POSTMODERNISM AND EDUCATIONAL STYLE. CLARIFYING DISCUSSIONS

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Abstract: *In the context of all the changes that we feel so acute, from societal level to the individual one, a fresh and updated conception of what education means today is required. Those who offer education (schools, teachers, and mentors) have to respond to the demands imposed by contemporary life, marked by increasing globalization and diversity, conflict and instability, etc. It is natural to believe and to promote the idea that post-modernization of the school (an idea that is not exactly new) will bring about those fundamental changes in the teachers' conceptions and, changes that are so expected and even urgent. This idea of post-modernization of the school will facilitate the resuscitation of education, considered so necessary in the conditions in which the confusion and lability of the system are "insight". This paper proposes two analyses. First, one of the elements that characterize post-modern education. The second analysis captures specific aspects of the dynamics of the structural elements of the educational style, considered a possible revitalizing factor of the educational phenomenon.*

Key words: *educational phenomenon, post-modern education, teacher.*

1. Introduction

It is understandable that in postmodern time (which includes two related, but distinguished terms: postmodernity and postmodernism) the general objectives of education are those of forming and developing an integral individual, who will show critical thinking and creativity, objectivity and flexibility, to produce quality knowledge, useful and sustainable, to develop, by all possible means, the individual and social identity, by creating a transformation society in which the individual transforms himself.

In spite of all the academic discourses that indisputably demanded the necessity and the assumption of the postmodern in education, viewed not only as a sum of ideas, a way to theorize, but also a way to practice, education "has remained largely immune to this trend and there is little outside the work of critical and feminist pedagogy that relates postmodern ideas to the processes and structures of education or that examines these in the light of postmodern developments in society and culture "(Martin, 2003, p. 1).

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More interesting is the fact that, although in educational practice many characteristics could be truly assumed in the postmodern, many practitioners still have enough reluctance to acknowledge this.

2. Postmodern indicators in the educational context

Regarding the conceptual dyad of postmodernism - postmodernity, a few clarifications are required. Very briefly, the postmodern refers to a condition of a historical era, postmodernity is seen simply as what we are in, whether we know it or not, and postmodernism is reflected in movements with varying levels of intention and self-awareness (Martin, 2003). Thus, postmodernism is associated with the emphasis placed on cultural and intellectual aspects that refer to the substitution of objective truth with experience, the rejection of absolute values, the promotion of thinking at the expense of reason, the leap to a philosophy of language (Giddens, 2000; Lyon, 1998). Regarding postmodernity, it is related to the social and political changes that have occurred in society, determined by the advances of technologies and information, thus equivalent to the consumer society or the entertainment society (Debord, 2002).

Postmodernity is a "cultural movement of perceiving the modern world with its contradictions, errors, failures, in the sense of eliminating the mental and social blockages in promoting the new" (Macavei, 2007, p. 246). Also, postmodernity is equivalent to the end of modernity that it claims to be beyond (Lyotard, 1993) or a stage of self-reflexive radicalization of modernity (Giddens, 2000). Modernity is accused of several aspects regarding rationality and excessive reductionism, to the conventional that represented a standard for education.

The „post" prefix gives the concept the property of foreshadowing something that follows, taking into account the traces left by modernity, changing them into elements with a high degree of functionality. Some theorists call this new society *The third wave* (Alvin Toffler), *Late modernity* (Gianni Vattimo), *Liquid modernity* (Zigmund Bauman), *Technotronic society* (Zbigniew Brzezinski), *Post-industrial society* (Daniel Bell, Alvin Toffler), *Information society*, *Society knowledge, Globalized society* (Francis Fukuyama, Ralph Epperson, Robert Kagan), *Global modernity or Geo-modernity* (Mircea Malița) (as cited in Macavei, 2007).

Some postulates support the comprehensiveness of the idea of postmodernity. One refers to the recognition and respect of differences between individuals. They differ by interests, needs, conceptions, and philosophy of life, by the level of development and personality structure. Thus, the principle of education for all must consider these differences. Moreover, the idea of equality is highlighted.

Education, by its structure, provides an object and a subject, the teacher and the student. In postmodern optics, their roles are reconfigured, they become interchangeable; the two become partners in the didactic context, they collaborate in building knowledge. The student is recognized and respected as an individual, he is perceived as a becoming individual.

3. Educational style – synthetic operationalization

3.1. The educational phenomenon beyond modernity. Postmodern trends

In the educational context, interconnectedness (first, with an emphasis on self-knowledge) becomes an indispensable tool, being considered as a benefit. We present a modern-postmodern antithetical synthesis (Macavei, 2007, p. 246):

Modern and postmodern aspects - antithetical synthesis　　　Table 1

MODERN	POSTMODERN
Rationality	Poor thinking, logical
Fixity	Mobility
Certainty	Uncertainty, beliefs
Delimited style	Combined styles
Conformism	Nonconformism
Rigid boundary	Border waiver
Permanent	Ephemeral
Imitation	Original
Continuity	Discontinuity
Intolerance	Tolerance
Collusion	Spontaneity
Obstruction	Freedom
Unitary	Diversity
Cultural	Intercultural, multicultural
History	Stories, post history
Truth	Truths
Reality	Realities, experiences
Mediocrity	Meritocracy

The postmodern paradigm in education is in the the theoretical foundation which will allow the changes to occur at the level of school practice. A reference paradigm of postmodernity is, as Emil Păun points out, the existential - humanist one which "produces significant changes in the value system" (2002, p. 19). The core of the paradigm is represented by the person-centered education, on its reconsideration as act that favours and ensures the development of society. Things change when we talk about postmodernity: the educational space undergoes major changes in which the dialogue between individuals, between them and society, is maximally stimulated; educational relations take on a new dimension - educational actors make a common effort for the construction of the meanings and together reveals new truths, "the teacher does not work on the students, but with the students and for them" (Păun, 2002, p. 20); education centered on the person, on the student, which implies that the student is a person in a continuous process of formation and development, of becoming. Educational relations are changing; it transforms into contractual, transactional

relationships, leaving behind the dominance of transmission and reception. From this perspective, the teacher acquires the role of administrator, manager of information and of the processes of formation of students' abilities and capacities.

In parallel with these transformations, the curriculum field also supports prefaces; it is desired to shift the focus from the normativity and formalism, the analysis and the definition of the objectives, on the reconstruction of the curriculum through the prism of what is actually happening in the educational environment of the student class, which will bring a new vision: student-centered curriculum. The school, through all the learning situations that it makes available to the student, must ensure the training and development of competences, not contribute to the formation of information warehouses; the student must be in a position to discover, explore, not be indoctrinated. In the same note, the student's status must be reconsidered. Thus, he is no longer regarded as a passive receiver or a simple performer of tasks; it represents a centre of interests and initiatives, being able to develop and even self-develop. Together with the teacher, the student becomes a builder of knowledge, a process that the school supports by making the most of his life experiences. It is understood that all these aspects are directly dependent on the way in which the curriculum is restructured, especially the formal one, which uses the regulatory documents of the school type: curricula, school curricula, auxiliary curricular materials, textbooks, methodological guides, etc., which must be connected to the personality, attitude, and disposition of the person being educated. In postmodernity, the main concern of education is the problem of values in the sense of identifying and classifying them in relation to their dynamics and specially to facilitate the access of the subject to them.

Provocative is the transition from the paradigm of certainty to the paradigm of uncertainty (Bârlogeanu, cit. in Păun & Potolea, 2002), which will allow overcoming the stage in which the didactic activity is intensely programmed, thus ensuring the subjectivity of the learning. All these postmodern tendencies have direct influences on what is happening at the educational process level, at the student class level. In his activity, the teacher learns the role of supporting and promoting these transformative intentions, by reconfiguring the didactic act (teaching, learning, evaluation, communication, leadership, motivation, and stimulation, etc.), channelling his efforts on the education influence - the student. In other words, the contribution of postmodernism is reflected in the potent professionalization of education in all its aspects.

3.2. Theoretical approaches of the educational style through the dynamics of the structural elements

The transition to a society of communication and knowledge inevitably determines the placement of education systems at the centre of concerns and changes that ensure global and permanent access to learning. Currently, pedagogical thinking relies heavily on a new orientation of the development of education, namely lifelong learning, based on the idea of training and developing individuals active in the social field. Also, it is extremely discussed on the topic of new skills that the individual must acquire and

beyond this aspect, to demonstrate in daily/professional activities. The education system in the current vision must respond to the needs and interests of all individuals, regardless of whether we are talking about the elitist school population or those trying to reach an acceptable level. The optimization and improvement of the education process represent current concerns of the specialists in the field, meant to configure several practices that will successfully increase its efficiency and quality. Efforts and interests for quality and efficiency are considered legitimate, given the development of science and technology, but also the increasingly pronounced affirmation of the role of science and education as determining factors for progress. Ensuring the effectiveness of the didactic activity is the subject of multiple debates in the field of education sciences, either it addresses the problem of flexibilization of the main components of the didactic process (contents, methodology, structures, and organization), or the changes in the action of the human factors participating in this process, focusing on the activity of the teacher. The strong interest shown for the activity/ action of the teacher is explained by the fact that in any education system, its quality is dictated by the professional characteristics of the teacher as well as by the quality of his performance.

The literature recognizes the teacher a key position in the design, organization, and conduct of the instructive-educational activity, his didactic behavior being a clear indicator of the efficiency of the activity. The didactic behavior is understood as a synthesis of his psycho-pedagogical and specialized training, certain attitudes and pedagogical conceptions. The experience gained in the educational practice emphasizes the importance of the components of the didactic process, viewed as a unitary whole, but the attention is still drawn to the fact that it - the didactic process - is in a highly dependent relationship with the teacher's action. Hence the idea that the way in which the teacher carries out the didactic activity represents the condition that favors the accomplishment of the activity in accordance with the objectives set.

Lifestyle, driving style, thinking style, learning style, professional style, educational style - here are just a few meanings given to this concept **style**. Its existence and manifestation are recognized by individuals, as it personalizes almost every activity, regardless of context. In the most general way, style refers to several characteristics, consistent and stable, observable in the behavior manifested by the individual, reflecting his manner of acting or performing.

In the pedagogical literature, the term educational style has been imposed relatively recently, with meanings that refer to the teacher's behavior, to the educational relations and, in extension, to the training and improvement of the teachers. Current concerns in the analysis of stylistic elements or structures are supported and favored by the increasingly frequent interdisciplinary contacts of the pedagogy with fields such as sociology, management theory, social and organizational psychology. The idealistic attitude captures the educational style in the hypothesis of "omnipresent quality of an individual who persists, although the content can change" (Conti, 1985). Teachers engage in educational activity with a set of values and beliefs that are transposed in their philosophy on education, education and which can influence their behavior in the classroom. Moreover, the style denotes "persistent qualities, attitudes and personality

traits, strongly anchored in the philosophy of the instructor (the teacher in this case)" (Conti, 2004).

The concept of educational style is noted by multiple connotations, but not enough to deny its own definition, as expressed by Ausubel's vision (Sălăvăstru, 2004). An old acceptance of the concept is provided by Erich E. Geissler (1977) who gives the concept the meaning of "expression of preferred modes of behavior, which come back with some regularity." Concerned with the didactic activity, B.O. Smith considers that the educational style expresses "the characteristic way in which the acts of teaching are executed" (Sălăvăstru, 2004). Thus, the teacher may exhibit sympathetic or rejection behaviors, even aggressive, both towards the students he works with and the ideas being debated (ibidem). Other visions give the educational style the quality of some of the driving factors that ensure the success of a complex system represented by the teaching-learning process (Artvinli, 2010, cit. in Dinçol, 2011); stable and consistent behaviors of teachers manifested in the context of their interactions with students during the educational process (Grasha, 2002; Yüksel, 2008).

Other senses are given to the educational style refer to the sum of the techniques, activities, and approaches in teaching, personalities, general and specialized knowledge (Cooper, 2001); how to manage the student class and the teaching activity as a whole (Yilmaz & Cavas, 2008; Rahimi & Nabliou, 2010). Continuing the analysis, it should be specified that an essential factor in the teaching process is its result, that is, the school performance achieved by the students, at the level of knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, etc. (Erdle, Murray, & Rushton, 1985). In other words, teachers are in a position to harmonize their own style with that of the students' learning, with the intention of preventing any problems or obstacles such as neglect, boredom, lack of interest or misunderstanding that would significantly contribute to the achievement of weak school performance. Numerous specialized studies draw attention to the compatibility of these styles (Oxford, Ehrman, & Lavine, 1991; Wallace & Oxford, 1992; Zenhui, 2001).

From the behavioral perspective, the educational style is expressed in the way of organizing and leading the class of students, in the control and sanctioning modalities, content planning, the instructional-educational strategies used, the motivational techniques and the evaluation modalities.

As it is understood, the style is characterized by consistency and stability, generally remaining unchanged (or with small changes) from one activity to another. The fact that he has this property, of constancy, does not mean that the educational style or the way of working of the teacher is always the same. Obviously, it supports reconfigurations that are carried out during larger stages of activity.

The issue of educational styles is much more complex than it seems at first glance. As we have shown before, the term itself refers to the way in which the teachers perform in the class of students. In other words, the generally accepted meaning of the term is that of the teacher's behavior. It should be noted that these behaviors are conditioned by a multitude of factors that affect the way teachers conduct current educational activities. Thus, based on the specialized references, we can say that the educational style is formed at the confluence of a set of factors: professional and personal

experience, scientific and cultural competences, psycho-pedagogical competences, aspects of personality, age and gender, specialty, professional and personal objectives, students variable, pedagogical ethos, curriculum, interpersonal relations, institutional factors (school management, type of school), and organizational culture.

The comprehensive analysis of the educational style manifested by the teacher in the didactic activities offers multiple advantages; on the one hand it allows to highlight the actions, operations, procedures and techniques used, the attitudes adopted by the teacher in carrying out the teaching act, but also to put these variables in correlation with the obtained results. On the other hand, the illustration of the role that the educational style plays in ensuring the success/efficiency of the activity offers the possibility to outline the characteristics of a prototype of the effective style, corresponding to the teacher who achieves good results.

4. Discussion

The designation of the educational style implies to analyze further, such as the pedagogical concept of ethos, to establish working methods and techniques in all the didactic activities. Each teacher is characterized by a pedagogical ethos, which summarizes interests and motivations, codes and principles, personal conceptions about this and instructions techniques. These indicators are highlighted as the result of the experiences accumulated over time, for the initial and continuous training.

The pedagogical ethos, seen as a prerequisite for the realization of the didactic activities, is notable not only for creating cognitive components (indispensable, otherwise) but also some parts of an affective, attitudinal nature, including here the passion and vocation for this profession. The school confirms this fact: the assimilation of certain didactic principles and technologies (especially in the context of the improvement of granting) did not lead to the desired changes in the (didactic) behavior of the teacher.

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