

## **An infelicitous agreement – the writing of education in relation to its practice**

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### **Abstract**

In the article, the author aims to problematize the notion that education as a practice can be written *a priori*. In doing so, first of all, an outline of Habermas' work in connection with the *ideal speech situation* is given, to show its importance in conceptualizing educational practice in democratic society. This is followed by a description of Austin's concept of the infelicitous functioning of the performative as a way to critically view the activity of teaching in general and then, more specifically, to bring into question the writing of education in connection with the discourses and philosophizing which govern its practice – what is done in the classroom by teachers and learners. In developing this idea, a number of discourses that underpin the practice of teaching (among others, functionalist-behaviourist, developmental-constructivist, critical-emancipatory) are discussed to highlight their similarities but also their fundamental differences and how, when one of the discourses dominates educational practice, it can lead to the distortions in the understanding and implementation of that practice. Additionally, instrumental and post-critical relations of philosophizing to the practice of education are described with the aim of posing the question of whether educational practice can actually be written *a priori*. In conclusion, the author suggests the writing of education would appear to be a “tool” to be used in the further “coloni-

tion of the lifeworld” rather than a support for the emancipatory projects that Habermas and Dewey pursued in relation to society and society and education, and that this may have consequences for democracy itself.

### **Keywords**

ideal speech situation, the performative utterance, discourses of education, functionalist-behaviourist discourse, developmental-constructivist discourse, Bloom’s taxonomy, instrumental relation, post-critical relation, democracy

## **Niefortunne porozumienie – pisanie edukacji w odniesieniu do jej praktyki**

### **Abstrakt**

W artykule autor dąży do sproblematykowania poglądu, że edukacja jako praktyka może być pisana *a priori*. W ten sposób, podany jest zarys pracy Habermasa w powiązaniu z idealną sytuacją komunikacyjną, aby pokazać jej znaczenie w konceptualizacji praktyki edukacyjnej w demokratycznym społeczeństwie. Następnie podany jest opis koncepcji Austina dotyczącej niefortunnego funkcjonowania performatywu aby krytycznie spojrzeć na działalność nauczania w ogóle, a następnie, bardziej szczegółowo, zakwestionować pisanie o edukacji w powiązaniu z dyskursami i filozofowaniem, które regulują jej praktykę – co robią w klasie nauczyciele i uczniowie. Rozwijając tę ideę, omówiono szereg dyskursów leżących u podstaw praktyki nauczania (m. in. funkcjonalistyczno-behawiorystyczny, konstruktywistyczno-rozwojowy, krytyczno-emancypacyjny). Omówiono te dyskursy, aby podkreślić ich podobieństwa, ale także podstawowe różnice oraz to, w jaki sposób, gdy jeden z dyskursów dominuje w praktyce edukacyjnej, może prowadzić do wypaczeń w rozumieniu i realizacji tej praktyki. Opiszano także instrumentalne i postkrytyczne relacje filozofowania z praktyką edukacyjną w celu postawienia pytania, czy praktykę edukacyjną można napisać *a priori*. Podsumowując, autor sugeruje, że pisanie o edukacji wydaje się raczej „narzędziem” do dalszego „kolonizowania świata przeżywanego” niż wsparciem dla projektów emancypa-

cyjnych, jakie Habermas i Dewey realizowali w stosunku do społeczeństwa oraz społeczeństwa i edukacji i że może to mieć konsekwencje dla samej demokracji.

### **Słowa kluczowe**

idealna sytuacja komunikacyjna, wypowiedź performatywna, dyskursy edukacyjne, dyskurs funkcjonalistyczno-behawiorystyczny, dyskurs konstruktywistyczno-rozwojowy, taksonomia Blooma, relacja instrumentalna, relacja postkrytyczna, demokracja

## **1. Introduction**

In the article, the writing of education – in the form of discourses and philosophy – as an equivalent for the practice of education (what occurs in the classroom), is problematized with the aim of challenging a present-day and all-encompassing belief within the administration of education that words are an equivalent for the world of classroom activity. To develop this idea, in the first part of the article, Jurgen Habermas' (1984, 1987, 1996) concept of the *ideal speech situation* is described, where rational and consensual interaction, free from coercion is viewed to be the basis of democratic society. Furthermore, this concept is linked to education and the idea of the American philosopher, John Dewey (1966), who states that a fundamental purpose of education is to prepare learners to live in and develop society along democratic lines. This consideration of Habermas' concept and Dewey's purpose for education, prepares the ground for the main discussion in which a concept that underlies Habermas' *ideal speech situation*, John L. Austin's (1975) linguistic-turn, is used to investigate education. More especially, Austin's schemata for the felicitous functioning of the performative is applied to the activity of teaching to show how its practice, including the writing of that practice, might be brought into question. This is followed by brief descriptions of a number of discourses, after Klus-Stańska (2009), which underpin teaching: among others, the functionalist-behaviourist, developmental-constructivist and

critical-emancipatory. This is done to 1) highlight the diversity of these discourses and the implications they have for the practices of teaching that each one proposes and 2) to show how the practice of teaching, as well as an understanding of that practice, may be distorted by the application of one particular way of writing it: the predominance of a functionalist-behaviourist approach through the application of Bloom's taxonomy. To show the problems that this may cause, descriptors from Bloom's taxonomy are then applied to the developmental-constructivist model. In the final part of the article, Zamojski's (2015) instrumental and post-critical views of education are outlined and the question is posed as to whether the writing of education can actually convey the dynamics of what is done in practice. Finally, it is proposed that the writing of education would appear to be a "tool" to be used in the further "colonization of the life-world", rather than a support for the emancipatory projects that both Habermas and Dewey pursued in relation to society and society and education.

## **2. Conceptualizations towards democracy according to Habermas and Dewey**

Habermas' work as a sociologist and philosopher was to understand social change, while "A core objective [...] [was] to reconstruct historical materialism in order to reflect more accurately the concerns of the present day and the shifting sands of Western politics and economics" (Murphy and Fleming 2009: 4). Central to this project, was the development of "a Critical Theory of society with emancipatory intent [...] [including the construction of] an overarching 'grand' theory of capitalist modernization and colonization, combined with an ongoing defense of modernity and a desire to further the aims of democracy" (Murphy and Fleming 2009: 4).

Habermas' project, therefore, was to try and find a middle way between the essentialism of modernism and the relativism of postmodernism: to move on from the one-sided rationalization of capitalist modernization without resorting to the decon-

structive strategy of postmodernism. As part of this, Habermas proposed that the state and the market had gone beyond the limits of their powers and interfered in the personal sphere – the colonization of the lifeworld, which consists of essential activities such as socialization, the reproduction of culture and upbringing of children. A situation where “the pursuit and maintenance of state political agendas, alongside the ability of capitalism to exploit new avenues for wealth creation, have resulted in more and more decisions affecting the lives of citizens being based on the ‘bottom line of power/money’” (Murphy and Fleming 2009: 6).

To facilitate a critique of this situation, Habermas developed the Theory of Communicative Action, which utilized ideas from the linguistic turn. This restated problems connected with consciousness in terms of language which, for Habermas, meant that he was able to view the development of the self as intersubjective, a process that occurs through social interaction with others rather than individual contact between monological selves in isolation. Accordingly, the subjective interests of a self are confronted by intersubjective interests that cannot be reduced and as such this allows for the existence of “truth claims” independent of a particular cultural context. In addition to this, Habermas offers the premise that when people engage in communication, they commit themselves to an *ideal speech situation*, where the interaction is rational and consensual, as well as free from any form of force. Accordingly, any communication can be tested with regard to validity claims that judge its comprehensibility, sincerity, truthfulness, as well as appropriateness in terms of the way it is expressed. Moreover, these validity claims are applied in “good faith” in communication with a second person – the interlocutor assumes that what the partner communicates is true and sincere up to the point that what is being communicated no longer fulfills one or more of the validity claims. Importantly, a person’s engagement in the discourse of the *ideal speech situation* (the application of the validity claims), engenders two results for the operation of the self in the public sphere:

- 1) “real needs can be identified, agreed on and the process begun of transmitting these needs (discursive will-formation) to the political sphere for inclusion in public policy [...] [and] law” (Murphy and Fleming 2009: 7),
- 2) because there are a set of rules for public discourse provided by the validity claims, “all are heard, no one is excluded, all have equal power to question the ideas and justifications of others, to ask questions, all are equal in making a decision and reaching a conclusion, coercion is excluded and the only power exercised is the power of the most reasonable argument” (Murphy and Fleming 2009: 7–8).

In connection with the above, Habermas viewed such a rule-led engagement in the sphere of public discourse as a condition for the functioning of democratic society. Additionally, and equally important and relevant to this article, Dewey saw the role of education to prepare learners to participate in but also perpetuate and develop such a society. With regard to this, Dewey believed that: “Democratic society is peculiarly dependent for its maintenance upon the use in forming a course of study of criteria which are broadly human” and “A curriculum which acknowledges the social responsibilities of education must present situations where problems are relevant to the problems of living together, and where observation and information are calculated to develop social insight and interest” (Dewey 1966: 192). Indeed, Dewey’s *Democracy and Education* is a treatise that lays out the way in which education needs to be linked to developments in society as it is, itself, important for the maintenance and development of democracy within that society. As Dewey writes in the preface: “the philosophy stated in this book, connects the growth of democracy with the development of the experimental method in the sciences, evolutionary ideas in the biological sciences, and the industrial reorganization, and is concerned to point out changes in subject matter and method of education indicated by these developments” (Dewey 1966: iii). And, although Dewey’s manifesto for education was published over one hundred years ago, its message still holds true for the present time, when educators such as Tomasz Szkudlarek

(2009: 65) and Zbyszko Melosik (2007: 316) view Dewey's project as bringing together ideas concerning democracy, society and the individual in a way that is relevant for the contemporary world, and especially Poland.

However, for such an educational model to be successful, the same set of circumstances that Habermas advocates for society as a whole have to prevail in the classroom; that is, an engagement in which the needs of each of the participants is acknowledged and where there is a possibility for conclusions to be reached through balanced discussion. Moreover, as with Habermas' proposal for society, the bottom line for this cannot be purely financial. In relation to education at present, where there is pressure to follow fixed patterns of activity (Klus-Stańska 2010: 234–244), to give “the one right answer” (Nowicka 2009: 265), and where a neoliberal agenda predominates (Potulicka and Rutkowiak 2012), and in line with its agenda, a particular model of how education as a whole is conceptualized, circumstances conducive to the fostering of a democratic society may not exist.

In the following section, an outline of Austin's schemata for the felicitous functioning of a performative utterance is given and then applied to the area of education to problematize its practice and the writing of that practice – the discourses and philosophizing that inform teaching. This is done as a first step to show how education as it is practiced at the present time is failing to fulfil Dewey's aspiration for it as a source for democratic continuation and renewal.

Furthermore, this application of Austin's schemata, does not appear to be out of line with that author's understanding of what a performative actually is when he states that the concept applies “to all ceremonial acts, not merely verbal ones, and that these are more common than is appreciated” (Austin 1975: 25). Nor is it contrary to ideas about teaching that place it as a ceremonial – ritual – practice (McLaren 1993; Dembiński 2005).

### **3. The performative utterance and the performative**

Something that will seem quite obvious now, more than 60 years after John L. Austin gave a series of lectures on the subject, is that there is a linguistic construction we can call a performative utterance as opposed to simply a statement.

In the lectures Austin gave in 1955, we follow the “highways” and “byways” of the philosophers’ thought as he builds a case for the performative. This is done through the exposition of the performative utterance in terms of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, as well as considerations of it as an area of grammar or vocabulary, behavior (including body language) and/or context. In the course of doing this, Austin also builds and discusses a detailed schemata of what is needed for the felicitous – happy – functioning of a performative as opposed to an infelicitous – unhappy – functioning. And, it is this schemata that I would like to present here in relation to teaching as an act which is performative.

What then is Austin’s schemata for a felicitous functioning of a performative and in what ways might it be said to relate to education? In answering these questions, the six different criteria that must be fulfilled to achieve the proper functioning of a performative will be outlined followed by a proposition of how these relate to the practice of education.

#### **3.1. Schemata for the felicitous functioning of a performative utterance**

Austin’s schemata for the felicitous functioning of a performative are as follows:

- (A.1) There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further,



(A.2) the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure involved.

(B.1) the procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and

(B.2) completely.

(Γ.1) Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of the participant, then a person participating in and so involving the procedure must in fact have thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves, and further

(Γ.2) must actually so conduct themselves subsequently. (Austin 1975: 14–15)

Overall, in accordance with the above, it is apparent that for a performative to function felicitously, there must be a known procedure in which language is used and which involves a definite set of people in an appropriate context. Furthermore, the people involved must implement the procedure exactly and fully, while the person leading the activity (resulting from the implementation of the procedure) must be fully aware of what it entails and, along with the other people that participate, agree to abide by the rules that govern it.

### **3.2. The performative and its relation to the practice of education**

In terms of the relation of Austin's schemata to education it is possible to say that for (A.1), the accepted conventional procedure is that of the teaching that takes place during the years of compulsory education and the conventional effect is the learning that ensues. Both of these include the uttering of certain words by teachers and learners, and mostly during lessons in a classroom. Additionally, with regard to (A.2), we can say that the teaching is carried out by an adult who has attained the appropriate qualifications to **teach a subject (or range of subjects – with regard to primary education) to a particular age**

**group, while the learners are children or adolescence who are attending classes to learn the subject (or subjects) the teacher presents.**

For (B.1) and (B.2), the procedure of teaching is executed correctly and completely by the teacher and likewise the procedure of learning by the learners, when the teacher presents information and prepares materials and tasks for the learners and **the learners note down and learn the presented information as well as work with the materials and complete the given tasks.** We may also say that a sign that this procedure has been followed correctly and completely by all the participants is when the learners achieve good marks with regard to formal assessment. **As well as this, the schools and classrooms within which this takes place will be furnished with the appropriate equipment and materials to facilitate the teaching-learning process, while the learners will possess the necessary books and materials.**

In connection with (Γ.1), it might be said that there are **procedures designed for use by teachers** who have certain thoughts and feelings, or who want to inaugurate certain consequential conduct on the part of the learners. It might also be said that these are usually **informed by discourses of teaching that the teacher is aware of and aims to implement in the classroom and (Γ.2), in accordance with which the teacher and learners subsequently conduct themselves.**

From this very brief outline it can be noted (already) that problems might occur in terms of the felicitous functioning of education with regard to the schemata for the performative as outlined by Austin:

For A1/2, for example, do all learners actually want to be at school and do they have an interest in the subject being taught? Are all schools appropriately equipped?

For B1/2, do all learners do what is asked of them all of the time? With (Γ.1/2), are all teachers aware of the discourses that inform teaching and learning, and do they actually plan their teaching following these models and then teach accordingly?

Concentrating on (Γ.1) and (Γ.2), it would seem that in relation to education these criteria uncover a further problem: differences between the discourses that inform teaching and learning, which can lead to confusion when it comes to the implementation of the practice of teaching.

#### **4. Five educational models – discourses that inform teaching**

The “problem” at the theoretical level is that there are at least five educational models – discourses – seen to underlie school education (Klus-Stańska 2009: 46). This “abundance” of discourses is not without its problems however, as they are not wholly compatible, and so by using one with the other the teacher may negate the very effect she/he is trying to achieve. The discourses include the functional-behaviourist, humanistic-adaptive, developmental-constructivist, social-constructivist and critical-emancipatory. And, to gain an idea of the similarities but also the differences between them, it is informative to look across a number of categories that describe the functioning of the discourses given in Table 1. These include: the development of the child, the creation of knowledge, type of activity, typical lexis for the discourse, metaphors, and how the mechanics of learning might be described in everyday language.

Looking horizontally across the discourses and vertically down to the different categories that describe their functioning, it can be seen that there are areas of similarity in the discourses across the areas of the Development of the Child and Creation of Knowledge. In the humanistic-adaptive discourse and developmental-constructivism, for example, there is an emphasis on the self-development of the child. Meanwhile, the humanistic-adaptive discourse and social-constructivism respectively, place importance on interpersonal relations and work with others – the child with an adult. Similarities also exist in the areas of

**Table 1**

Categories of comparison between educational discourses.  
Adapted from Klus-Stańska (2009: 46–74 – translation MB).

<b>Discourse and Main Postulate</b>	<b>functional-behaviourist</b> “To educate is to direct”	<b>humanistic-adaptive</b> “To educate is to accept”	<b>developmental-constructivist</b> “To educate is to organize the surrounding environment”	<b>social-constructivist</b> “To educate is to support / work together”	<b>critical-emancipatory</b> “To educate is to lead to critical engagement”
<b>Development of the Child</b>	linear and hierarchical; reaching set standards; given levels of educational achievement	potential for self-development and gaining of self-knowledge; cannot be measured	individual growth of competence as a researcher: trial and error; testing of hypothesis and reconstruction	movement from everyday understanding to learning takes place through work with an adult and is determined by education	initiated into the tension between cooperation and resistance; acquisition of emancipatory competences and ability to stand up for one’s rights
<b>Creation of Knowledge</b>	memorisation of information; following external instruction	personal; individualized; concentrated on interpersonal relations	independent; active construction and reconstruction of models of	negotiation between everyday knowledge (constructed by the child) and public /	ability to engage critically and activate one’s own intellectual

			thinking about reality that do not need an adult	scientific knowledge (represented by the adult)	strategies
<b>Type of Activity</b>	drill-correct-intervene	flexible; process orientated; based upon unhindered communication and play as well as the needs of the child	organisation of experimental workshops and problem-solving tasks; effects are relative and unforeseeable	helping; working together	symmetrical; uncovering the political and the need for engagement
<b>Typical Lexis</b>	memorize, practice, drill, form, familiarize, teach	partnership-therapeutic; caring acceptance	research; explore; experiment; learn	support; form; lead	involvement; understanding; emancipation
<b>Metaphors</b>	teacher – crafts-person; learner – empty vessel; classroom – workshop	teacher – gardener; learner – valuable plant; classroom – sunny field	teacher – patron; organizer learner – scientist; classroom – research laboratory	teacher – advisor, guide; learner – assistant, apprentice; classroom – master’s workshop	teacher – revolutionary, moderator; learner – fighter, apprentice; classroom – discussion forum, centre for

					initia- tives
<b>Mechanics of Learn- ing</b>	“Listen and learn”	“Allow the child to be a child”	“Keep trying until you grow and under- stand”	“Can do a lot but needs some help”	“Think for your- self. You have the right to do so”

Activity Type, Typical Lexis, Metaphors and Mechanics of Learning. In the humanistic-adaptive and developmental-constructivist discourses, the learner is viewed as someone with certain needs and skills that are central to the educational enterprise. With the humanistic-adaptive discourse, these needs and skills are the child’s propensity for communication and play. With the developmental-constructivist discourse it is the innate inquisitiveness of the child and the willingness to experiment. Additionally, in both discourses, because the child takes an active role in the process, flexibility is part of the educational encounter along with an understanding that not everything can be determined *a priori*.

However, there are areas in which differences are also apparent. In the areas of Activity Type, Typical Lexis, Metaphors and Mechanics of Learning, the humanistic-adaptive, social-constructivist and critical-emancipatory discourses, emphasize partnership between the teacher and learners. With the humanistic-adaptive discourse, acceptance and understanding are the basis for the relationship with the child; where the teacher, by providing the appropriate conditions, allows the child to develop and grow in accordance with her/his own abilities (what Bruner (1999) would term native endowment). Thus, in connection with the mechanics of leaning, the role of the teacher is to “allow the child to be a child.” With the social-constructivist discourse, a similar form of partnership exists, **but** here the teacher takes on a more directive role, supporting the learner to understanding, where the learner “can do a lot but needs some help.” Similarly to the social-constructivist discourse, in the critical-emancipatory discourse, the teacher supports the learners towards

understanding. However, that understanding is now focused on developing awareness in the learner about the political grounding of knowledge and the surrounding world, as well as the learner's position with regard to it. Hence, the mechanics of learning is based upon "think for yourself – you have the right to do so." Indeed, returning once again to the areas of the Development of the Child and Creation of Knowledge, the critical-emancipatory discourse places emphasis on self-awareness in connection with critical thinking, a form of engagement that is not part of the other discourses. The greatest contrast with regard to the discourses, however, exists between functional-behaviourism and all of the others: functional-behaviourism conforms to external standards, is directed and tightly structured. It also expects learners to accumulate a given knowledge. This is in contrast to the other discourses that follow the needs of the learners and rely more upon their involvement with regard to abilities and interests in a personal exploration of the world with varying degrees of support.

In the practice of teaching, if the aim is to follow a particular discourse as an underlying "inspiration" for classroom activity, then the teacher needs to be aware of the "demands" of that discourse and that to mix the discourses may not produce the desired effects or actually be detrimental to the teaching-learning situation and what is trying to be achieved. For example, following the model of developmental-constructivism, if the teacher organizes experimental workshops with problem solving tasks, then the logic of this discourse dictates that the learners will be actively involved and that the role of the teacher is to set up what is needed and then let the learners "find out" for themselves – to create a path to understanding rather than follow a path (Klus-Stańska 2002: 221–252). In such a situation, it would be out of place to expect the learners to simply listen and learn, or follow the drill-correct-intervene scenario which is advocated for the functional-behaviourist discourse and which is very teacher controlled. Neither would the teacher work together with the learners to help them discover meaning as in the social-constructivist discourse, or uncover the political dimensions of

society and the need for engagement as with the critical-emanipatory discourse. In addition to this, and in connection with the functional-behaviourist and humanistic-adaptive discourses, the latter's focus on the personal attainment based upon the learner's personal capabilities and needs would be out of place in a discourse (functional-behaviourist) where the emphasis is on reaching the level of given standards of education: ones which are external to the learner.

However, at the present time, the most detrimental situation is the domination of the functional-behaviourist discourse in connection with the writing of education – the “production” of curricula, syllabuses and lesson plans. This is something that Klus-Stańska touches upon this in her alternative analysis of the practice of teaching, in which it is viewed not as an ordered and ordering discipline, but one where chaos is a defining characteristic (2010: 9). In her study, Klus-Stańska concentrates on the influences of behaviourism and constructivism on various didactic projects. Especially interesting for the purposes of this article, is Klus-Stańska's consideration of the way the practice of education is influenced by behaviourism and the way it creates a restrictive practice of teaching as a whole.

#### **4.1. The dominance of a functional-behaviourist discourse in the “writing” of education**

As Klus-Stańska describes it, behaviourism was born out of the positivist-modernist project, where it was believed the social sciences were similar to and could be carried out in a similar way to the natural sciences. For behaviourists, this meant that “the subject of psychological research is that which can be observed and measured” (Klus-Stańska 2010: 210 – translation MB), while the whole of human behaviour was seen to consist of “the relation ‘stimulus-reaction’, connected with the belief in total control over and predictability of human behaviour” (Klus-Stańska 2010: 210 – translation MB). In the field of education, these ideas connected with an instrumental conception of teaching, led to the creation of an educational model based on



the assumption that the behaviour of the learner can be controlled and in that way changed. It also resulted in propositions in the pursuit of that model<sup>1</sup>, as well as procedures and practices described in curricula and syllabuses, of which ultimately the lesson plan and how it is written is an important part. Klus-Stańska (2010: 218 – translation MB) writes: “A necessary but sufficient condition to achieve the given aims is a precise plan of action written using a language that describes observable activity (what the teacher says and does; what the pupils say and do in answer).” In addition to this, these propositions of behaviourism have become an integral part of the practice of teaching generally (Klus-Stańska 2010: 218), so that now the idea of the success is to what extent the teacher and pupils follow and achieve the aims set in curricula and syllabuses. Indeed, this way of working is so ingrained in teaching as a whole that student teachers on their practices are assessed positively and remarked upon favourably when they follow what is given in the curricula and syllabus, rather than reacting to the needs of the students and modifying their planned actions accordingly (Klus-Stańska 2010: 234–239). This, along with the ‘naïve’ adoption of the “precepts” of behaviourism, without understanding or realizing to the full their application, leads to frustration both on behalf of the teacher and pupils alike. A situation that inevitably leads to the pupils being blamed when things do not work out as planned (Klus-Stańska 2010: 252–253).

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<sup>1</sup> Klus-Stańska (2010: 217–253) gives ten propositions for the functional-behaviourist discourse which she then elucidates upon. The ten propositions are as follows (translation MB): 1. The main object of reflection and design in behavioristic instruction is the act of teaching; 2. The managerial role of the teacher is the basis of the teaching process; 3. The student's learning is in reaction to the teacher's activities; 4. Both teaching and learning are expressed in the performance of observable activities; 5. The observable activities of the student must follow a strictly defined pattern; 6. The learning material must be organized according to its elementary parts; 7. Every activity of the student should be controlled and reinforced; 8. Student mistakes are undesirable; 9. It is possible and advisable to precisely formulate educational goals expressed in terms of changes to behaviour; 10. A necessary and sufficient condition for achieving the goals is the exact implementation of the teaching plan.

Klus-Stańska restricts her comments to how functional-behaviourist discourse influences the writing of education (curricula, syllabuses, lesson plans) and how, consequently, lessons are viewed. However, at the present time, in a world of education governed by the neoliberal agenda, where measurable effects are all important (Potulicka 2012: 177–201), the functional-behaviourist discourse offers the favoured means of describing and assessing educational practice as a whole. This shows itself most clearly in the adoption of Bloom’s taxonomy, which is part of the “language that describes observable activity” mentioned by Klus-Stańska above.

#### **4.1.1. Bloom’s taxonomy – language that describes observable activity**

The taxonomy offered by Bloom was created to provide teachers greater precision in understanding the educational processes they were engaged in as well as to facilitate exchanges of information, especially in the areas of curriculum development and assessment. Originally, three domains were to be classified, the cognitive, affirmative and the psychomotor, although work on the final domain was never published. Of interest here is the cognitive domain.

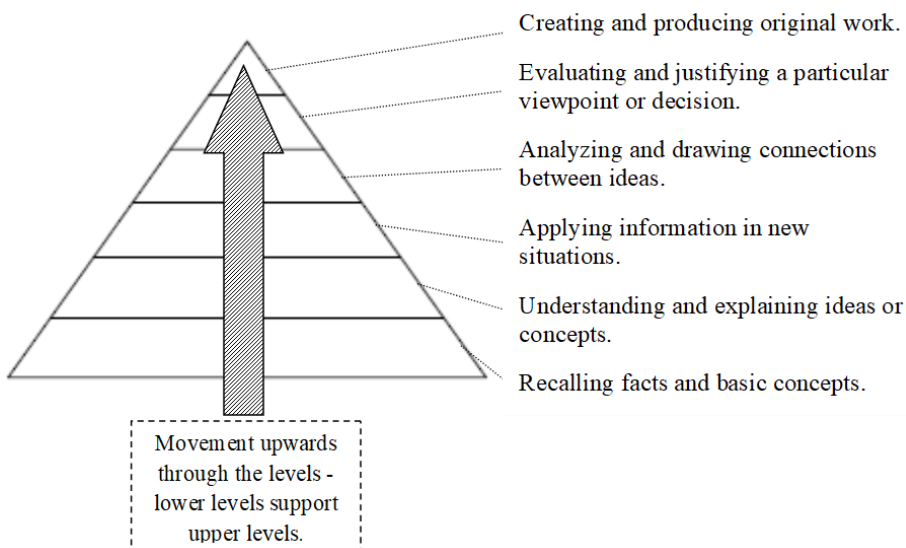
In the taxonomy for the cognitive domain as it was first developed there were six categories: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Bloom et al. 1984: 201–207). These: “were ordered from simple to complex and from concrete to abstract. Further, it was assumed that the original Taxonomy represented a cumulative hierarchy; that is, mastery of each simpler category was prerequisite to mastery of the next more complex one” (Krathwohl 2002: 212–213). In 2001 a revised version of the Taxonomy was published to provide a model that was more in keeping with advances of understanding with regard to education but also because of the fact that in relation to curriculum and testing too much emphasis was placed “on objectives requiring only recognition or recall of information, objectives that fall in the *Knowledge* category”

(Krathwohl 2002: 213). This was seen to be to the detriment of: “objectives that involve the understanding and use of knowledge, those that would be classified in the categories from *Comprehension* to *Synthesis*, that are usually considered the most important goals of education” (Krathwohl 2002: 213). The overall effect of this was the creation of a set of categories that would be more multi-dimensional in their application, to provide “a basis for moving curricula and tests toward objectives that would be classified in the more complex categories” (Krathwohl 2002: 213). As a result, the original categorizations were changed to: *Remember* – Retrieving relevant knowledge from long-term memory; *Understand* – Determining the meaning of instructional messages, including oral, written, and graphic; *Apply* – Carrying out or using a procedure in a given situation; *Analyze* – Breaking material into its constituent parts and detecting how the parts relate to one another and to an overall structure or purpose; *Evaluate* – Making judgments based on criteria and standards; *Create* – Putting elements together to form a novel, coherent whole or make an original product (Krathwohl 2002: 215).

In connection with the cognitive process dimension of the revised taxonomy, Krathwohl (2002: 215) believes it retains the hierarchical intent of the original (something he suggests might be supported by empirical evidence – see Anderson et al., 2001) in that it moves from less to more complex operations: for example, to remember poses less challenges than to understand, to understand is less challenging than to apply, and so on. Although, in connection with this, he suggests the revision allows for more flexibility, with movement between the categories being possible without adherence to a strict linear process: with *Understand*, for instance, the process of *Explaining* is deemed to be cognitively complex than *Executing*, which appears in the category of *Apply*.

#### 4.1.2. The taxonomy as a “Christmas tree” – arboreal model

In spite of the movement towards a more flexible framework, the revised taxonomy remains hierarchical and as such it can probably still be visualized in the form of a triangle consisting of six levels. At the base of the triangle the ability to recall facts and basic concepts is seen to underlie (support) all of the other five levels which are: to understand and be able to explain ideas or concepts, to apply information in new situations, to analyze and draw connections between ideas, to evaluate and justify a particular viewpoint or decision, and finally, creation, which includes the production of original work. This suggests movement up through the levels, where creation is at the apex of achievement supported by the other five levels, giving a “Christmas tree” arrangement – see Figure 1.



**Figure 1**

“Christmas tree” model – the revision of Bloom’s taxonomy as a linear and hierarchical model

#### **4.1.3. The problem of “writing education” through the prism of Bloom’s taxonomy**

As was mentioned earlier, Bloom’s taxonomy (the original and the revision) were created with the intention of providing teachers with a tool to bring greater precision to their understanding of the educational processes they were involved in and to facilitate exchanges of information connected to curriculum development and assessment. However, when this way of writing education becomes the way of viewing it overall, harmful distortions may occur. As Gerd Mietzel (2002: 444) comments, after Rohwer and Sloane (1994), there are a number of reasons for a critical view with respect to the taxonomy. One is that there are as many taxonomies as there are disciplines, a situation which is made even more complex by the fact that each discipline covers different areas of knowledge and involves different processes. As a result of this, aims for teaching and learning need to take into account such diversity. Another reason is that the knowledge and skills in each of the disciplines are different, consequently, transfer may only occur when dealing with a problem in which the different disciplines are represented. Additionally, while some areas of teaching and their aims lend themselves to being placed in a hierarchy others do not. With regard to this last point, there are also approaches to teaching, such as learner-centered educational models – 2, 3, and 4 in Table 1 – that would appear to eschew hierarchical possibilities. In the following section, the developmental-constructivist discourse model is analyzed more closely in connection with the problems outlined above.

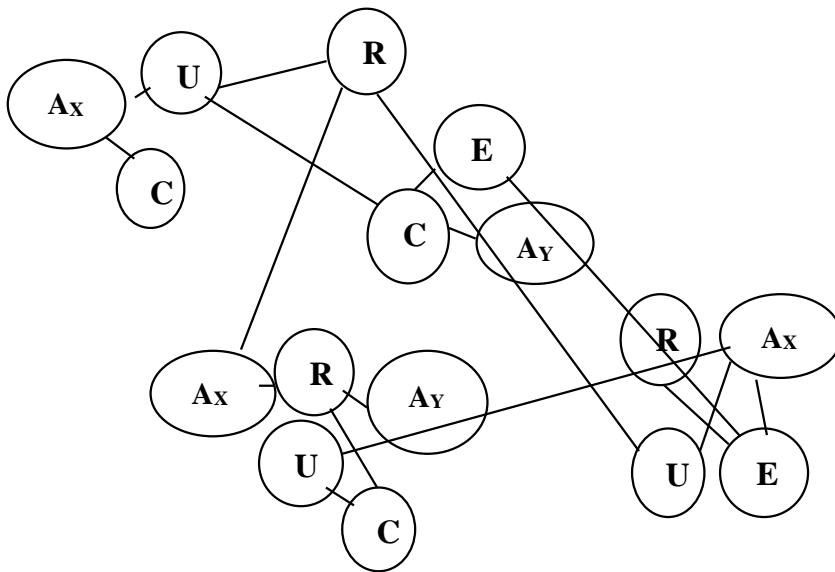
#### **4.1.4. The application of Bloom’s taxonomic categories – rhizomic model**

In connection with the model of the taxonomy shown above, contrary to functional-behaviourism, developmental-constructivist discourse has as its starting point individual creativity, where hypothesis making and testing are encouraged, along

with the active construction and reconstruction of models of thinking. This being so, the potential use of the taxonomy can no longer lie in the fact that it provides layers of achievement where the movement is from one level to another involving the acquisition of evermore advanced abilities which support and build upon one another. The developmental-constructivist approach foregoes this controlled and structured development. Learning is now “messy”, where there is room for trial and error, where individual hypotheses can be made and tested, and where thinking about a particular problem involves processes of building and rebuilding rather than being led in one direction towards one possible answer: a difference which, as was mentioned above can be conceptualised as following a path already laid out or creating the path for oneself (Klus-Stańska 2002: 221–252). In connection with this, the triangular model described above is made redundant. In its place a nodular model appears to be appropriate, where involvement and abilities once laid out in a linear and hierarchical scheme now become atomised and can affix to one another at random depending on the activity engaged in and the stage of its progress. Indeed, appropriating models elucidated by Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 23–24<sup>2</sup>), the developmental-constructivist approach can be viewed as rhizomic as opposed to arboreal (the “Christmas tree” model discussed earlier). Figure 2 shows a reinterpretation of Bloom’s taxonomy with regard to a nodular scheme representing developmental-constructivist activity in a classroom.

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<sup>2</sup> The page numbers given here are those in which the rhizome is summarized “in opposition” to the arboreal, although a fuller idea of these complex models is given by reading the whole of the introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 3-28).



R = remembering, U = understanding, AX = applying, AY = analyzing, E = evaluating, C = creating

**Figure 2**

The developmental-constructivist approach viewed as a rhizome using the categories from Bloom's taxonomy

With this nodular, developmental-constructivist scheme, there are possibilities, of course, for the areas of cognitive activity that the Bloom taxonomy suggest. However, its more strictly hierarchical nature is lost. As a result, there is now a situation where, following the model above, creativity leads to application, application to understanding and understanding to either remembering or further creativity, and the routes which these connections consequently open up. In such a case, is the chosen language for the writing of educational practice, Bloom's taxonomy, adequate to describe (dictate) the processes resulting from a developmental-constructivist approach to teaching? And, if Bloom's scheme is applied to each of the other discourses, is the language of the taxonomy adequate to describe (dictate) the relations and processes that they propose? To provide considered

answers to these questions lies beyond the length and scope of this article. However, if Table 1 is viewed once again, it is noticeable that of the five discourses described, only functional-behaviourism advocates such a determined practice of teaching where learners submit themselves to an external logic. With the other discourses the learner is an integral part of a teaching-learning process in which their capabilities and needs are taken into consideration.

But there is, perhaps, an even more fundamental question: can language as a whole actually represent the practice of teaching?

### **5. Writing education – instrumental and post-critical relations**

Piotr Zamojski (2015) proposes a new space for philosophizing<sup>3</sup> about education that moves beyond instrumental and critical relations to an area he designates as a post-critical relation. In connection with Zamojski's "exercise in thought"<sup>4</sup>, an outline of the instrumental relation is given as an example of a type in which philosophizing about education dictates the action of education. This is done to provide a contrast to the post-critical relation, in which Zamojski questions whether the action of education can (should) actually result from theorizing and writing about it (for example, the discourses which Klus-Stańska describes). Instead, he proposes that philosophy can only make

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<sup>3</sup> As described by Zamojski (2015), philosophy can be the mastering of a professional set of knowledge (133) or a process of thinking (145). In the instrumental relation the emphasis is on a professional set of knowledge leading to theories to be implemented. In the post-critical relation, the emphasis is placed on the act of being involved in the process. In this case, the philosophizing that occurs is about the space that is opened up for thought. In connection with education, this translates into a space for action. Thus, as is described in this section, the philosophy of the instrumental relation leads to theories and procedures to be implemented, while in the post-critical relation a space for action that is not pre-determined is offered.

<sup>4</sup> Zamojski describes his discursive article as "an exercise in thought" after Arendt's (2006) suggested procedure for gaining deeper insight into a particular issue.



suggestions about the space in which the educational encounter will occur, not dictate what should happen there.

The instrumental relation resulted from the project to understand the causal relationships which govern the world and to make science and rational thought the basis for modern society. It also resulted from the need for a state controlled education system to help society adapt to the rapid changes brought about by the industrial revolution – one of the “successes” of the application of science – as well as contribute to its further development. This meant that education on a national scale was needed, while the theorizing and writing linked to that education was to provide instrumental guidance – to say ‘what to do’ in the form of guidelines and instructions. In such a case, as Zamojski (2015: 132) writes: “philosophy gives practical guidelines to educational practice, [...] it functions as a legislator for this practice.” More fully, it “has the status of an exponent of the truth, it is [...] the beginning and the highest ideal for all educational practice [...] Thus, philosophy sets norms which cannot be undermined, which should be realized, incorporated into the body of practice” (Zamojski 2015: 133). In line with this, the primary aim of the activity of education is to satisfy the needs of the philosophy that inform it. As such, educational practice is a “manageable process”, “a purely executive activity”, where “The practitioner’s task is [...] to act according to authoritative procedures, [...] [to be] an executor and not a creator of her own practice” (Zamojski 2015: 134). This, in turn, leads to a reification of the educational process, one which is dehumanized and where procedures are technical and repetitive and, importantly, implemented to produce particular effects derived from theory and the writing of education.

On from the instrumental relation, and in a number of ways standing in opposition to it, is the post-critical relation. In its relation of philosophy to educational practice, “theory [...] [is] a rationality of action, a horizon of educational practice [...] as a practice of thinking, [it] enters into a relation with educational practice, it creates a space for it to happen” (Zamojski 2015: 144). In addition to this, and importantly, in the post-critical

relation, “The horizon which creates thinking, can be managed in different ways” (Zamojski 2015: 144). Consequently, and unlike the instrumental relation, philosophy does not say ‘what to do’ with regard to education, rather it provides conceptualizations for a space and the time to experience and become involved in thinking. It is “an area for acting which gives the possibility to initiate [...] a kind of explicitly marked empty space which is yet to be filled or managed by educational practitioners” (Zamojski 2015: 144). In the post-critical relation, therefore, philosophy does not dictate what should be done and how it should be done over and above the people who are engaged in the educational process. It gives the practitioners the opportunity to find their own way in the process and discover meanings that are important to them: it provides “a space in which everyone has a chance to come into presence in [their own] unique way [italics as in original – MB]” (Zamojski 2015: 144). In this situation, therefore, the philosophy of education is not the educational practice, although it constantly tries

to impose itself on the practitioners. However, this imposition is a far more intimate relation than a directive instruction [...]. The theory offers itself as the logic of the practitioners’ action. This means that **the sense of practice, or telos of education does not lie in its effects, nor in its curriculum, nor in what justifies it, but in the way it happens** [emphasis MB][...]. The most important concern of educational practitioners is thus what happens between people while they act. Exactly this concern frames the way of understanding old and new answers to the question ‘what is education?’. Regardless of what is their claim on education, in the post-critical type they make sense only if they can be conceived of as rationalities of action, as symbolic horizons in which there is an opportunity to act meaningfully with others. (Zamojski 2015: 145–146)

The post-critical relation, therefore, places the action that occurs in the educational exchange at the very heart of what education is, while the theorizing and writing of education is an attempt to understand the actions that take place. Additionally,

these actions are always in the form of “inter-actions”, as the educational exchange is prefigured as a meaningful exchange that takes place between people, not the implementation of a set of written procedures that produce predictable results and where it is the individual in contact with those procedures that is the primary form of engagement.

## **6. Conclusion**

Looking at the situation outlined above, the question arises of whether the “favoured” language chosen to describe educational practice as a whole is actually adequate to the task. On the one hand, if education is seen to be a culturally situated process whose purpose is to prepare learners to engage with the wider world (Klus-Stańska 2002: 390), then the practices it engages with ought to be adequate to providing those learners with the means to function successfully in that world. Consequently, if the contemporary world is viewed to be dynamic, where former certainties no longer hold (Beck 2003), then education needs to be responsive to this. It should promote approaches that do not only replicate what already exists or has indeed passed, but encourage learners to continuously engage with what is present in the “here and now” and to construct meaning adequate to the present time to move into the future. The writing of educational practice in terms of functional-behaviourism, would appear to run the danger of locking learners into a rationalist framework in which they will seek somebody else’s truth – to follow a path that has already been laid out – rather than searching for their own path. Over and above this, the rationalization and schematization of the education process that an unquestioning application of a model grounded in functional-behaviourism creates, runs the risk of preparing learners to become uncritical and easily absorbed into prevailing tendencies. In accordance with Potulicka and Rutkowiak (2012), this might be the unthinking consumerism promoted by corporations and a neoliberal agenda. It might also lead to a situation where the democratic project that Habermas (1987) envisaged, where individual life-worlds

partake in the advancement of society, as well as Dewey's (1966) belief in education to facilitate that project, are abandoned for other forms of government (Fukuyama 1992: 13–38)<sup>5</sup>, or even other forms of democracy (Fukuyama 1992: 314–315)<sup>6</sup>, in which the majority of individuals and their influence on the advances to be made are less clear or even non-existent.

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<sup>5</sup> Fukuyama's book, *The End of History and the Last Man*, was written at a time of great changes in the world politically and socially, and at a point where liberal democracy appeared to be "succeeding" in relation to other forms of government. In the two chapters that are referred to in this citation, *The Weakness of Strong States I* and *The Weakness of Strong States II*, Fukuyama describes countries and forms of government that had been "unsuccessful" in relation to liberal democracy, i.e. they had turned away from the forms of government they previously had – totalitarian, authoritarian – and adopted liberal democracy (see also the table *Liberal Democracies Worldwide* – Fukuyama 1992: 49-50). The different types of government he writes about in these two chapters are what I am thinking about above when I write "other forms of government".

<sup>6</sup> Fukuyama believes liberal democracy is more likely to change – to "be subverted internally" (Fukuyama 1992: 314) – by an excess of *megalothymia* (an excess feeling of individual greatness). Recent events in the USA and President Trump, would appear to show what is possible with regard to this.

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