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Zbigniew Kwieciński

The Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń (Poland)
University of Lower Silesia in Wrocław (Poland)

Education towards difference and inclusion. Two types of discourses —to positive pedagogy*

ABSTRACT. The main goal of this article is description of two educational discourses pertaining to differences, their acceptance and eradication or alleviation. The first is the special needs pedagogy, which has seen a dispute between the enthusiasts of institutional and social integration of the disabled with people, communities and institutions dominated by those within a given norm. The second is characteristic of the critical pedagogy and sociology—concerns people and social groups who are culturally and socially excluded and marginalised, both overtly and covertly.

KEYWORDS: inclusion, special needs pedagogy, critical pedagogy, positive pedagogy

Inclusion is a category that stands in opposition to exclusion, marginalization and segregation with regard to people who diverge from the health, cultural, social norms or not fulfilling normative expectations or institutional and social ideals (schools included).

Educational discourses pertaining to differences, their acceptance and eradication or alleviation can be divided into two trends (cf. Slee, 2009). One of them—the special needs pedagogy—has seen a dispute between the enthusiasts of institutional and social integration of the disabled with people, communities and institutions dominated by those within a given norm. The second trend embraces specialist care of people with different kinds of disabilities, health deficiencies or life threats.

The second discourse—characteristic of the critical pedagogy and sociology—concerns people and social groups who are culturally and socially excluded and marginalised, both overtly and covertly. These

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practices are socially justified, for example, in cases of social selections in education. They can also be felt as unjust and likened to the unavailability of resources ensuring decent standard and quality of life.

Despite the fact that processes of social exclusion experienced by people of low cultural and social capitals operate in a spectrum of domains, the high social cost of exclusion, tendency to be reiterated cross-generationally, and the fact that they have been well-researched, there is a need for a stronger discourse of educational inclusion of marginalised groups. Globally, as well as more locally—in Poland—the main types of special needs pedagogies are medical, psychiatric, guardianship, charity, pastoral, humanistic, and emancipatory.

Critical pedagogy, sociology and anthropology along with critical social philosophy provide reliable and in-depth diagnoses of social inequities within educational settings. Moreover, they are a case for positive pedagogy programmes and systematically broaden the catalogue of groups likely to be marginalised, including the social MAJORITY, i.e. women (cf. Chmura-Rutkowska et al., 2013; Gromkowska-Melosik, 2011). Polish social pedagogy, initiated by Helena Radlińska and recently creatively reread by Lech Witkowski, has had an extensive tradition in this respect. Tomasz Szkudlarek school of philosophical and anthropological pedagogy has had a special impact on the critical pedagogy.

Within this paradigm, for instance, Basil Bernstein demands that every person is granted the possibility of exercising their rights to a full development, building positive social relations, and political participation. He does that on grounds of widely known research into the reproduction of cultural differences determined by the environment of primary socialisation and enculturation. Here, education (also called “pedagogy”) is understood as a lifelong developmental effort of an individual to learn from all possible sources and to build their identity.

A similarly broad structural and functional programme of preventing social inequity in accessing culture and decent life has been proposed by a Swedish sociologist, Goran Therborn (2006). According to him there are three types of unjust differences in the social standing of individuals. These are: vital (concerning health and life), existential (concerning freedom, respect, relations, outlook, and identity), and resources (concerning income, wealth, standard and quality of life). Within mechanisms of creating inequality, such as distancing, exclusion, hierarchisation, and exploitation, he has distinguished causative entities and factors from the systemic dynamisms and functions. Therborn has pointed to

types of equality mechanism, such as (1) catching-up (early recognition of communities at threat, compensatory capacitation, affirmative action, field-evening, counselling and encouragement institutions, actions boosting the autonomy of the excluded), (2) inclusion (entitlement, facilitating migration, demanding and the fight for observing human rights), (3) resources redistribution (taxes, politics and social care).

Systemic application of strategies and resources aiming at reducing acute and unjust differences, however, is neither common nor easy to accept in contemporary democratic states. Indeed, democracy is funded on two pillars: freedom and equality which are in constant and inevitable conflict (John Rawls).

Emphasising freedom (over equality) leads to justifying any differences and treating them as natural. Their reconciliation is possible as part of voluntary help and acts of mercy. This takes place within the neoliberal system, within which education undergoes the rules of the free market, as a systemic rule of self-regulation. In a weaker form, the dominance of freedom results in elitism and entrusting the enlightened upper classes with leading the nation towards prosperity. Here, in the republican reality, unequal access is simply petrified, along with difficult access to the high quality of education.

Emphasising equality (over freedom) in liberal systems leads to making rights and structural access equal. This also concerns all levels of education, roles, and occupations, irrespective of the social and ethnic background, gender or race. This, however, does not entail systemic interventions in the case of exercising the right to equal chances in advancing one's social status or escaping the reproduction of poverty and exclusion.

According to J. Rawls, fully-fledged democracy—in fact, social democracy—strongly emphasising the rule of social equality, causes systemic interventions with the view of preventing unjust differences right at the outset, on one's way towards prosperous adulthood and compensating for social and cultural exclusion.

Backing-up J. Rawls' arguments are comparative studies coming from the field of social medicine (carried out globally by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, 2010). In their recent book, under the telling title *The spirit level. Why greater equality makes societies stronger*, the authors have shown that the greater the differences in income levels and living standards, the greater are the number of the poorly educated with restricted access to culture. Moreover, these differences correlate with

poor social relations (saturated with mistrust, and hostility), higher numbers of mentally ill and addicted to drugs, higher level of obesity, more pregnancies among teenagers, higher crime levels and imprisoned people, and poorer social mobility within one society.

In contemporary Poland, John Rawls' or Richard Wilkinson's and Kate Pickett's arguments are not only not obvious but might bring about associations with the negative experiences of the alleged communism, abandoning socially and educationally beneficial structural solutions from the Polish People's Republic.

If we have a careful look at the typology of the contemporary democracy as seen by John Rawls, or at experiences of professor Nicholas Caritat—a protagonist of a book by Steven Lukes (2003)—a tourist traveling through democratic countries after he escaped an authoritarian state, we can quite easily state that Poland has been attempting to incorporate all these characteristics at once for the last quarter of century (along with demons of the authoritarian past and the long compromised catchphrases of national closure and xenophobic distancing from anything different). As a country we have been drifting quite long on this astonishing convergence of political systems. We may arrive at the same conclusion having read the review of the contemporary types of democracy and the education systems functioning within them, carried out by Aharon Aviram in his book titled *Navigating through the storm. Reinventing education for postmodern democracies* (Aviram, 2010).

Nobody and nothing can free us—educators—from seeing educational institutions as obliged to provide everybody—irrespective of their non-normativity—with key competences of access to the symbolic culture, which is fundamental to ensuring prosperous life, respect for oneself, good social relations and taking part in political decisions.

Exclusion, often within education and through education, concerns a spectrum of developmental possibilities, partial developmental disabilities, access to good social relations, achieving higher social and professional standing, access to culture and in political decisions and citizen activity.

From this perspective, inclusion seems to be a moral imperative, a political rule, good quality of public discourse, transparent evaluation criteria, open-mindedness with regard to differences and types of orientation, equal treatment of all non-normativity, removing barriers, negative reaction to hate speech, xenophobia and marking non-normativity, creating the possibility and institution of another chance, constructive

opposition to depriving people of specialist care and leaving weak and helpless people to their own devices. At the same time, however, inclusion cannot be synonymous with annexation, appropriation, granting supposed autonomy, depriving one of independence; also, it cannot mean accepting attempts of social domination of the marginalised groups.

Should education for inclusion mean—as Bernstein wants—supporting each individual towards their full developmental possibility, and one of the meanings of ‘inclusion’ is ‘integrity’ (see European union convergence policy), making development consistent also concerns intrapsychic areas.

Ken Wilber’s model of integral human mind (Wilber, 2006) functioning and the development of awareness levels helps us to understand that one individual can find themselves at different levels of development related to thinking, intuition, emotions, needs, values, and motivation. Furthermore, people also differ with respect to the scope and activity level of the four quarters of mind (related to corporeality and ego, social relations, culture and environment).

Moreover, people of different awareness levels coexist next to one another: starting with archaic (focused on survival), magical (focused on loyalty towards a tribe under the protection of gods), through traditional awareness (fighting for a territory and religion) modern awareness (preferred nowadays competition for success), finishing with postmodern awareness (community-based and focused on tolerating differences), and integrating, global, transcendent awareness types.

Within the domain of education, one cannot ignore the need to balance these intrapsychic structures and the need to establish good relations between people of different awareness levels. There is also a need for integrated attitudes that also concern divergent stances towards past and future. Some applications of this amazing conception by Wilber can be noticed in Poland (e.g. Kielar, 2012; Kielar & Kop, 2012; Przyborska, 2013; Błajet, 2012).

Since the idea of ‘convergence policy’ has been mentioned, we need to take the question of cross-cultural open-mindedness and mobility on board. Polish borders remain open and Poles are said to be remarkably mobile and present globally, especially in the Western European countries. How are they prepared for these migrations? What is the quality of education that they receive? What do they learn amid foreigners and from them? On their return, what are the behaviour patterns, lifestyles, acquired habitus they come back with? How do we, Poles, receive for-

eigners? What kind of education do we offer them and what do they learn from us? What are our relations with our neighbours? Do we know them and, if yes, to what degree do we understand them? Can we cooperate with them and discover distinctness of historical memory? Can we build dialogue despite differences?

The other type of critical pedagogical discourse of inclusion is the pedagogy of caring to introduce students to rules and competences of full, prosperous life (as could be seen in the works of Bernstein, 2000, and Therborn, 2006). Here, invaluable is the research and publications which reconstruct and revitalise complex pedagogical systems from the past (e.g. Andrukowicz, 2006; Szulakiewicz, 2011; Witkowski, 2013), but also successful bold educational experiments (e.g. Garbula, 2010; Urlińska, 2007), touch upon the issue of sense, self-fulfilment and joy of life (e.g. Michalski, 2011; Murawska, 2008; Wajsprych, 2011; Żywczok, 2011). These important research themes are taken up and developed too rarely.

Fortunately, within the positive pedagogy the pedagogy of talent and creativity, encouraging activation and social inclusion of talented and creative people, but also the development of individual's specific skills within regular state-funded schools fares well (e.g. Krasoń, 2005; Limont, 2005; Szmidt & Modrzejewska-Świgulska, 2013). An emerging, and already visible trend, is the anthropological pedagogy (e.g. Cervinkova & Gołębiak, 2013).

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The Polish Pedagogical Association was established over 32 years ago thanks to the massive opposition to and rejection of the previous political system. The Association headquarters was located in Gdańsk. It was set up with the hope of enabling unconstrained discussions on the best educational solutions in the independent, democratic Poland among educators ignoring institutional and generational divisions. Hence one can witness our longstanding involvement in the analysis of reciprocal relations between the dynamics of political system change and possible educational changes. The substantial systemic changes that took place over the last quarter have not resulted in defining a clear trajectory to be pursued *per se*, including the transparent development of beneficial education on all levels. Perhaps, the trajectory of educational development can be built only on the bottom up basis and hence the emphasis on pedagogical research on positive educational visions and experiences. Naturally, including the ones concerning differences and inclusion.

The most recent book by Dariusz Kubinowski titled *Rozwój badań jakościowych w pedagogice polskiej na przełomie XX i XXI wieku* [The development of qualitative research in Polish pedagogy at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries] (Kubinowski, 2013) draws our attention to about 40 thousand successful research projects by educators involved in different types of humanist empirical investigations rejecting the positivist paradigm. Therefore we can look at the future of humanist pedagogy with cautious optimism as opposed to, for instance, psychology which seems to be trapped in the positivist paradigm. This is preferred by the 'corrupted science' (Krimsky, 2006), the competitive research funding system, where discovery and comprehension do not seem to matter; what matters, though, is counting... benefits.

It might be that POSITIVE HUMANIST PEDAGOGIES are our good perspective...

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