Jarosław Jendza
ORCID: 0000-0001-7598-9085
University of Gdańsk

Symbolic inversion in the narratives
of Montessori practitioners –
additions to the *Discursive Construction of the Subject*

Introduction

The following article constitutes an attempt to continue and develop the scope of research carried out by and under the leadership of Tomasz Szkudlarek, focused on the category of the subject and its discursive construction in various dimensions of culture, as well as the phenomenon of symbolic reversal. In the first part of this article, I return to the methodological hints present in this part of Szkudlarek and his colleagues' works, which deal explicitly with identity, discourse, and subjectivity (Stańczyk, Cackowska, Stare 2012). I do so in order to sketch out the premise of my own project, which puts *childhood* at its centre. At this stage I report on the research procedure and briefly discuss the social field of Maria Montessori's pedagogy, within which I am specifically analysing childhood.

Thanks to the findings of Szkudlarek and his team, at the stage of interpreting the results, I direct attention to the less explored dimensions of the analysed field, and – following the Professor's idea inspired by the work of Peter McLaren – I refer to the issue of *inversion* or *the symbolic reversal* (McLaren 1985; Szkudlarek 1992), which I reflect upon in the context of the collected empirical material. Turning to these dimensions has made it possible to look at some aspects of Montessori's pedagogy related to the figure of a *child*, the category of *childhood* and the meaning of education, which I consider particularly important today, especially at a time of a renaissance of various educational approaches derived from the child-centred concepts of the New Education Movement, also known as the New School, or Reformpädagogik in

German. Therefore, in my analyses I draw on both Szkudlarek's developing proposal to creatively combine critical analyses of discourse and phenomenography, descriptions of the phenomenon of *symbolic reversal* and its relevance to possible analyses (Szkudlarek 2023), as well as Małgorzata Cackowska's findings regarding the discursive "nature" of constructing the cultural phenomenon of childhood (Cackowska 2012: 37–38).

Material and methods

Between 2019 and 2022, I've conducted in-depth, individual, semi-structured interviews, which were then analysed according to the procedure of phenomenography (Martön 1986; Richardson 1999) and the seven steps of analysis and interpretation involving: problem formulation, study design, interviewing, transcription, analysis, interpretation, and reporting described by Steinar Kvale (1996).

The time context of this research is significant because it included the COVID-19 pandemic, which, according to many researchers in various parts of the world, affected the reality of education – not only in the Montessori approach (Malm 2004; Beatty 2011; Christensen 2016; 2019; Aziz, Quraishi 2017; Andrisano-Ruggieri et al. 2020; Ender, Ozcan 2019; Siswanto, Kuswandono 2020; Efe, Ulutas 2022).

In the light of the above research, it can be concluded that teachers faced numerous challenges related to, among other things, the involvement of children and limitations relating to the prepared environment and other dimensions of education, which must undoubtedly have influenced the content of the collected empirical material. At the same time, I would like to emphasise that in this text I only analyse the parts of the statements that I coded as possible symbolic inversions concerning school and childhood. This is because I assume that these are the relatively permanent rules of the grammar of discourse, or, as Pierre Bourdieu would say, the rules of this social subfield (2008).

The research sample consisted of twenty-eight Montessori teachers (aged 23–58) working in 14 institutions (2 nurseries, 8 kindergartens, 4 primary schools) located in various regions of Poland. The main research question of the project was formulated as follows: How do Montessori teachers experience their professional reality?

Experiencing professional reality constitutes an important scholarly problem due to the fact that it has the potential – in Erving Goffman's terminology – to frame practices, including discursive ones (Damore, Rieckhof 2021; Bavli, Kocabaş 2022), and not only in relation to early childhood education in general, but also in terms of the meanings given to childhood (Slovacek, Minova 2021), the meaning of Montessori education in the context of schools at subsequent

levels (Rathunde, Csikszentmihalyi 2005), and other alternative pedagogies (Dodd-Nufrio 2011).

However, for the purpose of the analyses presented here, focusing on the categories of a *child* and *childhood* as well as *symbolic reversal*, I have narrowed the scope of inquiry and selected only those parts of the narratives identified as related to the aforementioned categories. For this purpose, I applied open coding using MaxQDA software and then formulated analytical categories.

In other words, the phenomenographic analysis "procedure" applied involved (a) reading "natural" sense units (verbatim transcripts of interviews) oriented to specific parts of the narrative, (b) coding passages, (c) condensing and comparing codes, (d) identifying, labelling and describing analytical categories, (e) illustrating categories with "representative" quotes, as well as (f) data-driven interpretation (Martön 1986; Szkudlarek 2023). In the following part, I limit myself to quoting a few verbatim statements, unaltered in terms of grammar, syntax or lexis, and discuss them in the context of the category of symbolic inversion as well as the meanings attributed to childhood.

Research results

The issue of symbolic reversal/symbolic inversion – as a concept relating to a specific culture and interesting in terms of research – has been analysed in anthropology for at least fifty years. Already in 1978, Victor Turner wrote the following:

> One aspect of symbolic reversal may be to pull people out of their culturally defined and even biologically assigned roles by making them play the exact opposite roles (Babcock 1978: 287).

In this sense, this inversion refers to a cultural situation in which a person or a certain group of people in specific circumstances play their roles "backwards". In this context, it would be necessary to establish what roles we are dealing with in the field of education. For the purposes of this work, I propose to focus on a child, an adult and their mutual relationships.

The issue of childhood is widely discussed within the pedagogical sciences (Smolińska-Theiss 2000; Łaciak 2013; Magda-Adamowicz, Kowalska 2020). Large body of research allows us to conclude that the cultural conditions of child-rearing undergo changes in terms of the preferred family model and parenting style of Polish women and men towards the partnership model, and the while the traditional model is weakening (Kubicka-Kraszyńska 2022: 37). Nonetheless, the author of this report notes: "However, changes in practices in the daily functioning of partners in households are occurring much more slowly and are still largely based on the woman's greater responsibility for household duties" (Kubicka-Kraszyńska 2022: 39). Therefore, it can be said that the declarations concerning upbringing are changing,

but the cultural practices in this regard are relatively permanent, largely traditional and "leaning" towards a conservative patriarchy.

As shown by numerous analyses of the world of early childhood education in Poland, the traditional, behaviourist-based model of education has not changed significantly (Mendel 2006; Klus-Stańska 2007), hence a change or even a reversal of the paradigm is sought in alternative pedagogies (Klus-Stańska 2008).

At this point, I would like to offer a slightly different analysis of the issue of *symbolic reversal*. The practices, metaphors and perhaps even values underlying Montessori pedagogy are sometimes compared to traditional model of parenting, relationships, and education. Pedagogy inspired by the idea of the famous Italian woman can therefore serve as a reservoir of resistance against a certain dominant vision and educational practice with a different and perhaps even opposing vision of childhood and children's relations with adults. In this sense, I sugget to interpret the narratives relating to the realities of how Montessori pedagogy works in a similar way as Szkudlarek treats the story of Agata, a fourth-grade student, about an unusual school (Szkudlarek 1992: 48–49).

In other words, the transmissive school, the post-figurative model of upbringing and childhood are, for me, the norm, the ordinary, "domesticated" cultural conditions (Klus-Stańska 2012b; Kosowska 2018), with Montessori pedagogy (potentially) being their symbolic reversal.

As we remember from Szkudlarek's analyses cited above, Agata inverts certain dimensions of the school's "ordinariness", but others are not inverted and remain unchanged (Szkudlarek 1992: 49–50). Such an observation leads the researcher to the conclusion that:

> [t]he elements of school life that are associated with "deterministic" rationality, with a norm prohibiting spontaneous activity […] and with the authority of the teacher expressed through ritualised forms of "corporeality" (body posture, dress, behaviour) have been explicitly reversed (and thus singled out as specific "objects"). What has not been reversed […] are the relationships of hierarchical power and the organisation of the learner's behaviour, time, and space. One may risk a generalisation that those elements of the hidden agenda that were related to the structure of the school institution (its hierarchy, rules of organisation) turned out to be "more deeply hidden" and those that are related to the functions performed by it "more shallowly" […]. (Szkudlarek 1992: 50)

Using Szkudlarek's findings, I select such fragments of the narrative from the research material that indicate a symbolic reversal. I then look at those dimensions that have been inverted and those that have remained unchanged. Let us first recall the statement of Anna, a teacher working in a Montessori kindergarten with a mixed-age group of children between the ages of three and five:

> I feel that with some children you can see that they want something. They want choice, they want to achieve something, they want to do something, they want rewards, they want things.

So, Montessori could work. Instead of saying "go stand in the corner" when a child actually does something bad, we first remind the child that there are rules, for example Janek hits Zosia […], so I go to Janek and explain to him: "Janek. We have these rules. Do you remember? No hitting, no biting, no pushing – kids feel sorry. I ask: Janek, how do children feel afterwards? Well usually Janek says – sad. And what do the children do, I ask – they cry. And why do they cry? – Well, because they are sad. Well then, why are you pushing children? To make them feel sad? – Well, no. Well, Janek. I remind you for the last time. I will not remind you about the rules any further. We don't push children, we don't bite children, we don't take away toys… that's all there is. So, I'm saying that if this situation happens again, you'll have time-out at the table. Well then the child usually says noooo [symbolises begging], no… So instead of this kind of time-out there is this relaxation with an earlier reminder of the rules. But the case is that some children adapt to it very well and you can see that… this works for approximately with 90% of children (Anna, W26).

Anna directly addresses a certain cultural norm regarding the punishment of children. Not only is the form of punishment itself ("time out") reversed, but also the communication. The teacher uses the first-person plural for verbs describing desirable and undesirable behaviour in the environment. This initial "we" removes the "they" from the discourse (Bauman 2016), or, as in Szkudlarek's Agata, the norm disappears as an overt imperative: "be polite" (Szkudlarek 1992: 49).

In Montessori, together we form a group of people who are subject to exactly the same rules. This is how the conversation with the child begins, i.e. by referring to rules that apply to everyone without exception. However, if we look at the next stages of the teacher's communication with the child, two further important discursive phrases can be distinguished. First, the adult formulates questions in the nature of disjunctive alternatives, precluding the child from giving an answer contrary to the adult's expectation. Then, the adult already explicitly expresses the expectation of the child's desired behaviour with an articulation of the possible consequences of non-compliance. The corner is replaced by a table where one "relaxes". What remains unchanged in the evoked narrative is the power of the adult over the child, the power over the distribution of voice, the positive valorisation of the child's adaptation according to the expectations of the institution.

Let us now look at another part of a statement. This time, Barbara, who works in a Montessori nursery, describes a certain pedagogical solution that – at least at first glance – is meant to benefit the child:

There is, of course, also a shelf with clean cutlery and plates as well as table mats that are prepared for children. These table mats are a sheet of paper that's laminated, on which the spaces for the plate for the glass and for the cutlery are drawn. So that when a child picks up a mat like this, they know straight away where to put what, right? It is then easier for the child. With such a mat, the child has sort of an own space at the table, knowing that it's his or her space. When the child eats it is supposed to eat there. Each child has a mat like this and knows that they have their own place to eat (Barbara, W18).

Mats made to make it easier for children, made to have their own space at their disposal invert the traditional order. At the same time, there is a disturbing "sort of own space" in the quoted narrative passage that invites analysis of what has not been transformed. The child follows – as Dorota Klus-Stańska puts it – the "footsteps" of the adult (Klus-Stańska 2012a). The adult person makes it clear which part of the space serves which purposes and who clearly defines how the plate and glass should be placed. Authority over the space and therefore the child's body is held by the teacher.

In another interview by Celina, the adjectives "conventional" and "ordinary" appear explicitly in relation to the mainstream school, the transmission model school. The transition from the extraordinary world that in this case is a Montessori kindergarten to the traditional education involves the inevitable boredom of the child and the passive experience of education below the level of intellectual development.

Another aspect that distinguishes the "ordinary world" and the reversed realities of Montessorian education and upbringing is the shouting and noise, running, physical violence present in the "conventional" school. Such a transition will therefore be associated with the child's terror. Because Montessori children want development and ask questions, they become "inconvenient" for the traditionalist teacher.

> I believe that a child will be bored if a child from a Montessori kindergarten goes to a primary school, a conventional school, they will be bored because a lot of the kindergarten material goes strongly beyond this curriculum of an ordinary primary school. In such a conventional school, the child in that case will also have to sit and listen to something he or she in fact already knows. But I think it can also be lost precisely because of the fact that in such kindergartens [Montessori – J.J.], I mean, you know it depends on the group and the day, but we rather try to make peaceful. And so that there isn't a lot of shouting and running or some beating, but it's very noisy in schools, both during lessons and breaks, and a child can be scared. But I think that it would be difficult for teachers who get such a child coming from a Montessori kindergarten, because the child would be inconvenient, because he or she asks a lot of questions, wants to know a lot, and since the child has already learnt a lot from kindergarten, going beyond the school material, I think that he or she would be very inquisitive, which could be a problem for the teacher. Actually, we usually know what the child will be asking. We have prepared tables of the child's progress, i.e. all the aids are listed and the child's age and the aids he or she should have mastered by this age are written down. And we try to follow that, the child can reach for whatever it wants, but if the child reaches for the maths section into the divisions because it likes the material on the shelf we then rather just go for the sand paper numbers and start working from there. But there are these progress tables and there we mark what the child can already do, and I verify it with the material, so if the child, for example, wants to work with some letters, I first ask it about the ones I remember teaching, I also have the ones I taught the child before and I check if he or she remembers them. If not, I repeat it once again, and just ask the same thing again the next time. And I introduce new ones if the child has actually

mastered the ones we previously introduced. The teacher should give the child the freedom to decide. But nevertheless, such decision-making by the child … sometimes there are rules. But also, the teacher should be firm, perhaps that's too big word, the teacher should be able to say – stop, I don't agree, or stop, we don't work like that, or first me then you, because I also want to present something to the child (Celina, W25).

At the same time, it is easy to identify those dimensions that have not been inverted. This will include, for example, the regime of the necessity of intellectual development, perceived as a transition from simple to complex forms as a consequence of specific educational interventions planned and implemented by adults. Such a configuration of the discourse and the meta-discourse in the logic of developmental necessity is critically and creatively described by Maximilian Chutorański (2015) inspired by the works of Foucault.

However, even at "shallower" levels, the dimensions of *the ordinary* of this supposedly *extraordinary* pedagogy can be clearly seen. There are developmental tables describing specific developmental norms and related teaching resources (here called *material*), and there is also the principle of grading difficulty, which has been valid in didactics for at least five centuries (Comenius 1956). The children's evident decisiveness and relative freedom of choice meet here with the teacher's rather traditional authority over the use of didactic resources and the objectives assigned to them – goals defined by adults.

The adult presents the world to the child through specific materialities and then enables the child to work with them. Therefore, we are dealing here with a partially reversed order. First, the child, through their curiosity concerning certain material, gives an indication to the adult about the teaching work, but in a later phase, the child returns to their *usual* role, i.e. that of the recipient of the presentation, in order to eventually gain relative freedom again in terms of individual work.

It is also worth noting the irreversible definition of knowledge and the ways in which it is constructed. Celina mentions the ideal of "mastering" knowledge, which would be evidenced by a child's ability to reproduce certain content from memory. If a child cannot prove memorisation, the presentation procedure should be repeated.

Let us now recall an extract from another interview. Danuta said:

[…] and in a traditional school there is no time to pay attention to the child, to look at the child a bit more, to work on something. Or, I don't know… at least check if the child prefers visual or auditory or kinaesthetic learning, just which way to go so that this child starts to understand what's being said. And what's cool here is that there's simply stimuli coming at the child from every possible direction and there's no way the child won't understand something. Secondly, I believe it's much easier for the child later, even when they go to a traditional school, the child has already some foundations. And in fact, the child coming out of kindergarten can read fluently, and it happens in traditional school that children cannot read, even in the first grade (Danuta, W16).

In an "inverted" school, there is time, unlike in an ordinary school where this time is lacking. However, it is *productive time*, so the function of time at school remains unchanged. The organisation of the day is therefore inverted. The rush and "chasing time" in an ordinary school give way to an apparent slowdown, and yet the logic of the capitalocene subordinated to the productivity (Haraway 2015) of the educational institution is unreversed (Rancière 2013; 2015; Räber 2023).

The concept of knowledge and the mechanisms of its acquisition are also interestingly unchanged. This is because the stimuli "push" on the children, making them understand all those elements of knowledge that will enable them to function effectively later on in ordinary school. Such a basis consists in, for example, the ability to read, we should add – common in an "inverted" Montessori school, but rare in a regular school.

In terms of development, there is no identifiable inversion, but rather a return to the question of time, acceleration, and the maintenance of a stable cultural norm of "faster is better" (Lakoff, Johnson 2008), the problematic nature of which is widely reported in the literature (Berg, Seeber, Collini 2017; Laasch 2017; Rosa, Duraj, Koltan 2020).

Another extract from the interview deals with a certain possibility of an educational relationship between an adult and a child. Elżbieta mentions a type of children who are reluctant or insecure to go beyond their comfort zone or, as Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky would probably say, enter the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, Cole 1978).

The teacher defines her role as that of an adult who provides positive feedback designed to encourage the child to – to use the sporting metaphor present in the interview – "set the bar higher", to be ready to take on a developmental challenge.

> Well, there are some children who will reach for such materials that they know are easy, and they know they can handle it. They don't set the bar a bit higher themselves, but rather reach for easy things that they know for sure they can do. Well, I approach such kids and say 'well look you already know how to work with this, you simply do it very well already. I'd like to show you something else now, or some new material', and then I involve the child in the presentation a bit, to show something more, to get the child to know something more (Elżbieta, W23).

Let us note that not only the choice of educational content, but also the forms/methods of didactic work are reversed here. Before proposing a form of activity or learning content to a child that may be educationally challenging, it is important to diagnose the child's potential in terms of attitudes towards transcending the familiar and the easy.

Then, the teacher provides reinforcement in the form of a positive message to encourage the new activity/content, to finally "involve" showing the content in a format of a presentation. Such a model of behaviour is in accordance (to some extent) with the general assumptions of Montessori pedagogy, especially the postulate

of following the child (Montessori 2013), but also with behaviourist concepts of motivation (Dilshad 2017: 64).

At the same time, in this case we are dealing with aspects that have not been inverted. Firstly, in the statement "[…] you are already doing it very well", we find the norm that (1) adults can and should evaluate children's activities, because (2) this is a motivating factor for further work.

Moreover, it is the adult who explains and shows the world and, in this sense, is the guide. Such an assumption is often problematised, for example, in the context of the complexity and uncertainty of the mechanisms of constructing children's meanings (Klus-Stańska 2004).

Another excerpt presented in this text is from Fiona, who explicitly states that Montessori education is something very different from mainstream education. She illustrates her view with the precise characteristics of a certain pedagogical form, particularly characteristic of Montessori kindergartens, called the three-period lesson, which consists of three stages/periods: association (naming), recognition, and memorisation. The idea itself was borrowed by Montessori from Eduard Seguin, who, as a physician, worked with children with special educational needs in France and the United States in the late 19th century, however, research into the validity of its use is still controversial today and has inspired subsequent researchers to pick up the thread (Larrow 2009; Jackson 2011; Feez 2023).

It's very different at our Montessori. Just look, we have something like the three-period lesson. A three-period lesson means that we have objects, if they cannot be objects, then pictures, in the relation. My aim is to teach the child what it is. So that it can identify what it is dealing with. This means that the child should know one of these things, should know, for example – "Oh! This is a pen". And the child knows it's a pen, but for example doesn't know it's a notebook, doesn't know it's a phone. And I, for example, in the first stage, I tell the child, I show. I take one thing. It is very important not to put all the things in front of the child at once. Just one at a time, I take all the rest, put the pen down and say "this is a pen". The child mostly repeats, I say that the child can touch, see, smell if he or she wants to, so that it can sort of fully imagine, see, smell what it is and what he or she associates it with. And I then take this pen, give the child a notebook and say, "see – this is a notebook". The child once again takes it, touches, checks, repeats after me, I take the notebook away. I show a phone and say the same thing: "this is a phone". The child takes it, touches in various ways, sometimes even tastes it. I take these three elements I put them next to each other and I say to the child for example something like this: "I want you to cover the phone with your hand" and the child covers the phone with the hand, I say: "and now I'd like you to turn the notebook upside down" and the child turns the notebook upside down [shows how it does it]. I say this several times, if the child gets confused, I start again, from the first period, so when I show it to the child, present these objects one by one and say: "this is a pen, this is a phone, this is a notebook". Again, I move on to the following stage. If a child, in the second stage, after a few such attempts, because I don't say every single thing once, just to move things around, for example, I will say: "bring Małgosia's pen, for example". And the child goes with the pen, well … in general kids love to go with things. After this stage, when the child

does not make mistakes and I can already see that he or she more or less knows what is what, I take the three things again (*shows)* and again one by one show it the child and ask: "what is this?". And the child replies: "a pen". I take it away, and show the other thing. I say, "what is this?". "This is the phone". I take again and show the last thing and say, "and what is this"? The child replies to me that it's a notebook. And I say, "see, you've learned new words today". Well, this is what a three-step lesson looks like. If, for example, a child, during this final stage, when I ask: "what is this"? the child answers me wrongly that this is the phone where it's the notebook, then I start again from the first stage. So, I once again show it to the child, then the child has some movement related to these things, and at the very end I ask if he or she has remembered. It is also important to emphasise at the end that the child has learnt these new things today, so that the child knows that he or she knows, that he or she is able, and so that he or she can be pleased with oneself. So, this can be used as well and it just works in every situation. I have to honestly say that even at university when I was learning vocabulary for English, I used the same method. And it gets into your head quickly (Fiona, W7).

At this point I do not undertake an exhaustive explanation and description of the solution reported above in working with a child, but in the context of the issue of symbolic inversion it is worth highlighting what has been inverted and what remains the same.

What we have here is an individualisation of teaching, an empathetic approach to error, which is a reversal of the logic of the transmission school. The idea of the three-period lesson also implies a focus on the content/thing that brings the child and the adult together. They meet around a particular concept, issue, word in different roles. It is this thing that is central to this triangle, and therefore this form can be seen as a departure from both child-centred and pedeutocentric pedagogies towards thing-centred approaches (Vlieghe, Zamojski 2019a; 2019b), although, of course, Montessori approach itself is often located as child-centred (Śliwerski 2007).

Thus, in this case there is a problem with the concept of inversion itself. Because inversion assumes the existence of two oppositional orders, yet here perhaps some form of synthesis of the dialectical relationship between child-centred and pedeutocentrism becomes apparent. It is therefore difficult to treat the turn towards things (thing-centred pedagogy) in education as a symbolic inversion in the sense described by Szkudlarek. It seems that an interesting continuation of this thread would be research oriented towards identifying symbolic shifts in education, perhaps in the spirit of the methodology of the "archaeological" part of Michel Foucault's œuvre.

However, returning to Fiona's account, it is possible to notice the aspects that have not been inverted or displaced. It is probably undeniable that a form of didactic work such as the three-period lesson described by the teacher above can be regarded as – as Dorota Klus-Stańska called it *following the teacher's footsteps* (Klus-Stańska 2012a). Moreover, there is an unstated assumption here

that repetition is necessary when an error occurs. This repetition may occur at a different point in time, but this does not change the general assumption that *repetitio est mater studiorum*.

Moreover, the architect of the entire situation of the three-period lesson is the adult, who determines the scope of the content, the degree of assimilation of this content by the child, the sequence of successive presentations and the possible need to repeat the activity.

Concluding this text, I would like to refer to one more piece of the collected empirical material. Grażyna, a teacher working in a Montessori kindergarten, defines what is unusual, inverted in a facility whose idea already represents an inversion of what we used to call traditional transmission education.

> Sometimes we have a completely different, unusual day. If, for example, it's a child's birthday, we also throw the child a little party, the parents often bring fruit, because it's more likely that you don't eat sweets in environment like ours, so the parents bring a very large amount of fruit or jellies and we have such a treat. Of course, the child also brings things related to their childhood or their favourite toys… pictures… or some of their favourite clothes so that the child can show it to other children. We make a crown for the child. So that's more or less how it goes, and we make sure that the child knows that it's their day, so that they are happy (Grażyna, W24).

Grażyna tells about a situation of a *fun day*. The occasion for organising such days is a child's birthday. I believe that this phenomenon can be perceived from at least two perspectives.

Firstly, the adults note the need for special treatment for the child who celebrates their birthday on a particular day. The child is given the role of monarch and a party is organised for them.

On the other hand, the question can be raised as to which aspects of that day "belong" to the children. The party is arranged by the adults in such a way that the child is happy. It is on this day that "the child brings things related to their childhood". In the view of locating this situation on this particular atypical day, questions must be raised concerning the (non-)presence of such elements on *typical* days.

Is there room for favourite, important toys in an already inverted Montessori environment?

Does collectively looking at a photo album fit into the logic of usual educational work in this kindergarten?

Is a child's satisfaction as important on a typical day?

Thanks to concepts of discursive construction of the subject and analyses of symbolic inversion, it is possible and – by all means – legitimate to ask such questions, and attempts to answer them can lead us towards a deeper understanding of specific cultural practices.

Literature

Andrisano-Ruggieri R., Iervolino A., Mossi P., Santoro E., Boccia G., 2020, *Instability of personality traits of teachers in risk conditions due to work-related stress*, "Behavioral Sciences", vol. 10 (5): 91, https://doi.org/10.3390/bs10050091.

Aziz F., Quraisi U., 2017, *Effects of Political Instability on Teachers' Work Decorum in Pakistani Universities: A Teachers' Perspective*, "Pakistan Vision", vol. 18 (1).

Babcock B.A. (ed.), 1978, *The reversible world: Symbolic inversion in art and society*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Bauman Z., 2016, "*My" bez "onych"*, "Więź", No. 59 (666).

Bavli B., Kocabaş H.U., 2022, *The Montessori educational method: Communication and collaboration of teachers with the child*, "Participatory Educational Research", vol. 9 (1), 443–62. https://doi.org/10.17275/per.22.24.9.1.

Beatty B., 2011, *The dilemma of scripted instruction: Comparing teacher autonomy, fidelity, and resistance in the froebelian kindergarten, Montessori, direct instruction, and success for all.* "Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education", vol. 113 (3), 395–430, https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811111300305.

Berg M., Seeber B.K., Collini S., 2017, *The slow professor: Challenging the culture of speed in the academy*, Toronto–Buffalo–London: University of Toronto Press.

Bourdieu P., 2008, *The Logic of Practice*, Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.

Cackowska M., 2012, *Dzieciństwo* [in:] *Dyskursywna konstrukcja podmiotu: przyczynek do rekonstrukcji pedagogiki kultury*, eds. P. Stańczyk, M. Cackowska, K. Starego, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego.

Christensen O., 2016, *Proving Montessori: Identity and dilemmas in a Montessori teacher's lived experience*, "Journal of Montessori Research", vol. 2 (2), https://doi.org/10.17161/jomr.v2i2.5067.

Christensen O., 2019, *Montessori identity in dialogue: A selected review of literature on teacher identity*, "Journal of Montessori Research", vol. 5 (2).

Chutorański M., 2015, *Urządzenie (edukacyjne): sieci, dyskursy, ludzie, nie-ludzie*, "Teraźniejszość–Człowiek–Edukacja", vol. 18, No. 4 (72).

Damore S., Rieckhof B., 2021, *Leading reflective practices in Montessori schools*, "Journal of Montessori Research", No. 7 (1).

Dilshad M.N., 2017, *Learning theories: Behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism*, "International Education and Research Journal", vol. 3 (9).

Dodd-Nufrio A.T., 2011, *Reggio Emilia, Maria Montessori, and John Dewey: Dispelling teachers' misconceptions and understanding theoretical foundations*, "Early Childhood Education Journal", vol. 39.

Efe M., Ulutas I., 2022, *Beyond teaching: Montessori education initiatives of public preschool teachers in Turkey*, "Educational Research for Policy and Practice", vol. 21 (3).

Ender D., Ozcan D., 2019, *Self-efficacy perceptions of teachers on using the Montessori method in special education in North Cyprus*, "Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences", vol. 14 (4).

Feez S., 2023, *Perceiving, labelling and knowing: Mediating educational meanings through multimodal dialogue in Montessori early years classrooms* [in:] *Dialogic pedagogy*, London: Routledge.

Haraway D., 2015, *Anthropocene, capitalocene, plantationocene, chthulucene: Making kin*, "*Environmental humanities*", vol. 6 (1).

Jackson R., 2011, *The Montessori method's use of seguin's three-period lesson and its impact on the book choices and word learning of students who are deaf or hard of hearing*, Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University.

Klus-Stańska D., 2004, *Światy dziecięcych znaczeń*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Akademickie "Żak".

Klus-Stańska D., 2007, *Behawiorystyczne źródła myślenia o nauczaniu, czyli siedem grzechów głównych wczesnej edukacji* [in:] *Wczesna edukacja. Między schematem a poszukiwaniem nowych ujęć teoretyczno-badawczych*, eds. D. Klus-Stańska, E. Szatan, D. Bronk, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego.

Klus-Stańska D., 2008, *Mitologia transmisji wiedzy, czyli o konieczności szukania alternatyw dla szkoły, która amputuje rozum*, "Problemy Wczesnej Edukacji", No. 2 (8).

Klus-Stańska D., 2012a, *Konstruowanie wiedzy w szkole*, Olsztyn: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego.

Klus-Stańska D., 2012b, *Wiedza, która zniewala – transmisyjne tradycje w szkolnej edukacji*, "Forum Oświatowe", No. 24.

Komeński J.A., 1956, *Wielka dydaktyka*, trans. K. Remerowa, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo PAN.

Kosowska E., 2018, *Instytucja kulturalna a tożsamość narodowa* [in:] *Palimpsest. Miejsca i przestrzenie*, Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.

Kubicka-Kraszyńska U., 2022, *Dzieci w rodzinie* [in:] (ed.), *Dzieci się liczą 2022. Raport o zagrożeniach bezpieczeństwa i rozwoju dzieci w Polsce*, eds. M. Sajkowska, R. Szredzińska, https://fdds.pl/_Resources/Persistent/5/c/a/7/5ca73e9f944c2977d6e90f12048802ef9f67284e/Dzieci%20się%20liczą%202022%20-%20Dzieci%20w%20rodzinie.pdf (accessed on: 23.09.2024).

Kvale S., 1996, *InterViews: an introduction to qualitative research interviewing*, Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Laasch O., 2017, *The slow professor: challenging the culture of speed in the academy*, "Academy of Management Learning and Education", vol. 16 (4).

Lakoff G., Johnson M., 2008, *Metaphors we live by*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Larrow P., 2009, *Three period Montessori teacher education*, "Montessori Life", vol. 21 (4).

Łaciak B. (red.), 2013, *Dzieciństwo we współczesnej Polsce. Charakter przemian*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Akademickie "Żak".

Magda-Adamowicz M., Kowalska E. (ed.), 2020, *Dziecko i dzieciństwo w badaniach pedagogicznych*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek.

Malm B., 2004, *Constructing professional identities: Montessori teachers' voices and visions*, "Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research", vol. 48 (4).

Martön F., 1986, *Phenomenography – a research approach to investigating different understanding of reality*, "Journal of Thought", vol. 21 (3).

McLaren P.L., 1985, *The ritual dimensions of resistance: Clowning and symbolic inversion*, "Journal of Education", vol. 167 (2), https://doi.org/10.1177/002205748516700208.

Mendel M., 2006, *Przekraczanie progu szkoły jako "rite de passage"* [in:] *Pedagogika miejsca*, ed. M. Mendel, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej Edukacji TWP we Wrocławiu.

Montessori M., 2013, *The Montessori method*, New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company.

Räber M., 2023, *Whose time is it? Rancière on taking time, unproductive doing and demo-cratic emancipation*, "Philosophy & Social Criticism", https://doi.org/10.1177/01914537221150457.

Rancière J., 2013, *In what time do we live?*, "Política Común", vol. 4.

Rancière J., 2015, *Béla Tarr, the time after*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Rathunde K., Csikszentmihalyi M., 2005, *The social context of middle school: Teachers, friends, and activities in Montessori and traditional school environments*, "The Elementary School Journal", vol. 106 (1).

Richardson J.T.E., 1999, *The concepts and methods of phenomenographic research*, "Review of Educational Research", vol. 69 (1), https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543069001053.

Rosa H., Duraj J., Kołtan J., 2020, *Przyspieszenie, wyobcowanie, rezonans: projekt krytycznej teorii późnonowoczesnej czasowości*, Gdańsk: Europejskie Centrum Solidarności.

Siswanto I.L., Kuswandono P., 2020, *Understanding Teacher Identity Construction: Profes-sional Experiences of Becoming Indonesian Montessori Teachers*, "Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics", vol. 5 (1), https://doi.org/10.21093/ijeltal.v5i1.539.

Slovacek M., Minova M., 2021, *Training of undergraduate preschool teachers in Montessori education in Slovakia and the Czech Republic*, "Research in Pedagogy", vol. 11 (1).

Smolińska-Theiss B., 2000, *Dzieciństwo w Polsce*, "Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny", No. 183 (3–4).

Stańczyk P., Cackowska M., Starego K. (ed.), 2012, *Dyskursywna konstrukcja podmiotu: przyczynek do rekonstrukcji pedagogiki kultury*, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego.

Szkudlarek T., 1992, *McLaren i Agata. O pewnej możliwości interpretacji rytualnego oporu przeciwko szkole*, "Nieobecne Dyskursy", No. 2.

Szkudlarek T., 2023, Discourse: Education, theory of politics, and politics of theory, "Przegląd Badań Edukacyjnych", No. 2 (40), https://doi.org/10.12775/PBE.2022.016.

Śliwerski B., 2007, *Pedagogika dziecka. Studium pajdocentryzmu*, Gdańsk: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne.

Vlieghe J., Zamojski P., 2019a, *Towards an ontology of teaching: Thing-centred pedagogy, affirmation and love for the world*, Cham: Springer.

Vlieghe J., Zamojski P., 2019b, *Education for Education's Sake: The Idea of a Thing-Centred Pedagogy* [in:] J. Vlieghe, P. Zamojski, *Towards an ontology of teaching: Thing-centred pedagogy, affirmation and love for the world*, Cham: Springer.

Vygotsky L.S., Cole M., 1978, *Mind in society: Development of higher psychological processes*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Summary

Symbolic inversion in the narratives of Montessori practitioners – additions to "The Discursive Construction of the Subject"

In the presented article, which is a part of a larger research project, the author analyses fragments of narrations of Montessori female teachers (working in Polish institutions of this type) concerning the issue of childhood and analysing *the symbolic inversion* present in their narratives. Using the procedure of phenomenography and the tools of critical discourse analysis, the author poses questions about what undergoes symbolic inversion

in Montessori pedagogy and which aspects of its functioning remain unchanged. Thus, the aim of the research is to identify and describe inverted and unchanged aspects of education at the preschool level. The results show that in the narratives of Montessori female educators, some methodological, organisational and communicative solutions are symbolically inverted, but the distribution of power in education and its fundamental purpose is relatively constant. The results of the study also show that the category of symbolic inversion has its limitations, especially when there is a shift of emphasis rather than an inversion of order.

Keywords

Montessori pedagogy, symbolic inversion, Szkudlarek, research report