

Interaction Between Philosophy of Education and Teaching Practice

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ABSTRACT

The article attempts to analyse the interaction between philosophy of education and teaching practice. Such area of learning as “philosophy of education” is defined, genesis and dynamics of practice as universals of human existence are traced; such concepts as “practice”, “teaching practice” are analysed in view of philosophy of education; the role and position of teaching practice as linking system in the theory of knowledge are grounded. The main conclusion of the conducted research is the proof that philosophy of education in its new interpretation is not only theoretical understanding of foundations and manifestations of educational process, but also practice, direct implementation of educational theoretical groundwork in everyday life. Using historical and philosophical analysis, the author showed that philosophy of education implements adopted philosophical (world view) paradigms in various teaching practices.

KEYWORDS

Philosophy of education, philosophy, education science, philosophy of teaching, practice, teaching practice, category of practice

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Introduction

Various authors understand “philosophy of education” itself differently. For instance, N.P. Pischulin understands philosophy of education as “philosophy of spirituality” [1], V.V. Chistyakov uses the term “philosophy of teaching”, as educational thought “never existed without philosophical reflection [2]; V.M. Rozin also calls “philosophy of teaching” “theoretical pedagogics”, whereas E.N. Gusinsky understands “philosophy of education” as multiplicity of philosophical disciplines, because it is “pluralistic” in its essence [3,4].

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Studies in the field of philosophy of education also mention various in wording, but practically the same in meaning definitions of the aim of philosophy of education:

- considering “how human mental and moral development happens in cultural environment and how the system of education can (and must) further this process» (E. Gusinsky, Yu. Turchaninova) [5];
- “understanding educational issues” (S. Schitov) [6];
- “discussing ultimate grounds of teaching activities and experience and developing methods of creating new educational institution” (V. Rozin) [7].

Philosophy of education as a special area of scientific work appeared in the 20th century in English-speaking countries and, first of all, in the USA. Inspirational work of J. Dewey (1859-1952) stimulated the acceptance of “philosophy of education” as mandatory measurement of competent and responsible practice in education. Before Dewey nobody had been proving so hard the need of teaching practice based on philosophical principles. None of the philosophers before and after him completed so many works dedicated to education (over 40 books and 800 articles). As a result, an idea appeared in the English-speaking world that practicing teachers should use educational philosophy as potential grounds for the whole of educational thought and practice.

According to B.M. Bim-Bad, one of the most significant events in practical activities was the emergence of the Department of Cultural Extension in Brazil. It was founded by P. Freire, philosopher and education practitioner. Groups of cultural extension were formed within the scope of the Department, the education was voluntary, class-and-lesson system was given up, explanatory method was replaced by dialogue, while teacher became a coordinator of students’ joint work. Originally, it had been aimed at adults and illiteracy eradication, but Freire’s philosophy soon found wide use in pre-higher and higher education and later extended over general education school. Since 1980s Freire’s philosophy, merging with long and well tested project-based learning and J. Dewey’s philosophy lying at the heart of it, has found wide use in engineering and management education in Europe and the USA, especially in corporate education of the latter. As a result, as B.M. Bim-Bad notes, philosophy of education, which begins and ends with practice, has reached general education school under the name of Service Learning. Service Learning is an independent training course, within the scope of which practical skills, basics of social project planning and conduct of social events are taught. [8].

Research Methods

Teaching practice is of key importance in the system of philosophy of education. Educational methodology and, in particular, its scientific methods taken in integrated system and apprehended in the view of scientific principles of philosophical cognition, play a major role in practical activities of teachers. As V.V. Krayevsky notes, the essence of methodology is defined in philosophy as a web of general premises of cognitive and teaching activity [9].

It is known that practice is a central concept and category of the whole philosophical system, an “ontologically central point” [10], “fundamental and original attribute of human existence” [11]. But the issue of the essence of the practice itself is one of debatable and ill-conceived issues.

Philosophical sources use various approaches to what is united and marked under “practice”: all activities are divided into two forms – material and production activity or object-transforming activity (man-nature) – the most important one, as it has the most influence on social relations and personality formation, and social historical or social communicative (man-man) practice [12; 13], thus revealing metamorphosis explication of different activities, which are primarily based on universal principle of practice as “stable and permanent” in the chain “man-man-nature”.

The most wide-spread form of social historical (social communicative) practice is teaching practice. However, it is not viewed within purely philosophical meaning as the activity aimed at spiritual world, at the area of human consciousness, since, as philosophers claim, “teaching practice itself is not able to change the reality of existence” [14, p.466].

This thought should be specified by referring to the fact that a component of teaching practice – educational teaching practice as a higher education method of preparing a rising teacher – has a direct influence on his or her mind, cognitive and exploratory interest, creative abilities in working with professional material, with a group of students, forms individual professional trajectory of influencing the future generation which will subsequently take an active part both in material and production and social historical areas. Therefore, teaching practice must be an object of a separate scientific-oriented and scientific philosophical study and comprehension

Teaching practice as a continuous dynamic system, each stage of which has its own permanent determinants, later on acquires new professional features and should be situated at the intersection of two equal, mutually intersecting and, at the same time, independent practical activities: material and production and social communicative.

That said, the set of “teaching practice” is formed through intersection of general characteristics of such sets as “material and production practice” and “social communicative practice”, which leads us to bringing teaching practice to the category of philosophy and, in particular, philosophy of education, to defining it as a concept and category of philosophy of education on the basis of analysis of dynamics and genesis of practice as a universal of human existence.

Results of Studies

The term “practice” has Greek origin (praxis, prakseos) and means activity, action, deeds.

Retrospective analysis of scientific works suggests that fundamental explanation of the word “practice” was the concept of “strength” in the meaning of steadiness, decency, pride, moral deed, good, freedom and later in the meaning of condition, driving force, cause of a process.

For instance, ancient Greeks, including Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, understood practice as human activity, actions, aimed at respective goals, at finding the truth for the sake of it. Aristotle thought that knowledge should be assimilated during practical work [15].

Two absolutely opposite approaches of medieval philosophy in practical activity – theological and logical- gnostic – generated various views on practical human cognitive activity.

In the days of Renaissance “a man rises to such level where he can create himself and transform nature according to his ideas about the ideal” for the first time [16, p.134].

However, representatives of the Renaissance saw the point of human activity not in practical activity, but in transformation of the world through the phenomenon of creativity. We consider this the basis of the problem of creative cognitive analysis of practice as a philosophical universal category. Today this problem is still given little attention, especially in the field of teaching.

The age of Enlightenment had its own interpretation of how practice was understood in ancient times and in the days of Renaissance and explained it as conscious moral activity detached from reality and based on feelings (the outside) and reflection (the inside). The role of practice in those times was reduced to experience and experiment.

G. Hegel came to a closer understanding of the essence of practice on the whole and some aspects of interactions between practice and cognition in particular. He thought that practice was a permanent, constant category and thus a source of knowledge, a means of proving the rightness of thoughts, notions, knowledge, science. The most significant elements and structure components of Hegel’s system of philosophy are purposes, purposeful activity, the result of purposeful activity. They form the notion of practical systemacy and consistency.

In the late 19th and early 20th century the issue of practice as a necessary concept of existence was explained in the view of pragmatism. Pragmatism philosophers (W. James, C. Peirce, J. Dewey) were guided by such concepts as practice, success, practical interests of a subject, plans, goals, desires, will.

The conducted within the scope of this article retrospective analysis of dynamics and genesis of the concept of practice in different historical periods suggests that although differently, thinkers recognised practical existence of humanity and the fact that if it is not whole human activity encoded in the “practice”, then it is at least significant and important for human life things. J.F. Rosenberg gave an interesting definition of philosophy, which undoubtedly assures that philosophical aspect of human formation, including formation of a teacher, is nearly the most important one, “What is, in fact, philosophy? Philosophy is what people do. It is practice” [17, p.12].

Discussion of The Results

According to B.M. Bim-Bad [18], currently the primary focus of educational philosophers is on the concept of education itself. Traditional view of it as a process and result of studying in schools and higher education institutions is gradually replaced by a view of education as a wide range of all kinds of experience, which influence the growth and development of an individual during all their life. Important role of informal, spontaneous learning in the content and method of human education is being understood.

Limits of human ability to learn, study and perfect through science have not been determined yet. Limits of the rate of learning are also not known. A man has a unique, as compared to other known creatures, ability to modify their reactions and ways of interaction with natural and social environment in view of accumulated experience.

A man is free from enforced action of forced instincts and thus not doomed to stick to previous patterns of thoughts and actions, but has the opportunity to improve them and change themselves and the culture for the better. Learning involves not only the intellect, but also emotions, soma and processes of volition. And each of the aspects of this process is so closely related to others that it cannot but influence them.

Now education science unanimously recognises the fact that abilities of students significantly increase when not only their intellect is used, but when emotions are also taken into account, when good physical well-being is secured, when their strong-willed decision to study is strengthened. At present, education is aimed at the same time at development of intellect, character and feelings (good will), civic consciousness, democratic nature, patriotism and humanity.

Today it is generally admitted that the conscious and the unconscious in education and teaching are closely interacted. A student at the same time consciously assimilates learning material while unconsciously assimilating teacher's intonations, their attitude towards themselves and other people, notions of justice and predilections, of power of the strong ones, of collaboration, competition and friendship. There is more and more proof and evidence of the fact that emotions are of great importance in the process of learning and studying, that thinking processes depend on how friendly the emotional atmosphere of school and class is. It is also admitted that the process of assimilation (comprehension and use) of such sign systems as natural languages or "languages" or mathematics, art, chemistry, etc., is highly significant for development and perfection of a person. Handling signs is what makes a man able to think, to generalise information and ideas at a high level. Thus a man acquires an ability to solve tasks quickly and find the shortest way to new knowledge. Imitation, memorisation and reproduction are replaced by dialogues, group projects, exchange of observations and discoveries. Learning through activity wins.

Today a consensus is reached in the understanding of value foundations of contemporary teaching practice. It became possible due to defining the new educational paradigm as personal. Within the scope of previous, technocratic paradigm, which was established as a result of scientific and technical revolution at the turn of the 20th century, main efforts in the process of education were aimed at acquisition of knowledge, skills and abilities through consecutive study of material of a specialised area and its further patterned use in a relevant field of activity. Technocratic paradigm of education which significantly stressed knowledge of natural science and strict specialisation ensured efficient training of high-specialised experts who were professionally competent, but, so to speak, "one-dimensional", dehumanised, not aware of responsibility for the consequences of their professional activity.

Information revolution of the last 30 years of the 20th century has led to systematic sociocultural changes in the development of humanity. More and more often contemporary society is characterised as society of knowledge. But we can also add that it is a society of knowledge the volume of which is constantly increasing and the content updating. This leads to constant update of nomenclature and content of professional activity. Under such conditions not high-specialised experts equipped with a particular body of knowledge, but

professionally competent individuals with expressed innovative potential and capacity for continuous education and self-education are in demand.

Under modern conditions disciplinary organisation of science is replaced by interdisciplinary organisation, prevailing natural science is replaced by humanitarisation and humanisation of science. Aggravated global issues and increased globalisation of civilisation development result in the need for formation of new ethics specified by such principles as responsibility, mutual understanding, justice and solidarity. According to all these systematic sociocultural changes, value essentials of contemporary teaching practice are formed – humanism with its respect to personal dignity and individuality of a person; democratism, creativity as a form of productive, creative and innovative attitude to oneself, to the world, to one's own activity; responsibility as a method of implementation of personal freedom; tolerance as a form of respect towards otherness.

Values of humanism, human and personal dignity, social initiative and creativity, democracy, patriotism, national self-consciousness also become priority world view values in Russian education system.

Declaring adherence to certain values is not enough for formation of a new kind of education system. Axiologisation of teaching of educational subjects on the basis of values recognised as priority ones, as well as unity of content and form of education in educational institutions, is also necessary. For this reason, within axiologically-oriented philosophical and educational discourse two groups of values are considered:

- 1) the ones that education should be focused on now and in the longer term;
- 2) the ones that should be created and formed within the educational process itself.

The first group of values determines essential purpose of education in modern world and understanding of strategic goals of education. This group of values has initial value, since content and form of organisation of the whole educational process depend on the understanding of what it should be aimed at.

The second group of values concerns value content of education and technologies of its organisation. That said, not only determination and organisation of educational process in accordance with the first group of values, but also masterful combination and implementation of educational tasks in the educational process are important. In other words, a modern teacher should clearly acknowledge value measurement of their educational subject and consecutively reveal and implement it in their teaching activities. Only in this manner it is possible to ensure creative assimilation of knowledge related to a certain subject and use of this knowledge within the general system of students' value and world view understanding.

In addition, assimilation of this group of world view values by a teacher is also needed so that they are conscious of their responsibility for emotional and psychological atmosphere they create when teaching their subjects, for moral world view values which they consciously or unconsciously reproduce in their style of teaching and represent by their personal image. In this context it is highly important that during the training of a future teacher requirements of

respect towards their individuality and dignity are fulfilled and kind, trustful, respectful and tolerant atmosphere is created.

It should be noted that currently teaching practice is mainly reduced to production activity, producibility, instrumentalism, which appears in scientific and philosophical cognition under different synonymous terms (practical activity, practice, transformation, theoretical activity, production, assimilation). Such approach to understanding practice and its main forms had great influence on its further, almost invariable interpretation in modern educational philosophical sources.

However, we are mainly talking about changes in methodological foundations of education, in philosophical messages and expectations which ground both new developing types of educational practices and modernisation of mass and professional school. We do not deny the materially transforming aspect and do not try to reduce the practice, including teaching practice, to the process of constant creative social communicativeness (in the context of social assimilation), we attempt to synthesise both of these aspects, but not on the principle of “instrumentalism and producibility”), but on the principle of practice as creative emerging basis of human world view and personal development.

To conclude, practice should be free, conscious basis of “application” of knowledge, means of development of cognition and fundamental principle of acquiring it. We think that this is categorial understanding of practice as the most general and fundamental philosophical concept.

Within its functioning, the category of “practice” “deals” with a multitude of concepts: field experience, teaching practice, educational practice. Educational practice as a methodical continuous dynamic system should include creative self-realisation of a teacher at the level of professional mastering and assimilation for the triune purpose:

1) understanding, mastering and creating own “educational product” which is studied and used;

2) assimilation and transformation of basic content of this product by the teacher through systemic analytical comparison with personal professional result;

3) formation of “individual educational course” by the teacher for the purpose of further successful educational activity.

The concept of a teacher “getting the feel” of real educational process through practical activity, which creates a methodological educational model aimed at “education as creativity” doctrine, and the principle of ascending professional trajectory are the basis of triune purpose of teaching practice.

Conclusion

The conducted analysis of the literature concerning the issue of the research allowed to draw the following conclusion: we are sure that any school subject, as well as methods of teaching it, are components of the philosophy of education and are, correspondingly, based on original methodology. That said, methodology and methods of a certain subject should be, first of all, developed in action, within the practice of particular observations and studies itself, and not just through theoretical development of methods.

Therefore, philosophy of education in its new understanding is not only theoretical comprehension of foundations and manifestations of educational process, but also practice, direct implementation of theoretical educational groundwork into everyday life. Philosophy of education does not just depend on the evolvement of social philosophy (and philosophy on the whole), it also implements established philosophical (world view) paradigms in various educational practices through its methodologies. This conclusion gives ground for considering educational practice an interactive body of detection of methodological foundations of teaching, since practice secures the “link of times” of educational existence. Thus, within philosophy of education practice is a means of cognition, transformation, mastery of reality in the process of educational activity. The issue of educational practice requires further study in the view of this particular integrative system.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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