TWILIGHT OF TEACHER’S SUBJECTIVITY?

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Abstract. The author deals with issues of the subjectivity of the teacher he treated as an idea of the past, which today is not found in the educational realities. Subjectivity, being receptive to decision-making and willingness to bear responsibility, is understood by the author as the ability of the teacher to engage in dialogue with himself. The author characterizes the main features of such a dialogue, indicating its determinants (power, market, ideological illusions, conventions and school culture). He stresses the negative impact of transformations in the field of education, among which the prevalence of the economic-political model of the educational system nullifying the subjectivity of the teacher dominates.

Keywords: pedeuthology, subjectivity, illusion, power, school culture.

1. THE IDEA OF TEACHER SUBJECTIVITY DRIES UP

The idea of subjectivity of the teacher in the educational process is wandering around the meanders of school theory. It can be clearly seen how it slowly goes to the place where the highest products of cognitive penetration go: to the graveyard of thoughts that turned out to be cognitive illusions, a type of mythology, intended primarily to understand educational reality, to find meaning in it, and then to appoint a man - teacher a dominant place in the educational pyramid. Educated, intelligent, efficient, open to the world - such a teacher was to reflect the best qualities of the subject - the conscious perpetrator of his professional fate.

The idea of his subjectivity understood in this way is found in elite company. The idea of pedagogical progress takes its place close to it, next to the idea of de-schooling society, one can also see - so fascinating in its time - a strong group of anti-pedagogical ideas. A moderately talented educator can indicate many more. They all have one thing in common: each had its own time, that is, it became a product of faith that it can become real. It is a simple mechanism: the stronger the belief in an idea, the greater its truthfulness. The premises of any of them were noble every time. It has always been about limiting the effects of the defects of human nature.

Admittedly, this is a lofty and legitimate goal, but in reality, it is unrealistic and most often missed. Mentioned human nature is so diverse that it is impossible to deal with it. Although many have tried to do so. Teachers - idealists usually showed the inability to break the gap between thought and reality. Practitioners’ pedagogues were generally not satisfied enough to change themselves and the world around them. The lack of faith in success and, consequently, the lack of desire for change, was complemented by the retort of the social environment of education (macro and micro politics, economy, local environment of educational institutions, ossified educational tradition). The great and
humanly attractive (because raising a man to the rank of homo creator) idea hung in a vacuum in confrontation with the substantive complexity of education: with its entanglement in politics, ideological turmoil around the concept of school and educational programs, enslavement by economics, unstable structure and loss of internal solidarity people involved in education.

This arrangement still causes the teacher’s subjectivity idea to dry up and be thrown out of the margin of his needs, becoming a form of an archetypal vision, only occasionally fed by the life-giving substance of human resentment and the rebellion of educational madmen against those forces that generally seem immutable and omnipotent. Let’s look at some of them.

2. THE SCHOOL FORTRESS, UNTIL RECENTLY POWERFUL AND PROUD OF ITS SOCIAL STRENGTH, IS WEAKENING, FALLING INTO RUIN AND ANYONE WHO WANTS CAN HIT IT AND CONQUER IT WITHOUT MUCH EFFORT

Authority

Authority enters school life loudly or quietly. Sometimes in a sophisticated manner, and sometimes more abrupt, it first creates a normative space for teaching activity, then controls it and accounts for the work done. Using the multitude of instruments, he possesses, he seeps through the school’s social system, spills around the periphery of school territory to eventually reach teacher’s awareness. The private (sometimes also intimate), family, “own” sphere of the teacher’s life is controlled by the consciousness effectively poisoned and colonized by the actions of power. Thinking about the uncertain future, guilt for perpetual failure to achieve tasks, ambiguity and inconsistency of the professional role - all this contributes to the birth of learned helplessness. Even if the teacher tries to keep some distance to work, release from gloomy thoughts does not come. Anxiety has spread over him and effectively restrains him from a good night’s sleep and willingness to act. In a personal emergency, he focuses on protecting himself. He also has a substantial package of funds. Meaning reversal, projection, aggression, symbolization, identification, conformism, masking, self-absolution, fake reactions - these are just some of the defence mechanisms that are within its potential capabilities.

At the same time, he is a slave to conventions that are beyond his control. Even if he finally rebels, he usually stays isolated with his views, desires, an individual vision of honest and authentic life. Authority, like the Orwellian Big Brother, is still looking at him. It is not known when and why he will want to be more interested in it. The school fortress, until recently powerful and proud of its social strength, is weakening, falling into ruin, and anyone who wants can hit it and conquer it without much effort. It was effectively deprived of her self-defence capability. It is not school which is oppressive today, but the oppressions penetrating it from the social environment, here they find their victims. Colonialists leaping across school rubble of various authority trying to find the remains of something that could still be appropriated. The social order is shaking, so the school is disintegrating. Social solidarity is crumbling, the carefully constructed structures of freedom and equality tremble over the years. This always happens when wisdom is replaced by loyalty and conflict instead of cooperation dominates in the system managed by orders. In education, stuffed with appearances and pretence, the idea of teaching subjectivity must collide with the reality of coercion and systemic subordination.

G. Deleuze has already proved that societies based on disciplining and interning individuals in subsequent institutions (family, school, army, hospital, prison) are gradually being pupated in a total control system. Travestying one of his thoughts, one can say that power is lust passing from the head of despot to the heads of his subjects. The greater the desire, the more prohibitions control collective life.

Teacher’s professional instability, fear of losing his job, external programming of his role - all this has a very worrying effect: the teacher loses the opportunity and desire to protect the values on which the contemporary school was built with its humanistic roots. This is especially dangerous.

Supporting development, respecting the subjectivity of students and parents, dialogical communication, creativity - these are the values that create space for teacher subjectivity. They are an important leitmotif of his role, which is sometimes blurred in the rapid current of change. This current, sometimes taking the form of chaos, means that the teacher does not have the courage to look into the
eyes of personal independence and make the effort to fight for his subjectivity. Not only did he lose the ability to engage in dialogue with partners, but also with himself. In addition, it is the dialogue with oneself, combined with the redefinition of one's own role that is the condition of the restitution of teacher's subjectivity. Reaching the genesis of one's own behaviour, understanding one's motivations are the first steps on the long road to gaining self-knowledge. However, this knowledge counts in the full balance of life events only when it reaches the maturity of true insight and the foundations of its perception of the world.

The previously unknown (or perhaps rather unaware) complexity of things appears here. Well, the subjectivity of a person (teacher) ceases to be a system of his features, such as the ability to make decisions, decide about himself, a sense of agency etc. Understood as the ability to engage in dialogue with oneself, it becomes a complex intellectual task for the teacher. Subjectivity has specific conditions and probably boundaries that should be recognized each time. Performing this task requires a critical reflection on - still present in many statements and settling social consciousness - the eighteen century legacy of developing the idea of subjectivity, in which there is a belief in the primitive position of man towards nature and the social world and the special reasons due to him. This requires a rethinking of the power and access possibilities of every person, even marginalized, to the goods and values they desire. Only then can subjectivity defend itself.

The 18th century concept of subjectivity mentioned above is characterized by a kind of glorification of human self-sufficiency. I. Kant wrote about "a man coming out of minority, in which he fell through his own fault.

Minority is the inability to make use of one's understanding without direction of another. This minority is self-incurred when the cause of it lies not in the lack of understanding but of resolution and of courage to make use of it without direction of another."¹

Following this trail, it one can say that the Enlightenment thought promotes visions of such social reconstruction in which the good flows from human nature, capable of co-experiencing the suffering of others. J. J. Rousseau wrote about it in his "Social Agreement". Moreover, he did not mean at all an irrational escape from civilization and a return to some minty, archaic nature of man (and this is how his thought is sometimes read by his contemporaries), but about opposing hypocrisy and selfishness (which he failed in his private life.)² The result of these investigations was the introduction of compassion to the social debate by J. J. Rousseau. It was - according to the philosopher's intention - to become the foundation of our morality.

The Enlightenment vision of subjectivity, however, did not relinquish the fear of influences to which it is subject. This fear seems to be the result of such a reading of man's relationship with the world, which reduces him to the role of a being who wants to act rationally, aspiring to cope with life's adversities. What is most personal to man, his own identity, is not in him but in interaction. He is always in a relationship, always 'in between'. So here is the drama of his situation, which increases with the moment he falls into the trap he set: self-sufficiency turns out to be a myth, rationality - originally conceived as a force to reduce fear of the unknown world - this fear multiplies. It makes people aware of what they can lose with the loss of their national or cultural identity.

The vision of subjectivity with a more romantic provenance comes to the rescue. A man - a creator, is still afraid because he knows that he is influenced by strong, secret forces, among which authority is distinguished by special power. However, he wants to cope with these forces, he rebels, although sometimes it leads him to the edge of insanity. It is close to crossing the borders of heresy, and to heretics' power is particularly ruthless. Although, as a result, he does not do much to put his ideals into practice, he can be the prototype of the subject undertaking the effort of dialogue with himself. He defeated the fear of the world. One foot is already in the land of freedom of thought, from which subjectivity originates.

² On the one hand, compassion, on the other, putting his own children to the orphanage. Is this not an example of hypocrisy? par excellence?
3. Even an unwanted market becomes fiction, because no market game is applicable here

Market

The market is in fact the form of power mentioned above, but it is specific enough to be looked at separately. It penetrated education following the dissemination of the neoliberal vision of man, in which the dominance of values such as freedom, equality and rationality is emphasized. The thing is that following the neoliberal path these values would be realized in the conditions of a free market game in the field of educational services.

This process would be accomplished by expanding parents’ decision-making competences and promoting inter-school competition and a specific struggle for the student by eliminating the regionalization, educational voucher programs and establishing social (private) schools.

The intention to introduce market values into education was clear: it was about improving the quality of education, desegregating and increasing the effectiveness of education, and promoting educational innovation. It turned out very soon, however, that these hopes proved futile. According to the OECD report, “all benefits in terms of improving student performance appear to be minimal at best.” Further, the same authors, based on the results of research carried out in different countries, conclude:

“The results of research on segregation as a derivative of market mechanisms indicate a potential risk of its deepening. Efficiency may increase or decrease, while it is unlikely to increase innovation. For all the phenomena discussed, the effect of diversity can be observed: specific groups of students and specific schools may experience the positive impact of market mechanisms, while others will experience negative effects.”

Despite the fact that market mechanisms in education have exposed their weakness, there has been a shift in the social understanding of its essence, including the essence of the teacher’s work. It gained market value, transforming into a product that has its price, its supplier and its clientele. The market, with its extraordinary sensory power, sets life goals. It sets standards, shows trends, awards prizes for the credentials accumulated in the course of man’s education (certificates, diplomas, attestations, awards etc.). The market wants to treat education as an investment area in which the funds involved (read: money) should bring specific profits in some specific time perspective. A financial game is underway in this area subject to the supply and demand mechanism. So far belonging to the sphere of culture education (and with it the school), by the power of market forces transforms into an economic enterprise.

In such an oriented system subject to the institutionalization process, the hierarchy of structures (managers, contractors, controllers, technical support and staff of programmers) must appear over time and bureaucracy solidifies.

The question arises whether education thus understood is still able to create conditions for human development, provide him with the tools to understand the world and himself, so that he “knows where and how to strive, from which sources to enjoy the joy of life.” Do market mechanisms in education allow, for example, to determine the rate of return on investment? Who will count what profit will bring education of seven-year-old Johnny, when he will be twenty-five-year-old John and enter professional life?

If we try to provide a relative balance between the educational offer of schools (supply) and the expectations of students and parents (demand) and it comes to us with difficulty, it is even worse in the delicate matter of interpersonal relations. Teacher autonomy and parental participation in school life are dominated by bureaucratic procedures. Here, even an unwanted market becomes fiction, because no market game finds its application.

The activities of all actors of the educational scene are recorded in the relevant legal acts imposing the obligation of universal compliance. Education clients (parents and students are so called in this convention, and in a sense also teachers) are subject to constant evaluation (tests, exams, questioning,

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4 ibidem, p.24.
promotion internships etc.). It is the basis either for leaving them in the system and obtaining the competences expected from them at a given stage, or for eliminating them beyond the margin of the educational sphere. So where is the place for market mechanisms here? What supermarket chain would decide to examine its customers? In education it is everyday life resulting from the promotion of the economic model of the school and the misleading message about its marketization.

Among them, one of the most important is our educational tradition. It allows, at most, to state that the school operates in a quasi-commercial environment. It takes over some elements of management from the world of business but introduces changes in them so that they meet its needs and do not violate existing imponderables. In this tradition, especially in the current emerging from the roots of humanistic pedagogy, the parent and student are perceived as an active subject participating in the process of creating value. If today they become clients, they are increasingly aware of their rights and obligations, possibilities and limitations.

In such a situation, an important task for the school is to build joint relationships with them based on dialogue, aimed at quickly responding to changing expectations of the target market, providing information about the service and offered values, whose main carrier is education perceived as the final product.

4. AN ILLUSION CAN ARISE ONLY BECAUSE IT IS PRECEDED BY SOME TRUTH THAT IS RELATED TO IT

Ideological illusions

We treat illusion as something that needs to be dealt with, that is, unmask, show internal evil and find the truth that this illusion wants to cover. Such action makes us heroic heroes and sometimes gives birth to illusions whose existence we do not perceive ourselves. What's more, we do not even feel that the illusion is the property of our cognition. In the world of science, sometimes dominated by the hidden, but also naive belief about the superiority of matter over the spirit, the illusion is considered a mistake, and it is perhaps the most enduring warp of educational reality. Illusion always appears where the declared desire to discover the truth about the world encounters a lie. The relationship of truth and lies is an extremely cognitively appealing instrument for describing and explaining the intricacies of being in which education turns out to be a “pearl in the crown.”

J.J. Rousseau, writing about upbringing, abandons his five children; S. Kierkegaard, leading a libertine life, creates religious texts; M. Foucault, praising the courage to proclaim the truth, keeps secret his AIDS disease; Simone de Beauvoir, posing as a leading feminist as the author of “The Second Sex,” maintains submissive relations with her American lover writer Nelson Algren. The question is “why?”

Just as Heraclitan nature “likes to hide”, so does the truth about education like to hide behind illusions of which it is usually some part, and which always carry some ideological version. Illusions remain at the service of educational ideologies. The desire to discover the truth satisfies the cognitive ambitions of educators as much as the desire to expose the illusion. The latter, perhaps more, given the double cipher concealing this truth. Illusion requires more determination and ruthlessness. If the truth is preceded by an illusion, then our effort to discover and tear it away is incomparably greater. The truth, covered by illusion, must be found again by the educator in the effort of a double course of thought: negation of illusion and exposing the truth. Although different, they are complementary goals. They are coupled together necessarily. An illusion can arise only because it is preceded by some truth that is related to it. The truth is usually the rejection of the illusion as “non-truth.” Because this “not-truth” has its admirers questioning the first, both (truth and illusion) persist in a sisterly embrace in which it is in vain to seek mutual love. The Nietzschean relationship between the Apollonian and Dionysian element of reality is evident in education precisely in this clash of illusion and the truth about education. The rigid rules of pedagogical ideologies, their orderly set of assumptions, beliefs and program declarations conceal the Apollonian appearance that seduces with a handsome mask characterized by stability and an attractive vision of the future. Next to her, the Dionysian element of emotions pulsates, real emotions, fears and elation, successes and failures creating a real picture of the
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pedagogical odyssey. Our hero - teacher - loses his subjectivity because - as I mentioned above - he loses the ability to conduct a dialogue with himself. This is a prerequisite for finding the truth about education, including school life. It is about contemplative thinking, directed directly towards the essential layers of school life in which the teacher moves. Dialogue with himself does not mean closing the world around him. On the contrary, it draws impulses that settle the content of his thinking about life, upbringing, other people, school, student, and finally about himself. When he undertakes a dialogue with himself, he begins a bold work: although he sometimes questions self-esteem, he greatly expands the field and depth of reflection.

It is a peculiar examination of conscience, the result of which can sometimes frighten, thrust into Jonah’s complex. Our teacher conducting a dialogue with himself adopts a romantic attitude: he is no longer enough for who he is, but in the act of transgression he exceeds his limits. However, this liberation has its price. There is a kind of pressure on him that requires the de-construction of his self-knowledge. He really develops only when he realizes that falls usually hurt, and perfection is the product of fantasy.

Hubert Hermans’ Dialogical Self Theory (DST) on the example of a teacher quite clearly finds its justification: various voices come to life inside him, becoming a partner of an internal conversation, the course of which maintains all the subtleties of close partners (Hermans calls it the positions of the self). Well, these partners (internal voices) value school events differently, reflect different types of discourse, build a kind of hierarchy, stuck only in the right perspective of perceiving things, reading intentions, interpreting experiences, etc. Acting in the epicentre of school life, a teacher acquires the ability to read different codes behind which meanings are hidden.

The multitude of internal voices (partners) is subject to arrangements by the subjective self. It keeps these internal voices in check, resulting in their fusion and thus ensuring an elementary level of internal integration. The subjective self has a very intimate relationship with partners. They interpenetrate each other in an endless journey of thoughts, meanings, suppositions or doubts. Internal voices are so well settled in the subjective self that they become its own element. This element feeds, immerses in it, succumbs to it and allows itself to be caught up in the stream of life, just to overwhelm it and dominate it thanks to a sense of its own coherence (“despite the variety of behaviours and features I am one”) and continuity (“despite life changes, I am still myself, I am the same subject.”).

5. CONVENTIONS, EVEN IF THEY CONFLICT WITH THE WORLD OF TEACHERS’ VALUES, REQUIRE THEM TO OBEY

Conventions and school culture

This is another force effectively blocking the teacher’s realization of his/her own professional visions and hindering breaking through the thicket of traps lurking at him in every phase of dialogue with himself/herself. The nature of this force is unique: they are primitive to education and are subject to legal and moral protection. Conventions are to regulate matters in education. The idea is glorious, but it also involves incapacitation or marginalization of educational innovators, whose conventionality usually hurts and whose incidental absurdity they clearly see. Because they do not want to live in an absurd reality and want to change it, they clash with school matter. Sometimes they manage to win, that is, break the current scheme and introduce some new (organizational, methodological, program). However, this does not change the fact that school conventions, even if they conflict with the world of teacher values, require them to obey. Sometimes it happens that their feeling of sense and moral responsibility forces them to oppose it. Then a more or less violent form of rebellion appears. They

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5 Jonasz’s complex is a kind of attitude characterized by escape and fear of taking on new duties, life roles, tasks that appear before a person in the flow of life changes. Jonah only becomes free when he begins to fulfill the task before him.

rebel against procedures for establishing rules of educational life, hierarchy of structures, excessive variability of education programs, ways of managing education, no wage increases, etc.

A dramatic situation is created when the teacher is stuck in the middle of a dispute between the forces of morality and convention. This drama is born of the fact that both (morality and convention), being one of the highest forms of influence on human behavior, often conflict with each other. They have their own dynamics, their sources and manifestations. Not everything that is inscribed in the conventions of educational reality gains a positive moral assessment of teachers. An example is the age-old dilemmas of the teaching profession: develop individuality or cultivate collectivity in school everyday life, cultivate discipline or prefer free development, introduce into the world of culture or rather cultivate individual interests and meet the child’s personal needs, etc.

Each choice creates a different order and is embedded in a convention created by collective majority through the power of cultural supremacy. Sometimes it is difficult to compromise. Especially that on the foundation of the conventionality of behavior of all participants of educational life, the culture of the school arises, the content of which strongly determines the scope of the teacher’s duties, ways of fulfilling his social role. I define school culture here as a set of values, behavior patterns, norms, school traditions and rituals, characteristic for a given institution. It has a lot of power. Teachers can be so shaped by the culture of the school that they do not require supervision on a daily basis. They internalized the values and norms co-creating this culture (e.g. values expressed in the slogan “student's good first and foremost”, value of trust in relation to the student, the teaching team, school management) and, as a consequence, also norms related to responsibility for the effects of their work, preparation for classes, etc. School culture in this case becomes a derivative of a wider set of determinants and a variable dependent on the configuration of external factors of a socio-economic and organizational nature. It is also a mechanism that has been known for a long time and is used by school supervision or school heads (for example during trainings under the so-called “In-School Teacher Improvement”). In such situations, supervision uses a cultural form of regulating behavior. It is cheaper and generally more effective than long-lasting and burdensome bureaucratic and control forms. It is enough to invest in intensive teacher training, during which they undergo socialization, steering and shaping new values, behavior norms and daily habits. The result of using this method of regulation, and in fact re-educating teachers, may be, for example, their greater loyalty to school.

From these considerations, a rather tarnished picture of teaching subjectivity emerges. Being a composition of his sensitivity and self-knowledge, this image is the result of many overlapping processes. It shows the efforts of the teacher working on himself, but also reflects in the external world, whose impact reaches deeply into the private sphere, also determining daily professional behavior. Too often, the teacher’s subjectivity - contrary to official declarations and written missions or visions - is an ideological slogan in the propaganda warp, and the culture of the school strengthens conformist type behaviors, becoming an instrument of destructive competition and a habitat of demoralizing all anti-values.

It is also often a brake on teachers’ initiatives aimed at changing the school in a way that would make it a place of common life, a place of their own, with which they want to identify and in which important things happen. All this is due to the way of managing the educational system, which generates fear of dual power (government and local government agencies), which arouses teachers’ guilt for the insufficient level of their achievements. If it lacks joy from joint action, if it lacks optimism, it must also lack elemental satisfaction from the successes achieved. It is difficult to find this joy in a situation where values such as exploring the world, development, responsibility, dialogue, feeling of sense, safety and subjectivity are transferred from the level of goals to the level of the means of school action, and the main motive of each participant’s functioning becomes only survival.

In such a culture one can find many prejudices and words without coverage, one can see many behaviors testifying to contempt for partners, manifested not only in disrespect for different views, but often in a growing wave of aggressiveness. In relation to the educational process, it is more a culture of withdrawal from school life than a culture of participation, a culture more celebrating hierarchy than dialogue, a culture that imposes norms and enforces compliance. In the didactic sphere, it is mainly a
culture of searching for correct answers than asking questions, a culture of cataloging information, and not constructing knowledge.

If the question constituting the title of the text is justified, then in the light of the above considerations, the question mark should be dropped and replaced with an exclamation mark.