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Studying Pedagogical Theories. The Perspective of Pedagogy Students From Jan Długosz University in Czeszochowa

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to present the result of the author's own research focusing on senses and meanings attributed by Pedagogy students from Jan Długosz University (UJD) in Czeszochowa to studying pedagogical theories. Pedagogical theories (currents, trends) as one of pedagogy research areas are interesting for an academic for many reasons. This area stands out by its diversity, various dilemmas or controversies. This diversity motivates academics, but also students, to multiply their cognitive activity. Exploring this world, learning about and understanding senses and meanings attributed to it is within the area of pedagogical exploration, whose direction is determined by, among others, the hermeneutic journey chosen by the author (hermeneutic method with interpretative analyses corresponding to it). The choice of such a research path is the result of the aim of the research set by the author as well as the subject matter and research problems.

Keywords: theory, pedagogical theories, pedagogical hermeneutics, students.

Introduction

In pedagogical literature the term *theory* is used interchangeably with such terms as paradigm, pedagogical perspective or discourse (Śliwerski, 2021, p. 31).

“What for some researchers is the explanation of some laws or regularities, which determine invariable or probable relationships, for others it is extracting some knowledge about them, generalizing it and integrating it, for some others it is a way of inferring as to some relationships, and still for others a theory is a presentation of some postulated vision of image of the world (normative theories) or finally it is a theoretical reflection encompassing epistemological and ontological aspects of a given knowledge branch” (Śliwerski, 2021, p. 31). Regardless of those different definitions, each theory can be defined as a concise system, a system of “relatively ordered assumptions to generate, regulate, distribute and operate specific forms of truth” (Śliwerski, 2018, p. 23). Diversity is a word that reflects the state/ order of the world of pedagogical ideas from the end of 1970s, among others, in Western Europe, or 1990s in Poland. Some scholars emphasize that nowadays each theory is equally legitimate. All the attempts to smuggle one’s theory as the “only” one, according to the above statement, become “an unauthorized interpretation of phenomena or theories and a will to gain power. None of these individual interpretations can be superior to others, similarly there are no “better” or “worse” theories” (Śliwerski, 2018, p.23). Diversification of theories is noticeable not only within the very scientific discipline, but also within its sub-disciplines. Tendencies to diversify theories are also noticeable within particular paradigms (see Rubacha, 2005, p. 68). Due to that fact, it is more and more difficult to describe “a given paradigm in the category of its constant determinants. It is rather possible to talk about the multiformity of a given paradigm, mainly in terms of more specific problems” (Rubacha, 2005, p. 68). This fact brings about further consequences. The general premises of paradigms organize the map of pedagogical theories on the one hand, whereas diversity that occurs within particular paradigms opens the door to new leads, new perspectives of the world of education, educational practice, on the other hand (Rubacha, 2005, p. 68).

Thus, learning about pedagogical theories is not a simple task for Pedagogy students. It is a kind of special meeting with the world of pedagogical diversity, learning about, e.g. new pedagogical trends, currents, directions (and this article focuses on this theoretical area), noticing the correlations of pedagogy with other disciplines, relations between theory and practice, exploring the qualities constituting it, multitude of languages describing it, languages used by it, it is discovering the identity of pedagogy as a science. Paradigm maps, for example, turn out to be very helpful in this challenging journey. The paradigm map by Gibson Burrell and Gareth Morgan, encompassing humanism, interpretivism, structuralism, functionalism, on the basis of which sets of premises explaining the object of research of pedagogy (educational practice) were placed, is quoted most often. In this way, the paradigm map of pedagogy was developed. It consists of the humanist version of paedocentrism, the interpretive version of pae-

docentrism, the structural version of didascalocentrism, the functional version of didascalocentrism (Rubacha, 2005, pp. 62-63).

Students' engagement in this type of meeting, understood as something "more than ordinary contact" (Śliwerski, 2012, p. 199), which is part of the inter-determinist approach (Śliwerski, 2012, p. 199) is treated by the author as an introduction to a hermeneutic journey, within the framework of which there are attempts to comprehend the world of education, i.e. to explore senses and meanings organizing it, to discover the conditions for educational opportunities, conditions of such knowledge and such experience which are truly educative, i.e. form a subjective identity (Śliwerski, 1998). During that journey, there is not only an attempt to comprehend pedagogical diversity but also a human being. Hermeneutics is the art of human self(understanding) (Gadamer, 1985, p. 17), it is a way of human existence in the world, a way of exploring and understanding the world, part of the scientific space (Reut, 1995, p. 29).

Referring to education developed in this way, many questions naturally arise, for instance: What is the meaning of this journey (hermeneutic journey into the world of pedagogical theories) in the education of future pedagogues? What is the meaning of studying pedagogical theories (currents, trends) for pedagogy students? I looked for the answers to these and other questions (placed in the further part of the article: Methodological assumptions) in the essays of pedagogy students from Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa, titled *The need and way to study pedagogical theories. Theoretical implications in pedagogical practices*. The essays were written at the end of the course Introduction to Pedagogy.

The collected essays reveal the students' inner thoughts with regard to studying pedagogical theories (among others, currents and trends), the meaning they attribute to them, showing which theories are relevant to them, which ones they would like to realise in their professional space, in their private life, which ones are inspirational for pedagogical activity, and which ones regard the complexity and the multi-paradigm nature of pedagogy as science. Those individual interpretations hide not only the students' knowledge of pedagogical theories, the meaning they attribute to them and the activity of studying them, but also a particle of human experience, their own. For me, a researcher, the students' essays (understood as cultural/ objectified expressions/ forms of human spirituality) are a kind of code that expresses, among others, their attitude to a given subject matter, the story about themselves, about a human being. They are the material of cognition and the source of understanding.

Understanding is one of the main processes of human life, the basic element of hermeneutics seen as the theory of understanding and interpretation, and one of the scientific methods helpful in exploring the socio-cultural area. The method based on understanding the researched phenomena is a process, which engages "all human mental powers" (J. Such, 1999, p. 15), not only the intellec-

tual sphere. In professional literature there are many procedures regarding the process of understanding and as a result, various forms of hermeneutics are distinguished. The path of research procedure adopted by me is close to the assumptions of pedagogical hermeneutics that has its roots in philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Hans-George Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur (I shall write more about it in the part “Methodological assumptions”). Thus, the adopted path of research concerns an attempt to read senses and meanings attributed by UJD Pedagogy students to studying pedagogical theories. Taking into account the above, the aim of this article is to share the research results, conclusions and invite the readers to a dialogue in the topic addressed.

Methodological assumptions

Pedagogical theories (currents, trends) as one area of pedagogical research are interesting for a researcher for many reasons. This area is characterized by high diversity, various dilemmas or controversies. Diversity motivates academics as well as pedagogy students to multiply their cognitive activity. Exploring this world, learning about it and understanding senses and meanings attributed to it lies within the area of pedagogical research whose direction is determined by, among others, the hermeneutic journey chosen by me. Hermeneutics fits into the area of qualitative research. Within the framework of this research, the researcher tries to answer such questions as: What is the meaning of what is happening? What is the sense of what is happening? This scientific path helps to understand the human world, the world of culture (of which it is a part, which it co-creates), and what follows, the world of education.

Exploring senses and meanings hidden in cultural texts¹ (among all, in creations, situations, events, behaviours, people) defines the direction for most of my research journeys. As a pedagogue, I am interested in unveiling senses and meanings building the world of education. Hence my engagement in pedagogical hermeneutics described as a pedagogical theory of understanding and interpretation (general meaning) and as a methodological orientation (narrow meaning).² As H. H. Krüger emphasizes, in science, hermeneutics “occupies – in its

¹ Cultural text is understood more broadly here, not only as a record, but also as an event, e.g. educational one, a specific social reality, phenomenon, cultural creations, for instance, words, sentences, beliefs, symbols, metaphors, metonymies, signs, looks, films, paintings, sculptures, gestures, clothes, etc.

² At a general level, it takes into account “the significance of understanding and interpretation in education and pedagogical research and the influence of pedagogical experiences on understanding and interpretation” (Milerski, 2011, p. 12). In a narrower meaning, it takes into account understanding and interpretation as methodological categories referring to “the process of identifying senses and values organizing educational reality and its interpretation” (Milerski,

developed from as a method of comprehending meanings – a central position among qualitative pedagogic scientific research methods” (H. H. Krüger, 2005, p. 148). In a discussion making applied research methods in the social sciences the focus of its attention, hermeneutics, as H. H. Krüger notices, is one of the significant methods (H. H. Krüger, 2005, p. 148)., and “as philosophical hermeneutics, interested in understanding experience of the world as a whole, it also offers a meta-theoretical framework of reference for qualitative social research (H. H. Krüger, 2005, p. 148; Adamska-Staroń, 2018, p. 101).

Taking into account the aforementioned approach, qualitative research is designed to be “empirical-analytical cognitive activities based on direct, personal experience. A researcher collects empirical material on their own, and subjects it to analysis and interpretation, using appropriate qualitative methods at all stages of research project realization” (H. H. Krüger, 2005, p. 7). Planning one’s research journey, there is no thought about discovering a given phenomenon, as it is in case of quantitative research, but a desire to understand.

Understanding takes many shapes. Wilhelm Dilthey³ captures hermeneutic understanding as an attempt to comprehend spiritual life, i.e. spiritual structure of human personality via objective expressions of spiritual life. In his view, understanding can be realised in two ways (Milerski, 2012, pp. 119–138): by observing people, their attitudes, behaviour, ways of being in the world and via objectified cultural expressions. In both cases, understanding cannot regard interpretations of one-off acts of action (one of the conditions for understanding to be a scientific method). Each understanding directs its efforts to something individual (Milerski, 2012, pp. 119–138). However, it should be noticed that in the elementary it is aimed at the singular and psychologically subjective, while in the hermeneutic the understanding of the elementary is put in the context of “the overall elements of spiritual life, cultural creations – texts, forms of social life, customs, mythical stories” (Milerski, 2012, pp. 119–138). Dilthey’s hermeneutic understanding encompasses three moments: transposition, reconstruction of spiritual states, recreating experience (Dilthey, 2004, p. 201). Understanding of external manifestations of spiritual life reconstructed in the experience was referred to by Dilthey as “interpretation” or “rendition” (Milerski, 2012, p. 65). From this perspective, hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation

2011, p. 13). Focusing on the methodological aspect, I bear in mind that hermeneutics has also an epistemological (F. Schleiermacher, W. Dilthey) and ontological dimension (M. Heidegger, H.-G. Gadamer, P. Ricoeur) - Adamska-Staroń, Łukasik, 2012, pp. 119–138).

³ It should be emphasised here that a turn to philosophical hermeneutics was initiated at the beginning of the 19th century by F. Schleiermacher, who developed general hermeneutics as a theory of art of understanding. W. Dilthey, referring to Plato’s hermeneutics, which studies the metaphorical nature of language and its importance in comprehension, clearly transports the subject matter to the area of epistemology.

or rendition. Assuming that understanding is the method of interpretation or rendition, hermeneutics is simultaneously the theory of understanding (Adamska-Staroń, Łukasik, 2012, pp. 119–138; Cf. B. Milerski, 2012, p. 65). Understanding is seen here as a mental process taking shape of a hermeneutic circle, traveling between reference to the part and reference to the whole. It is a form of cognition “on the way.” Dilthey made hermeneutics a method of cognition in the humanities as a science of human spirituality. He gave hermeneutics an epistemological dimension and inscribed it in the broad field of historical knowledge. Dilthey’s hermeneutics opens new horizons of understanding the nature of comprehension, and in this way the horizons of understanding a man as an event in history, man-interpreter and man-participant of this history (Sawicki, 1996, p. 10-18).

From the perspective of Martin Heidegger, understanding is perceived as a way of being in the world of one who understands, i.e. *Dasein*. By posing the question about the world, “What is the way of being of the one that exists only through understanding?” (Ricoeur, 1989, p. 206), Heidegger gave hermeneutics the ontological dimension. Self-understanding, or making use of Heidegger’s terminology, pre-understanding constitutes here a condition of understanding others and one’s own situation of being-in-the-world. Pre-understanding as the anticipation of understanding lies at the foundation of the hermeneutic circle by Heidegger. This philosopher brought the hermeneutics of the time to a new path, which was continued “in his own way” by his student Hans-Georg Gadamer. Gadamer, similarly to Heidegger, emphasized that understanding is not based on empathizing with the other person’s position/ experiences, but it is “an agreement as to the matter in question” (Gadamer, 1993, p. 353). In this perspective, understanding takes into account an interpreter’s individual position. The interpreter is not able to fully step into the role of the author of the text, among other things, because they are “entangled” in certain socio-cultural relations, they are “under the influence of the socio-cultural context and a set of individual traits characteristic only to them” (Sawicki, 2012, p. 81). Thus, this individual “perception” of the world, “unique pre-understanding and understanding” should be taken into account in the process of understanding (Sawicki, 2012, p. 81). Every person is unique, a certain micro-world. “This horizon, accompanying an individual in every moment of their life, on the one hand seems to limit the possibility of understanding, and on the other hand, constitutes its condition. The specificity of Gadamer’s definition makes it an inalienable privilege of human existence, through which the author captures hermeneutics as something deeper than just a method” (Sawicki, 2012, p. 81; Gadamer, 1993, pp. 255–258).

Paul Ricoeur made a text the main point of reference of his hermeneutics. For Ricoeur, a text constitutes the source of knowledge about culture, man and the world. He understood a text as a space within which he tried to combine

beliefs both of epistemological and ontological nature that hermeneutics should realise (Baszczak, p. 11). He undertook a task of integrating philosophical hermeneutics and hermeneutic philosophy. Ricoeur understood the programme of text hermeneutics as "certain abolition (in the Hegelian sense) of differences and incompatibilities of both hermeneutic approaches. This argument could be put, using G. Scholtz's terminology, as an opposition between philosophical hermeneutics (here: epistemological approach) and hermeneutic philosophy (here: ontological approach). P. Ricoeur proposed a synthesis, discerning the inadequacy and problems of each option" (Baszczak, pp. 7, 8, 11). As a consequence of this way of thinking, understanding was for Ricoeur a complex act, a special process which has its beginning in "naïve" understanding called guessing (using Heidegger's or Gadamer's terminology, naïve understanding/ guessing can be treated as pre-understanding). At a further stage, "there is looking for the justification of this guessing, and then it is necessary to get to deep semantics of the text, discover its meaning. And the whole process of interpretation ends up with critical understanding, i.e. showing text references, its existential references (Ricoeur, 1989, p. 179). Then, the text becomes the space within the framework of which one broadens one's horizons of possible being-in-the-world, discovers new possibilities of self-knowledge, building one's own existence. For Ricoeur, to understand "is more than repeat the act of speech, to reconstruct it in a similar event; it is also to create a new event, starting from a text in which the primary event was objectified" (Ricoeur, 1989, p. 161). Ricoeur does not regard the discovery of the text's sense as the end of a journey. One has to proceed from what the text "says" (its general sense) to what it "talks" about, what it refers to (the text's meaning). Only critical understanding being the completion of structural analysis can do that. Treating structural analysis "as one of the phases, indispensable as it mediates between naïve and critical interpretation, then it will prove possible to frame explanation and understanding as two different phases of the same hermeneutic process (Ricoeur, 1989, p. 178).

Common elements discerned in the aforementioned views let us notice that in hermeneutic cognition the object of understanding is therefore always that which is individual but taken in the context of the whole. It is the context that determines the meaning of the text. It can be assumed that there is no meaning outside the context. The context in itself also constitutes the object of interpretation. There is no single general understanding "in the sense of producing scientific statements independent of space and time" (Krüger, 2005, p. 144), and thus a requirement characteristic of positivist science theory (H.H. Krüger, p. 144). Hermeneutic understanding of the text happens "within some culture and some time (...)" (Jakubowski, 2006, p. 97). Pre-understanding/ naïve understanding (guessing) lies at the foundations of such understanding (Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur), i.e. experiences, existential experience, life itself which "is

not fully knowable by the researcher themselves, and that it is intertwined, in a way that is hard to make sense of, with the intuition of meaning (or meaninglessness) of a given phenomenon" (Ablewicz, 2003, p. 127).

The structure of understanding is usually described as circular. Circular motion encompasses two aspects of hermeneutic understanding. The first one concerns initial understanding. It means that while getting immersed into the cultural text, one has to get aware, recognize their own existing knowledge in its historicity. Thus, the text should not be approached without any premises. Initial understanding experiences expansion via interpretation of a given text, which consequently contributes to its better understanding. At the second stage, initial understanding is updated. If the interpreter is still looking for a full reading, understanding of the text, feels unsatisfied, they can make a circular motion again. Then, the distance between them and the text is reduced. Hermeneutic difference – as a structural moment – belongs to every hermeneutic situation (Kruger, 2005; Adamska-Staroń, Łukasik, 2012, pp. 119–138).

As a consequence of choosing a particular research procedure, adopting certain rules (Such, 1986, pp. 9–19; Hejnicka-Bezwińska, 1997, p. 21), there emerges a particular scientific model (Hejnicka-Bezwińska, 1997, p. 21; Such, 1986, p. 14, pp. 9–19), a particular way of being in the world of science, a certain paradigm. The research undertaken by me, together with its ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions falls within the scope of idealist-subjectivist orientations, in the interpretative paradigm (Rubacha, 2005, p. 63). Entering this scientific area is linked with acknowledging the perspective of ontological and methodological anti-naturalism and the subjective nature of the object of study. It means that I accept the thesis on the existence of differences between a naturally occurring entity and a cultural entity. Consequently I believe that entities forming the socio-cultural world can be studied, among all, with the help of the following methods (Adamska-Staroń, 2018; Adamska-Staroń, Piasiecka, Łukasik, 2007, p. 71): the method of forming and criticizing hypotheses, also known as the hypothetical-deductive method, the method of an empirical nature referring to facts, the reductive methods also of an empirical nature (enumerative induction method or elimination method, the method of idealisation and gradual concretization, as well as methods characteristic only for socio-humanistic sciences: the method of humanistic interpretation, the historical-comparative method, the hermeneutic method (Such, Szcześniak, 1999; other classifications of research methods e.g. in: Babbie, 2004; Rubacha, 2005, Rubacha, 2008; Krüger, 2005).

The first two methods are directed towards the objectivist description and explanation of socio-cultural phenomena, they are also characteristic for nature sciences, while the remaining group of methods takes into account the subject factor and is dedicated to social-humanistic sciences (Jankowska, 2001, p. 187;

cf. Adamska-Staroń, Piasecka, Łukasik, 2007, pp. 71, 72). A naturalist as well as a representative of social and humanistic sciences are interested in discovering the existence of a certain objective order among entities studied by them,⁴ but the difference lies in the fact that “the first one studies things – facts independent of human judgements and actions, the latter one – entities created by a human being in experience and action – values” (Jankowska, 2001, p. 187; Adamska-Staroń, 2018; Adamska-Staroń, Piasecka, Łukasik, 2007).

Epistemological assumptions derive from ontological and methodological ones. I assume that knowledge is what comes from, for example, a researcher’s personal experiences (Adamska-Staroń, 2018; Adamska-Staroń, Piasecka, Łukasik, 2007; Jankowska, 2001, p. 188), their vicarious experience (Hałas, 1991, pp. 26–27), or the ones coming from data “closed” by the participants of socio-cultural life in various narrations: verbal (e.g. in essays or autobiographies), visual (e.g. in arts or graphics), musical (e.g. in symphonies or rock songs), behavioural (e.g. in dance or pantomime) as well as from observations of social experiences recorded, among others, in arts (Znaniński, 1974; Jankowska, 2001). Expressions taking forms of different narrations as symbolic-cultural entities embody the characteristics of a particular symbolic-cultural activity (Adamska-Staroń, Piasecka, Łukasik, 2007; Adamska-Staroń, 2018). I treat essays written by UJD Pedagogy students as just such expressions, symbolic-cultural entities, carriers of different kinds of senses and meanings. In case of the aforementioned study, it is about senses and meanings attributed by the Pedagogy students to studying pedagogical theories, thinking about pedagogy, they are also a source of new horizons, ways of thinking about education, ways of being in the educational space useful in building the educational world/ order.

Hermeneutic reflection performs “the criticism of thinking conscience, translating all its abstractions, together with scientific cognition, again into the whole of human experience” (Gadamer, 1979, p. 118). Hermeneutic reflection, like any other, is limited, yet it does not diminish its value if an individual/ a researcher is aware of this limitation (Gadamer, 1979, p. 118).

The choice of the research path is a consequence of the research goal set by me, the subject and the research problem. My goal was to learn about and understand senses and meanings attributed by UJD Pedagogy students to studying pedagogical theories. Thus, the subject of the research were senses and meanings attributed by UJD Pedagogy students to studying pedagogical theories. Consequently, the main research problem emerged: Which senses and meanings do UJD Pedagogy students attribute to studying pedagogical theories? Naturally, more detailed questions followed:

⁴ The boundaries of objectivism were described by F. Znaniński in *Humanizm i poznanie*, vol. 2, PWN, Warszawa 1991. In this book, the author makes an attempt to reconcile the objectivist and subjectivist positions, doing it with the help of value categories and humanistic coefficient. (Znaniński, 1984; see also Jankowska, 2001).

1. Which pedagogical theories are significant to the students participating in the research?
2. Which theories would the charges like to realise in their professional and personal life?
3. What paradigm do the pedagogical theories recognized by the students fit in?

The aforementioned hermeneutic method with its corresponding descriptive and interpretive analyses was helpful in realizing the research goal and looking for the answers to the research questions. As a result of my decision taken, I have tried to get to know and comprehend senses and meanings attributed by UJD Pedagogy students to studying pedagogical theories, “closed” in their essays, to grasp their various reflections, thoughts, experiences, interpretations, to get to know and comprehend the socio-cultural space chosen by me.

The analyses and interpretations within the adopted method are governed by specific rules. However, these rules do not form stiff frames, “may occur in a different order and intermingle with each other” (Śliwowski, 2012, p. 165), determining such a research path that is not distinguished by rigorous ruthlessness. It is important which scientific approach the researcher represents, their willingness to understand a given phenomenon. Humbleness, a critical approach to one’s own discoveries, reasonable distance that “shall defend the text against the interpreter’s subjectivism and their apodictic individuality, and shall allow the interpreter to keep their sensitivity not only to glaring issues, but also to details highlighting the specifics of a given issue” (Tischner, 1989, pp. 43–44). Despite certain arbitrariness, introducing certain modifications, for example “enforced” by the peculiarities of a studied text, the researcher should get familiarized with the map of hermeneutic rules helpful in analysing and interpreting cultural texts, so that cognition does not take on a colloquial dimension. The rules that constituted a compass for me originate from proposals defining a methodological research procedure concerning the way of understanding and interpreting the text, given, among all, by Dilthey (2004), Heidegger (1994), Gadamer (1985, 1993), Ricoeur (1989). The analyses and interpretations did not happen in stages but in a circular manner consisting in interweaving of various stages (Rubacha, 2008, p. 260). The adopted strategy was, generally speaking, based on a scientifically depicted scheme (Szahaj, 1994): the author – the text – the interpreter – interpretations, exposing the text and the interpreter. This strategy lets the interpreter go beyond the so-called author’s intentions, respecting these intentions at the same time (Tischner, 1989). Gadamer emphasised that “it is impossible to translate a text from a language to a language, not speaking oneself” (Gadamer, 1979).

The research encompassed first year, full-time and part-time UJD in Częstochowa Pedagogy students in the years 2021-2024.

The research material consisted of the aforementioned essays on *The need and way to study pedagogical theories. Theoretical implications in pedagogical practices*. The essays were written individually. On the whole, I collected 94 papers. A big number of data made me reduce it. The rule being its foundation was: the principle of saturation of information about a given research field (Krüger, 2005, p. 161). The activity of reducing and ordering the research material in qualitative research is regarded as selection and interpretation (Kawecki, 1996). Taking the above into account, I analysed and interpreted 23 works.

Results

The analyses and interpretations of the Pedagogy students' essays led to answering the main and detailed research questions. They let the researcher notice that the future pedagogues attributed significant importance to studying pedagogical theories. In their opinion, immersion into this pedagogical world makes sense not only in the context of professional preparation for their future job, but also in the context of personal development. The researched students made an attempt to enter the hermeneutic space, to talk to pedagogical texts in the sense referred below.

In the hermeneutic perspective, not only a person but also their works can invite one to conversation. These are cultural texts, i.e. among others, words, sentences, beliefs, judgements, assumptions, myths, metaphors, symbols, signs, looks, gestures, attire, films, music, poems, drawings or scientific/ pedagogical theories. The text may take the shape of "You" that talks. Similarly to a direct conversation, what the text "says," "what it talks about" may constitute the answer to some question (Gadamer, 1993, p. 353). Text comprehension consists in the recipient discovering its sense (they discover what the text "says"), looking for its meaning (they discover what it "talks" about), discovering and understanding this question (Gadamer, 1993, p. 353). The difference is that in the conversation with the text, unlike the direct one, it is the recipient/ interpreter that reconstructs the question that the text is supposed to answer (Gadamer, 1993, p. 353; Folkierska, 1995, p. 172). Depending on life, developmental, educational experiences, one's competencies, pre-judgements, pre-assumptions, the recipient may unveil different questions, thus receiving different answers (Jakubowski, 2006, p. 135). The recipient opens themselves to the text by studying, analysing, interpreting and comprehending it, but the text also opens itself to the interpreter endowing them with a variety of information, experiences, thoughts, reflections, questions. What happens in that space can be called an event. There is a "conversation" between the subjects of this event. The conversation, its language is "the medium that we owe our existence to. Conscience is

never language-less, the world happens in speech" (Gadamer, 1993, p. 353). Every participant of this event wants to understand that "speech", hence the attempts of its interpretation and comprehension (Cf. M. Adamska-Staroń, M. Piasecka, B. Łukasik, 2007). In my view, this is the attempt undertaken by UJD Pedagogy students.

Immersing themselves into the world of pedagogical theories, giving sense to this sort of activity, they discovered/ became aware of many aspects important to them in the context of professional preparation and personal development. Below, I shall quote the most common issues raised in the students' statements.

Studying pedagogical theories in the charges' view promotes the acquisition of substantive knowledge, which provides justifications for practical activities, for instance, theories help one understand why some methods (e.g. upbringing, education) are more effective than others. What is more, they draw attention to the fact that exploring the world of pedagogical diversity fosters gaining knowledge about oneself and another human being. Such a journey, in the charges' opinion, inspires them to deepen and update subject knowledge, knowledge about themselves, other people, culture they participate in, encouraging them at the same time to pose different types of questions, important in education, personal life, the socio-cultural space. Questions, as Ryszard Łukaszewicz remarks, are not less important than searched answers, they are the result of a reflexive approach towards oneself or an encountered entity. Questions gather layers of curiosity and motivation. The gained knowledge can be treated as "reframing questions on one's journey" (Łukaszewicz, 2011, p. 17). The most interesting things happen "at the crossroads of posed and noted questions, and questions that live, authentically and independently "inhabit" our heads when we remember that the world is not only perception but also interpretation" (Łukaszewicz, 2011, p. 17). The students' remarks show that the knowledge gained while studying pedagogical theories lets them understand a broader socio-cultural context where education takes place, enhances self-understanding, understanding of another individual, encourages to independently interpret received information, reflexive being in the world, including the educational space (cognitive aspect, i.e. exploring pedagogical theories to know, interpret, understand, ask).

Studying theories offers an opportunity to use the gained knowledge practically. The knowledge of pedagogical theories, in the charges' view, supports their professional preparation as well as teachers' work. Theories help to create educational programmes, materials, organize the educational process in a thoughtful, effective and efficient way. Thus, they may contribute to improving the quality of the educational process (upbringing and educating). The knowledge about pedagogical theories offers an opportunity to reflect on one's own practice, life-

long improvement of one's competencies and skills. Theories support practical activities, help to become reflective practitioners who are able to analyse their actions, draw conclusions and introduce changes to their work, be creative and innovative (operational aspect; reflexive practice, i.e. exploring pedagogical theories to act, to be a reflexive practitioner).

The knowledge of pedagogical theories, in the charges' view, awakens the desire to strive for community, to be with another human being, makes one more sensitive to social and cultural differences, more willing to understand another human being, the Different, as well as the natural world. Pedagogical theories may help to look at oneself from someone else's perspective, to look at one's own culture differently. Thanks to this, "I" can be joined with "You" and the group "We" (inclusive, communal aspect, i.e. exploring pedagogical theories to live in a community).

The students' opinions show that studying pedagogical theories, understood as Buberian *Opposite* awakens the desire for self-exploration, triggers the need of self-improvement, to realise one's own plans, intentions, create one own expressions, develop one's passions. A passion "is the basis of motivation, inspiration and engagement (...)" (Z. Melosik, 2019, 12) which accompanies us at all stages of projects realised by us, it is the source of our freedom and power as far as creating our own space is concerned (Z. Melosik, 2019, 12). Encouraging such activities, pedagogical theories foster the building of a conscious being on the border of inside and outside, discovering one's own talents, possibilities, teach courageous thinking in order to become capable of active self-realisation, to consciously discover and build one's identity,⁵ to develop one's spirituality, one's own self by (among other things) accomplishing supra-personal tasks to "become a conscious and creative member of a social, national, cultural and global community" (Z. Kwieciński, 1996, p. 31) (regulatory aspect, i.e. exploring pedagogical theories to be).

The analyses and interpretations of gathered material show that the most appreciated, noticed pedagogical theories (currents and trends) by the students are existential pedagogy, intercultural pedagogy, pedagogy of culture, Maria Montessori's pedagogy, inclusive pedagogy. The currents and trends described by the students as crucial fit into two paradigms: paedocentrism in its interpretative version and paedocentrism in its humanistic version. Thus, the students appreciate both theories that are less engaged into criticizing the social foundations of education (paedocentrism in its interpretative version) and those that are called radical critical theories (paedocentrism in its humanistic version). The students identified as meaningful education understood as "conscious educational activity aimed at strengthening the child's construction of subjective

⁵ In his book *Kultura popularna i tożsamość młodzieży. W niewoli władzy i wolności*. Impuls, Kraków 2013, Zbyszko Melosik develops thoroughly the subject matter of adolescent identity.

meanings given to the surrounding reality" (interpretativism) (Rubacha, 2005, p. 67), as well as education understood as "conscious educational activity aimed at strengthening the child's free development and removing its social barriers" (Rubacha, 2005, p. 66). In the first perspective (paedocentrism in its interpretative version), the educator grants the educated the right to autonomy, creates conditions to develop individual interpretations of the world, looking for and reaching knowledge by their own paths (Rutkowiak, 1992; D. Klus-Stańska, 2001). Educational processes are treated here as "interactions aimed at understanding and constructing educational reality via negotiations between the educator and the educated" (Rubacha, 2005, p. 64). In the second perspective (paedocentrism in its humanistic version), educational processes are linked with liberating individuals from *status quo* imposed by society, based on inequalities (Rubacha, 2005, p. 64).

The students would like to realise the aforementioned pedagogical theories/ currents and trends both in their personal life and professional space. At the same time, they emphasized that they are also open to other pedagogical perspectives, and declared to constantly update their knowledge in this area. The knowledge of pedagogical diversity, awareness, attentiveness to new needs in education, the results of the latest studies, reflection shall let them be flexible in adjusting their educational methods (of upbringing and education) to individual needs of their pupils/ charges, create inspiring educational environments, or develop strategies friendly to all the participants of the educational process.

Summary

The essay analysis and interpretation let me notice that studying pedagogical theories (currents, trends) makes sense as it constitutes the value of its own for the Pedagogy students (autotelic importance of studying pedagogical theories/ currents and trends), but it also has its practical values (instrumental importance of studying pedagogical theories/ currents and trends). In their essays, the students emphasized that the world of pedagogical theories is worth their attention and interest, it is needed in the context of their personal development and preparation for their future pedagogue profession. Thus, comprehending cultural texts, here pedagogical theories, by the students, discovering their senses and meanings became for them the way of learning not only about the educational world, conditions of educational opportunities, conditions of such knowledge and experience, which are truly educative, but also about the world in general and about themselves.

For the Pedagogy students the worlds of theory and practice are not in opposition to each other, they do not fight each other but they negotiate, co-exist, support each other. Theory, as they emphasized in their essays, provides them

with basic knowledge and understanding, which are indispensable in practice, whereas practice lets them use this knowledge in real situations, which in turn lets them understand theory better. Theory provides them with the framework that facilitates decision making, problem solving in a conscious, mindful and reflexive way. Practice based on sound theory is more effective. The theoretical space may inspire to adopt new approaches and solutions, thus, it favours innovations. Practice verifies theoretical approaches.

Although some students indicated that the journey through this theoretical world is not easy, engaging in that type of journey, in my view, let them become reflexive travellers, exploring various pedagogical ideas, perspectives, mental constructs that they describe and define. It can be concluded that the journey into this world offered them an exceptional opportunity of learning about and understanding cultural diversity. It showed them that exploring the world of pedagogical theories may help them find the sense of their own existence, the sense of their own coexistence in the world, including the world of education, the sense of creating it. For the future pedagogues, it means the possibility of thinking “in their own way”, crossing the boundaries of their own world, opening to, e.g. new situations, new experiences, to another person, another culture.

Such a journey lets them make (extra)ordinary connections between distant ideas, it becomes conscious participation in culture consisting in experiencing, interpreting, creating. It also invites them to the world of emotions, feelings, imagination, wisdom, to the area “in between”. The students’ essays are, therefore, not only the source of knowledge and understanding senses and meanings they gave to studying pedagogical theories (currents and trends), but they are also the source of knowledge of the world they participate in. Realising such pedagogy offers students an opportunity to discern ideas, thoughts, beliefs constituting pedagogical theories. Thanks to that, the future pedagogues “have got an opportunity to be co-creators and not only consumers of pedagogical knowledge” (Łukasik, Adamska-Staroń, 2015, p. 177). They showed that participation in the world of pedagogical theories is both reflexive and relational.

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Studiowanie teorii pedagogicznych. Perspektywa studentów pedagogiki Uniwersytetu Jana Długosza w Częstochowie

Streszczenie

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest zaprezentowanie wyników badań własnych, koncentrujących się wokół sensów i znaczeń nadawanych przez studentów pedagogiki UJD studiowaniu teorii pedagogicznych. Teorie (prądy, kierunki) pedagogiczne jako jeden z obszarów badań pedagogiki są dla badacza z wielu powodów interesujące. Obszar ten wyróżnia duża różnorodność, rozmaite dylematy czy kontrowersje. Różnorodność mobilizuje badacza, ale także studenta pedagogiki do zwielokrotnienia swojej aktywności poznawczej. Odkrywanie tego świata, poznawanie i rozumienie przypisywanych mu sensów i znaczeń mieści się w obszarze poszukiwań pedagogicznych, których kierunek wyznacza, m.in. obrona przeze mnie podróży hermeneutyczna (hermeneutyczna metoda wraz z odpowiadającymi jej opisowo – interpretacyjnymi analizami). Wybór takiej ścieżki badawczej jest wynikiem postawionego przeze mnie celu badania, przedmiotu i problematyki badawczej.

Słowa kluczowe: teoria, teorie pedagogiczne, hermeneutyka pedagogiczna, studenci.