, especially formation of individual attitudes and certain other educational phenomena. Secondly, the general circumstances of disciplinisation of pedagogy (Hejnicka-Bezwińska, 2008, p. 79, p. 133 et seq.) put together with historical, cultural and geopolitical special circumstances explains – at least in part – into the historical development patterns of the internal structures of this scientific discipline in Poland, with subdisciplines such as general pedagogy, history of education and theory of education (Jakubiak, 1992).

### **Theory of the structure of the educational process: its substance and significance indicators**

For reasons that will be explained a little later, the theory of the structure of the educational process developed by Heliodor Muszyński has been adopted here as the point of reference for further deliberations. As its chief education theorist, Muszyński was a prominent representative of the socialist pedagogy, which was verified by history as a degenerative – or perhaps inherently degenerate – research programme (see Hejnicka-Bezwińska, 1996, pp. 14-15). The same must, therefore, be said of its essential part, i.e. the theory of education, which was mainly formulated by Muszyński. However, historical hindsight makes it possible to look at such a failed research programme or theory simply as a theory, without bias or negative emotions. After all, the prime indicator of the value of a theory is epistemological one. It does not consist of conformity with political or social needs, with the expectations and demands of those in power, or with someone's religious or ideological convictions; the question is whether it is in keeping with reality, with the facts, or with its trueness. With the assertion that a true theory would be the best one agree even those thinkers who otherwise claim that this value cannot be attained by a theory, and that the system of references against which the propositions are confronted can in no way be the reality to which they refer (see Hajduk, 2002).

To determine whether the theory of the educational process structure is valuable, we must first ask what evidence could prove or disprove the theory's accuracy. A pedagogical theory of education, understood as a theory of the structure of the educational process, may either be a theory of educational activity or a theory of the educational environment. To simplify somewhat it may be said that the former approach was represented by such theorists of education such as H. Muszyński, as well as Karol Kotłowski, Janusz Tarnowski and Mieczysław Łobocki. On the other hand, Kazimierz Sośnicki, Bogdan Nawroczyński, Romana Miller and Zygmunt Mysłakowski may be considered representatives of the second current. It would seem expedient to narrow down the problem area of mentioned question to the class of cases examined here, thus facilitating a reasonable answer the question. Hence, what kind of facts fall within the scope of a pedagogical theory of the structure of the educational process that qualifies as a theory of educational activity? It could concern the structure of activities undertaken as part of the actual educational processes. Educational activities are interpreted by most contemporary education theorists as intentional and more or less specifically planned (Borowska, 1992, pp. 16-17). Consequently, what comes to the fore

is the most important dimension of compatibility between the theoretical description of the structure of the educational process and the realm of facts (see Misztal, 1998).

Does that fundamental aspect involve the compliance of the plan devised on the basis of such theoretical description with the actual subsequent activity, or is it rather the accuracy of the theoretical description relative to the devised plan? In the first case, we would rather be dealing with the matter of trueness of the plan, although the very application of the category of trueness to a design, plan or intention – albeit tenable – does give rise to reservations. Hence, the trueness of a theory could only be invoked in such a case as something indirect, subject to a number of additional conditions. The foremost of such conditions would include the compatibility of the prepared plan with the theoretical description of the educational process, i.e. the aforementioned second possibility regarding the concordance between theoretical propositions and the realm of facts to which they pertain. There is still a third possibility: to seek a correspondence between the empirical reality and the theory of the structure of the educational process in the context of the educational activities undertaken as part of the process or in connection with it for its sake. Specifically, that possibility would centre around the congruity between the theoretical description and actual activity. However, this option completely overlooks the role of planning an action, as a result of which one would not be able to distinguish educational activities in the pedagogical sense from any other activities.

Therefore, the correspondence between the theoretical description and the more or less detailed plan for the implementation of educational activity seems the best device to determine the concordance between the assertions of the theory and the sphere of facts with regard to the pedagogical theory of the structure of the educational process. Given the question of trueness, the confrontation is unusual enough to warrant careful consideration of what it might consist of. At first glance, it would seem obvious that it does not consist of the theoretical claims of the theory being accurately reflected in the design of activities. Indeed, that correspondence certainly cannot consist precisely of that. Nevertheless, despite appearances to the contrary, it concerns something quite closely related to that issue. What it must concern in one way or another – there being no other possibility in sight – is the matter of the correspondence between the theoretical description of the structure of the educational process and the assumptions about such structure which are actually taken into account in the planning of educational activities.

The only what one should to do, someone might say, is to ask the persons who plan educational activities whether they adopt such assumptions. In fact, something like this is very complicated. Firstly, it is impossible to pose such questions without presuming in advance that the person in question is the one who plans educational activities. Or, to put it slightly differently, without assuming that the activities planned by that person will be educational. In this manner, one will, in part, obtain information that has already been surmised in advance in any case. Secondly, it is impossible to ask about the assumptions concerning the structure of education in the context of someone's planned activities without drawing on any of one's own assumptions about such a structure.

It follows that while such a method of collecting information empirically to determine the alignment of theoretical description with the actually devised plans of activity is most likely useful and helpful, prior theoretical assumptions, inevitably derived from some other sources, are necessary. One of those, it seems, is somewhat aprioristic – analytical anyway (Borowska, 1991, pp. 17-18) – as it involves what must necessarily feature in thinking oriented towards planning educational activity, meaning categories such as the goal and, consequently, the value and the method, because one cannot conceive of an action in complete isolation from how it is to be implemented. The situation is another category that must appear when envisaging educational actions, as it is impossible to design activities situated nowhere that engage no one and take place in some timeless setting. There is also the relationship because educational activity, or any activity that matters, cannot be thought of without presuming an „object” at which they should be directed. Finally, yet another category of the kind is the form because an activity must proceed „somehow”, have some general, formal characteristics, and be „any”.

All the above categories apply in principle to every activity, whereas educational theory pertains after all to educational actions, which is why – considering their planning – one should identify those types and aspects of the specifically indicated characterizations that demonstrate educational significance and remain coherently interlinked. It should also be noted that a plan is always a model that necessarily omits a considerable proportion of circumstances since they are less important but simultaneously over-complicate the matter, obscure the picture and divert attention. Plans are developed with the intention of being implemented, so excessive detail and inconsistencies serve neither ease of understanding nor applicability. Therefore, besides the need to take into account the requisite – i.e. indispensable – structural

components of thinking geared towards action planning and the need to highlight their most crucial educational significance (Nowak, 2008, p. 50), the compatibility of the general theory of the educational process structure with its sphere of facts, and thus the design of educational activities, is also determined by its usefulness for this purpose. However, in the case in question, this factor is meaningful only in conjunction with those mentioned above. After all, next to trueness, epistemological assets that theories may have include explanatory scope and power, internal cohesion and external coherence, transparency, quality of justification and finally, usefulness (Borowska, 1991, p. 19; Hajduk, 2002, pp. 179 et seq.).

### **An expanded theory of educational forms as the missing module in the macro-theory of the educational process structure**

After the research programme known as socialist pedagogy had exhausted itself or, if someone prefers, collapsed, the matter of individual components of the structure of the educational process included in the theory by that author would be addressed by later theorists of education, who modified, developed and updated them in their works. Forms of education, in a broad sense, represent an exception in this respect, as the issue has not been addressed. It is for this reason that the general theory of educational forms, understood as a module within the theory of the structure of the educational process, was named here in the title as „an unwritten chapter”.

Today, various studies, as well as applicable laws (Act, 2016, Article 34; Regulation, 2017), employ the term „forms of education” in a sense that has nothing to do with the meaning originating from the theory of education. On the other hand, a number of eminent contemporary Polish theorists of education, authors of works which present the achievements of this sub-discipline to students of pedagogy, engage creatively with other issues in such studies, either choosing not to address educational forms (Borowska, 1991; Górniewicz and Petrykowski, 1991; Kubiak-Szymborska and Zajac, 2002; Rajpert, 1998), or concurring almost fully with the pertinent proposals by H. Muszyński, which they provide with only minor modifications that do not undermine any of the premises underlying that former approach (Górniewicz, 1996, pp. 64-67; Petrykowski, 2003, pp. 94-98; Petrykowski, 2005, pp. 107-111). The scarce deviations in that respect are two alternative proposal expressed by M. Nowak and Mieczysław Łobocki (Frączek, 2022, pp. 202-204; Zarzecki, 2012, pp. 89-102). Łobocki consistently equated forms with educational techniques: more detailed and concretized instantiations of educational methods (Łobocki, 1990, 2004, p. 233). He distinguished such

techniques (forms) as: exchange of opinions, dramatization-based, positive and negative reinforcement, non-verbal interactions, and organizing leisure time. It is not quite clear what criteria informed such a classification, which gives the impression of being indivisible as the various types of forms intersect, whereby, in principle, each is coupled with another. Elsewhere (1999, p. 93 et seq.), the author advances a slightly different classification of educational forms, but simultaneously underlines the ambiguity of the category itself, the vagueness of the theoretical distinction from methods of education as well as the conventionality, a kind of provisionality and arbitrariness of typologisation, including his own.

Also M. Nowak approaches educational forms in conjunction with methods but finds it expedient to differentiate between the notions of forms and techniques of education, although he does not clarify the rationale behind it (Nowak, 2008, p. 454). Analogously to Łobocki (1990), Nowak (2008, pp. 454-461) distinguishes verbal, non-verbal and ad hoc forms of exposure. Evidently, such a division is not uniform: the distinction between verbal and non-verbal forms of exposure is clearly disjunctive by virtue of the logical laws of non-contradiction and excluded middle, whereas the relation of the two forms to ad hoc exposure is not disjunctive: any ad hoc exposure not only may, but must, have a verbal or non-verbal form. Moreover, planning ad hoc action may only take place in a certain limited sense and short-term perspective.

The circumstance outlined above is not the only element which validates the earlier observation concerning limited interest among theorists in exploring the issue of educational forms. One could name at least another one. Specifically, the other components identified within the structure of the educational process have been found to merit more in-depth research and, in most instances, attempts to develop relatively separate „mid-range” theories (see Hejnicka-Bezwińska, 2008, p. 417) in which they constitute a core issue (Ablewicz, 2003; Chałas, 2005; Cichoń, 1996; Dejnarrowicz, 1981; Filek, 2001; Frączek, 2002; Jeziorański, 2022; Konarzewski 1982; Ostrowska, 2017; Paszkiewicz, 1998; Piotrowski, 2019; Sobczak, 2000; Wróbel, 2014; Żelazkowska, 2019). In contrast, no such attempts have been made with respect to the forms of education.

As noted above, the category of form can be analytically identified in each instance of thinking oriented towards planning an activity and – necessarily – in each specific case of actual action. This is a ubiquitous category when experience is reflected on and articulated in utterances or described (Brykczyński, 1999, p. 65). The question is whether the notion of forms of

education is at all required in order to describe and explain the dependencies within the structure of this process as well as to plan educational activity. Therefore, one has to concur that any activity undertaken in an educational situation must necessarily have some form. This indicates that the problem of the forms of education probably sometime is important.

**The problematic approach to educational forms in the conception of the structure of the educational process by H. Muszyński**

To be exact, it must be noted that the very concept of forms of education in contemporary Polish pedagogy should be attributed to K. Sośnicki (1973, pp. 57-65) and his critical reconstruction of the conception by the German pedagogue Oswald Kroh, in which he drew attention to the semantic contiguity between the category used by the latter author and the prevalent understanding and scope of the concept of educational methods. But H. Muszyński devoted more attention to the issue in question than any other Polish education theorist. However, the text in which he devotes particular attention to educational forms (Muszyński, 1977, pp. 233-307) demonstrates that the author is hardly consistent when using this notion and its consequent distinctions. In fact, this is understandable, as it is extremely difficult to describe the complexity and dynamics of human activity without employing such terms as relation, situation or form, or using them only in a single, strictly defined and reserved context. Even in contemporary logic, the notion of form is encumbered with ambiguity (Brykczyński, 1999, p. 65). This does not change the fact that Muszyński's position on this issue loses some clarity as a result. Nevertheless, although his basic definition of educational form, i.e. „a given process of education assumes the form  $F_1$  in view of the type of activity  $D_1$ —if it involves situations in which the educatees demonstrate activity  $D_1$ ” (Muszyński, 1977, p. 270), is a postulative rather than a classical definition, it does not raise any objections with regard to clarity. Legitimate doubts arise when the premises of the definition adopted in Muszyński's conception are elaborated.

The most general of such reservations may be formulated as follows: if it is assumed that the theory of educational process is a theory of the actions or activities of the educators – a position expressly stated by H. Muszyński (1977, pp. 226-227) – then the actions of the other subject in the educational relationship cannot belong to the same type of components in the structure of the educational process as the former, but should rather be approached as elements which are potentially associated or correlated with them in a particular fashion. In other words, indeed, such a thing as forms of activity

of the subjects to whom educational activities are addressed certainly exist and can be more or less precisely defined, expressed, and characterized, but it does not seem justified to refer to them using the notion of educational forms. After all, the latter should originally characterize educational activities as opposed to what may, in simplified terms, be called responses to such activities or effects they produce.

Meanwhile, the author asserts as follows (Muszyński, 1977, p. 270): „The forms of education that are possible in particular situations are as numerous as the types of activity which may occur in a given situation”. This raises the question of whether it is possible to devise such a catalogue and its criteria with adequate precision and due justification. One can hardly resist the impression that the assortment of objective varieties of educational forms distinguished by the author – which are characterized by indicating the type of activity and set apart from organizational forms – relies on arbitrary grounds and that more than one alternative list of the kind could be suggested. Moreover, there are certain specific activities which can hardly be unequivocally assigned to any of the objective educational forms specified by the researcher (Muszyński, 1977, pp. 275 et seq.). The author himself undermines the significance of such a typological account of educational forms in the following assertion:

There are no human activities that do not involve ideological, social, moral, cultural or aesthetic aspects, i.e. those that are relevant from the standpoint of education. (...) There are no activities which do not express human attitudes towards certain values. If, therefore, the specifically oriented dispositions of an individual can manifest themselves in everything they do, it evidently follows that they can be shaped in all their actions (Muszyński, 1977, p. 273).

Given earlier remarks, as well as the above quote in particular, it is doubtful whether such a catalogue of educational forms is useful in the context of planning educational activities. With such an approach to the varieties of those forms, the degree of generality of the theory appears highly uneven. More specifically, in the case of educational goals, it is characteristic for the statements to become gradually more detailed, in line with the increasing detail of the varieties of goals, whereas gradual progression is lacking in educational forms. A proposal to remedy this shortcoming was put forward by Andrzej M. de Tchorzewski (2018, pp. 139-140), who replaced the division into objective and organizational forms of education with a distinction between their environmental, objective and subjective models. However, the types

identified within these models are consistent with Muszyński's approach, except for the environmental model, which, in turn, appears to be poorly integrated with the other two.

Occasionally, the author identifies educational forms with the operational goals of education while stressing that from the standpoint of education, „only certain aspects of the actions of the educatees” are truly relevant (Muszyński, 1977, p. 273). This would suggest that one cannot, however, equate between the forms of activity undertaken by the educatees which have been deliberately initiated by the educator and forms of education, since only certain aspects of such activities carry educational significance, indirect though they may be. However, the educational significance of two specific activities that may be categorized as the same type of activity, e.g. play-and-entertainment (Muszyński, 1977, p. 287), may differ far more than two other activities belonging to a distinct type. Thus, if the forms of education are to take into account the content or substance of the educational aspect that is common to various activities – which, incidentally, would roughly correspond to the Aristotelian view of the form (Facca, 2016) – then classifying them in terms of the type of activity undertaken by the subject is ineffective and thus pointless. Perforce, the same applies to the varieties distinguished within the second typology of forms of education proposed by H. Muszyński and other authors, i.e. organizational forms which encompass individual, team and collective modalities (Muszyński, 1977, pp. 290 et seq.). Although this division seems more legitimate and less arbitrary than the one just discussed, its weakness lies in the fact that it partially overlaps and in some way „resonates” with the typology of educational methods, leading to complications that may adversely affect the planning of educational activities. These complications may stem, e.g. from the need to differentiate between educational situations in which the educator plans to arrange using one of the individual educational methods to initiate an individual form of education and situations in which the form is to be collective, whereas the method is individual.

### **Typology of forms of education: suggested modifications**

It may be worthwhile to consider replacing the aforementioned typology of organizational educational forms with a simpler one that distinguishes between direct and mediated forms of educational exposure. Strictly speaking, each structurally elaborate attempt at educational action is directed towards a particular subject using some kind of mediation; most often, that mediation component consists of a system of symbols, which tends to be so

essential as to become imperceptible to the participants in the interaction, „transparent” as it were. Nevertheless, in a proportion of cases, there are significant and quite conspicuous additional mediations, such as a group of other subjects (e.g. peers), mass communication media, technological solutions, cultural texts or official normative and organizational acts in the shape of, e.g. rules and regulations. The presence of this kind of mediation needs to be taken into account in the planning of educational activities in a slightly different manner than when the educational event is supposed to be more direct and personal. Therefore, one has to allow for the relevant difference as far as the structure of the educational process is concerned. Here, the component represented by the concept of educational forms offers a valid locus to do so in the context of this structure.

On the other hand, the aforementioned difficulties in the context of the theory of the structure of educational process involving so-called objective forms of education could be mitigated by replacing the catalogue of their individual varieties with a less extensive typology focusing on the nature of the mode in which the educator attempts to shape educational exposure and achieve unity of the educational activity with experience – both his own and the pupil’s (Filek, 2001, pp. 85-87). The conceptions concerning this dimension of educational activity have been functioning for quite a long time in the pedagogical literature, usually referred to as educational styles (Levin, 2011; Liberska, 2007, p. 56; Walker, 2008) or styles of educational direction (Łobocki, 2004, p. 154). H. Muszyński also perceived a connection between that issue and the question of educational forms, discussing such techniques of applying forms as imposed, institutionally given, culturally, customarily, or organizationally given, and finally determined by the autonomy granted to the educatees (Muszyński, 1977, pp. 303-304). However, the matter was devoted marginal attention compared with other aspects pertaining to educational forms.

Although the very notion of educational style does not fit in well with the theory of the structure of the educational process, but the principal varieties of styles mentioned in the literature, i.e. authoritative, democratic and liberal, or eventually it could be defined in such terms like shaping, liberating and concessive one (Górniewicz, 1996, pp. 19-21) seem to aptly express a certain important and inevitable aspect inherent in educational activities; moreover, that aspect may be designed and requires to be taken into account. Importantly, the proposed division appears complementary to the one outlined above, which involves direct and mediated forms of educational activity. Both with direct and mediated interaction, the educator may

seek to base it on an authoritative, liberal, or democratic substrate, a peculiar backbone of the educational interaction. Inevitably, one of these will either be chosen or shaped by other factors. This inevitability suggests that relating the presented typology precisely to the category of form is valid. Moreover, except in extreme cases, it does not usually happen that the backbone of educational interaction between the same subjects remains the same, always being authoritative or liberal, for instance.

## Conclusions

In contrast to the other components distinguished in the theory of the structure of the educational process, educational forms have so far not been the object of extensive inquiry among education theorists. H. Muszyński was one to devote the most attention to this issue, elaborating on it within the framework of a research programme that – as a whole – has degenerated and collapsed. A closer examination of this part of his theoretical conception leads to the conclusion that it raises a number of doubts and reservations that are independent of the circumstances surrounding the collapse of that research programme. It may be beneficial to revisit the topic of educational forms and update it within the context of contemporary theories of education. Adding this information to the Polish theory of education can help develop a more comprehensive „mid-range” pedagogical theory. As suggested above, one could also consider the benefits of drawing on the concepts of educational styles functioning in pedagogy.

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