

Discourse Analysis in Social Pedagogical Research

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Abstract: *This paper presents a proposal for social pedagogical research that is included in the dissertation of the author. The author's research leanings draw from social constructionist and post-structural approaches. These approaches form the framework that bounds not only the conception of the research, but also the overall viewpoint and approach of the researcher. The author has focused her research activities on the everyday knowledge of immigrants as representatives of a socially disadvantaged group in the Czech educational milieu.*

Keywords: *social pedagogical research, social construction of reality, everyday knowledge, culture, religion, free time, reflection, discourse analysis, discursive practices, non-discursive practices, dispositive, interpretation, socialization, experience, informal learning*

1 Introduction

Multiculturality is a characteristic of today's civilized world. In 2012 the number of legal resident aliens in the Czech Republic reached 435,900. In comparison with 2011, this figure has increased by 1,793. (Český statistický úřad, online). The meeting of different cultures, people, languages, habits, symbols, and different forms of behavior result in many new situations in all dimensions of life. The indisputable difficulty of coming to grips with these aspects of the late modern era is an area of interest for social pedagogy: “*The settlement of immigrants is also bound to education*” (Průcha, 2011, p. 74).

The educational process is the fluid resultant of many variables (i.e., institutional, family, peer, symbolic, value-based, and reference variables). If we try to get under the surface of the educational process and to understand the conditions of socialization, it is important to focus attention on more complex social relationships. Understanding these connections necessarily leads to an open, interdisciplinary point of view that paves “*the way to deeper study of everyday life and to everything that seems from the outside to affect it*” (Havlík, 2002, p. 25).

Contemporary educational practice must reflect current sociocultural problems and the diverse environments from which social actors—students and their teachers—come. Multiculturality alongside classroom education have become

topics that affect society-wide discourse. Deconstructing commonly widespread “knowledge” that may produce stereotypical, racist, or xenophobic tendencies in society appears to be one of the possible paths to harmonizing the coexistence of all social/ethnic groups.

Social pedagogy and research in this field exceed the dimensions defined by educational institutions. They are also projected into school- and non-school-related issues and into broader cultural-social contexts (environments) both within and without social groups and society as a whole. Social pedagogy deals with everyday culture, an issue that is sometimes neglected (cf. Dočkal, 2008; Kraus, 2008). Subjects of research in social pedagogy include the influences and interaction of specific social groups (ethnic minorities, disadvantaged and endangered groups, subcultures, etc.) and the environment; the forming of attitudes and lifestyles; and axiological issues. This broad research focus “*in many cases differs from research conducted in the school environment*” (Němec, 2010, p. 14).

2 Theoretical-philosophical Base of the Paper

Postmodernist arguments express skepticism about perceiving the truth as an invariable authority: “*The truth is unobtainable, as attempting to 'translate' it into our own symbols and signs will result in permanent deformation*” (Skálová, 2011, p. 57). The potential for interpreting a certain, specific experience in different ways demonstrates the fact that only one legitimate truth does not exist. “*If the same 'truths' are recounted from different points of view, they will have very different meanings*” (Freedman & Combs, 2009, p. 54). At the same time, knowledge has an ideological base, with which an instrument of power is formed that stratifies society (resulting in a hierarchy of relationships).

During the production of knowledge and interpretation in the human and social sciences, we implicitly lean towards seeing the world as interpreted. According to Köglera et al., one part of intercultural dialogue is the assumption of recognizing the other including his or her perspectives and “*recognizing the other as a being with a specific value*” (2006, p. 102). The aim of dialogue is the pluralistic, reflexive consideration of the values of other cultures, that is, to accept the opinion of the other with all of its differences.

The medium of understanding in dialogue is language. Human communication is a social practice, a process leading to gaining, processing, and transmitting information. Vybiral describes communication as “*influencing the one we are communicating with and simultaneously we are in every communication event influenced by the one communicating with us*” (2005, p. 27). Besides having a performative nature, language is also a representative of the social world and the interests of power. “*Language exists as an always specific articulation of values and norms in specific cultural contexts*” (Kögler et al., 2006, p. 169). The social reality of an individual is always formed during interactions with other people or institutions. This means that “*society forms a 'lens' through which its members*

interpret the world.” Reality, which we often take for granted, “*provides us with the opinions, attitudes, words, and experience with which we make up our lives or, how we would say in post-modern jargon, 'how we constitute the self'*”(Freedman, 2009, p. 35).

Considering the diversity of the issue, the use of discourse analysis in the author's dissertation research is proposed. Discourse analysis is a theoretical research approach that is able to critically reflect on behavior and the practices of a particular discourse. Ideally, the results of such an analysis should lead to change in the given situation. The value of critical discursive reflection can be found in its “*sensitivity to otherness and creation of space for personal and social change*” (Zábrodská, 2009, 11–12). A reflexive analysis of social constructs and power structures contributes to discovering the traits of naturalized “facts” that must be revealed if we want to contribute to equal conditions for living.

The following explanation describes key terms that can help one orient oneself in the process of discourse analysis. The term **modi operandi** is understood to mean speech strategies with which speakers put forth their ideas (cf. Thomson, 1990). The first such mode is legitimization, which itself includes typical strategies and symbolic constructions: rationalization, universalization, and narrativization. Rationalization serves to ground that which is recounted in reality with the help of reason. Universalization, or generalization, occurs when the interests of an individual are passed off as the interests of an entire group. Narrativization connects the past and present into a whole. It searches for examples and links in the past that are invariable and uninterrupted and that help form the whole.

The second mode of operation is dissimulation, which involves concealment and obscurement to suppress thoughts. Tropes and figurative language are used in this speech strategy. Specifically, synecdoche (using a part of something to refer to the whole or vice versa), metonymy (based on the transference of typical characteristics), and metaphor (figuratively naming something based on external similarities) occur frequently. Unification is the third mode. It is grounded in the creation of symbols that are intended to stimulate unity. The fourth mode is fragmentation, the goal of which is to emphasize as well as discredit the enemy of a given group. The last mode that Thompson uses is reification, a component of which is the strategy of naturalization. This strategy modifies facts with an emphasis on their historical or physiological bases.

Potter and Wheterell (2004) have introduced the term **interpretative repertoire** for discursive elements and structural sources that appear in text/speech and that the potential reader can expect (Šmídová, 2012, p. 34). For an analyst, it is important to study the meanings that subjects and objects in the text construct in the discourse, for their use has concrete consequences. Interpretative repertoires are one possible source for evaluating and producing statements as facts (cf.

Homoláč, 2009). For example, children who break a window while playing may be described by a lawyer as “juvenile delinquents,” by a teacher as “children unsuitably spending their free time,” and by the window's owner as “misbehaved brats.” Interpretative repertoires create several versions of reality that may, but do not have to be, at odds.

Discursive practices are capable of producing discourse (writing, lectures, declarations, sermons, confessions, political speeches given in public, and manifestos) and at the same time have a discursive effect (a medical diagnosis, consulting). **Non-discursive practices** include symbolic gestures made during blessings, while cheering on a sports team, at demonstrations, or while doing the Mexican wave (Keller, 2007).

A **dispositive** is an institutional component whose purpose is to achieve goals through discursive practices. The dispositive is the context of the environment that creates the conditions for applying discursive and non-discursive practices of power. The dispositives of individual communities have contextually binding, permanent meaning (Kraus, 2008, p 116). For example, schools do not represent only the power of teachers but also of students, the receptionist, and the headmaster.

Everyday knowledge is a term that Berger and Luckmann develop in their book *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966). Everyday life is the reality that people perceive and interpret through the subjective meanings that form a frame, a logical arrangement of their world and focused action within it: “*It is a world that originates in their thoughts and actions, and it is maintained real by these*” (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p. 33). Knowledge in everyday life is an implicit frame of reference that represents a prism within which we naturally act and through which view areas that we know, experience, and evaluate. “*As I can take hold of the world only in reflection, it must be made real only in the form in which I perceive it*” (Nohejl, 2001, p. 18).

Human thought is not “*immune to the ideologizing influences of its social context*” (Berger & Luckmann, 1999, pp. 21). The experience of a particular individual is a key factor in everyday action and life in the world. People produce certain opinions and patterns that over time may be objectivized and become social norms that an individual may accept as his or her own and perceive as being firmly given and having their own order. Schütz holds that in order to understand a social act, it is crucial to connect it to its meaning. We give meaning to the world not only through personal interpretation, through our own viewpoints, but also, and primarily, through our constant presence in the world (1979, p. 25). The individual therefore accepts a shared perception of the world, an orderly experience, which helps the individual find his or her bearings in the chaos and complexity of the world. This sharing process legitimizes the institutions that play a great role in constructing social reality, for example, the family, schools, state policies, etc. In this paper, we have chosen **the institute of**

religion as a representative of the symbolic world. Religion as a base accents context, which among other things affects the course of everyday life, and the strengthening of knowledge in context. Religion—the authority of a symbolic universe—is a source of cultural and symbolic meanings that help individuals legitimize actions, understand their own existence, and form their identity (Nešpor & Lužný, 2007, pp. 42–43). This religious perspective offers a coherent and meaningful image, an order to the world through the internationalization of social reality. Institutions work with a shared knowledge set, a set of instructions, that define expected and desirable behavior. In conceptualizing religion and its research, Durkheim states, “*the main objective of religion is not to explain the exceptional and abnormal, but in contrast, to explain that which is constant and regular*” (2002, p. 36).

Different faiths, cultural differences, and the concept of social disadvantage all carry risks, which can be manifested in failure at school but which can extend further into the overall life perspective of the individual. In disputations on the issue of social disadvantage, taking into account the specifics, values, and norms of the sociocultural context of the individual is the core of the entire process of comprehending. My research activity is focused on a socially disadvantaged group of migrants.

Immigrants to the Czech Republic come from diverse sociocultural backgrounds. Within formal learning, the Czech education system has attempted to react to this diversity by changing the curricula to include cross-cutting topics (multicultural education, education leading towards thinking in European and global dimensions). With reference to everyday life, a different type of learning has come to the forefront—**informal learning**—which is a natural part of everyday life. Informal learning is based on experiences gained within a sociocultural context and through relationships and interactions both within and without this context. Informal learning, together with formal and non-formal learning, creates a comprehensive learning set, a cycle of life-long learning. In broader terms, the dissertation focuses on mapping the (formal and informal) learning process of foreigners in the sociocultural environment of the Czech Republic.

3 Research objectives

The objective of the author's dissertation is **to describe the sociocultural background of immigrants** in the Czech Republic. Another goal is **to analyze the everyday knowledge of immigrants** and their social reality in connection with the educational and sociocultural environment in the Czech Republic. The term immigrants is narrowed down to focus on adherents of Islam. We have selected institutions, or more specifically actors from these institutions¹ who support cultural patterns and norms of life in Czech society, as representatives of the educational and sociocultural environment in the Czech Republic. The intent

¹ School, media, public opinion fora (e.g., Facebook), religious organizations, etc.

of this analysis is to capture the often unreflected aspects of everyday life that implicitly affect the course of the lifelong educational process. A minor objective is to map intercultural conflicts on the basis of everyday knowledge. A research report will present any possible conclusions that can be applied in informal and multicultural education practice.

Defining the research problem through forming research questions:

- *What cultural patterns create the social reality of everyday life of select immigrants in the Czech Republic?*
- *How are the subjective meanings of terms/experiences of immigrants projected into the educational reality of immigrants both in- and outside the classroom?*
- *From what sources is their knowledge constructed?*
- *What discursive practices affect intercultural coexistence in the Czech Republic?*

4 Methodological Grounding

Considering the nature of the dissertation's objectives, I have elected to use qualitative methods. Semi-structured interviews will be used to acquire data. Purposive sampling will be used to select individuals for the study from a group of socially disadvantaged individuals, which in our case consists of foreigners/Muslims living in the Czech Republic. The intention is therefore not to study a representative sample of the population as a whole, but instead the research endeavors “*to select representatives who are found in the studied area and possess knowledge about the issue*” (Šanderová, Šmídová, 2009, p. 11). The interviews will be transcribed using notation.

I would like to interpret data using discourse analysis, as my work is based on the premise that language significantly contributes to constructing and giving meaning to social reality and thus becomes a tool for achieving social goals. Speech is not just a logically ordered set of words; it is an act that has a social effect (cf. Austin, 2000). Discourse analysis emphasizes “*the values of critical reflection, sensitivity to otherness, and the creation of space for personal and social change, which have a place in any social context*” (Zábrodská, 2009, p. 12). Human speech is perceived as a social act, is performative in nature, and is viewed from the perspective of that which it accomplishes within a given context. In other words, in order to understand what people say, we have to take into consideration the social context and social position that they have in the context of a given discourse. Understanding language becomes the essential key to understanding the reality of everyday life. “*Language may become an*

objective storehouse of a great deal of meanings and experiences that may then be preserved in time” (Freedman, 2009, p. 48).

Discourse is a set of utterances corrected by rules that determine what we may or may not say within a given context and when, where, and how we say it. In connection with discourse, Vávra speaks of “*verbalized knowledge that is shared*” (2008, p. 205). Nekvapil characterizes the as-of-yet not particularly well-defined research area of discourse analysis as “*uncommonly diverse and hybrid in nature*” (2006, p. 263). We attribute the hybridity that the author indicates to the diverse background from which discourse analysis originated and which it still continues to draw from. Finally, the mystery that enshrouds the term discourse and its analysis leads back to the ambiguous definition supplied by the originator of this term—Foucault.

Understanding and interpreting context is a mechanism focused on language-based communication that in its latent as well as transparent form produces, shares, and conceptualizes meanings and sets roles and positions in the world (cf. Fairclough 1995, Wodak 2001). In my conception of the term, discourse is the whole of language-based acts within speech (text in spoken or written form), produced by an actor for a recipient within a specific context.

Several sub-branches of discourse analysis exist, which serve as mutual inspiration for each other: conversation analysis (Sacks 1984), ethnomethodology, critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995), social semiotics, Foucauldian discourse analysis, discursive psychology (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), etc. These sub-branches are grouped according to the academic tradition from which they are implicitly derived. Considering the research objectives, in the spirit of eclecticism I have established my own discursive concept that uses discourse analysis tools from all of the above-mentioned fields. The keywords contained in the introduction of this paper outline this approach: diapositives, discursive and non-discursive practices, interpretative repertoires, modi operandi. These shall become the focal point of discourse analysis.

The following diagram reconstructs each of the closely connected steps involved in the analytical-interpretative process.

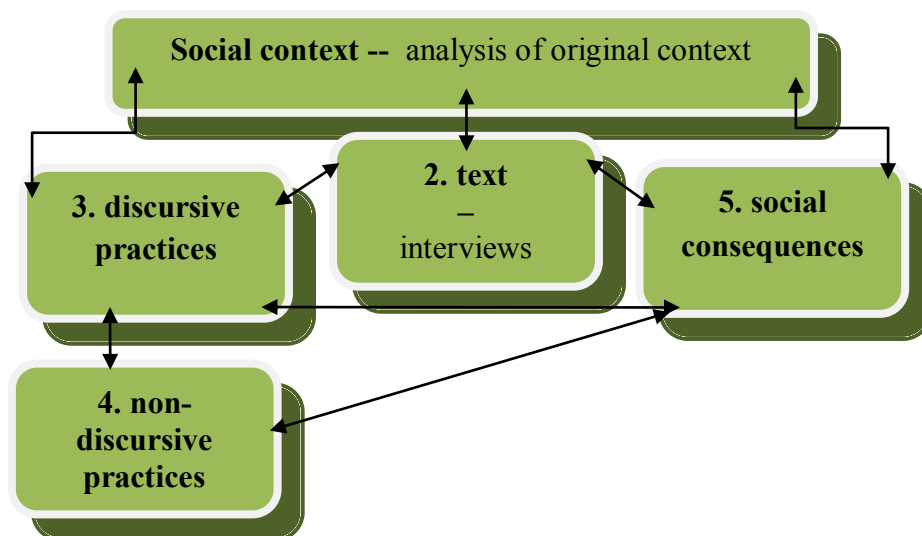


Diagram 1: steps involved in analysis and interpretation

An analysis of the social background of foreigners/Muslims will present their environment in a broader contextual frame. This frame produces meanings that the interviewees receive, reflect, implicitly accept, and in some cases explicitly reject. A brief excursion here will help to understand these interviews in context. Rather than conducting an in-depth probe of each interview, the objective of the analysis is to map the broader social context. In the next phase of the analytical-interpretative process, interview transcripts will be analyzed. Then the analyzed constructs, speech strategies, and identified discourses that they contain will be presented. Exposing discursive and non-discursive practices will be important. Here I most closely approach a linguistic approach to viewing text, in the sense that a detailed analysis is involved. The final phase will transfer identified (non-)discursive practices into the social practice of actors. In this phase, I will attempt to reflect the possible social consequences of these practices.

5 Conclusion

Considering the possibilities offered by discourse analysis and its abilities to reevaluate dominant, rigid forms of knowledge and its orientation towards taking pluralistic views, we assume that it is an approach (although it is not the only, exhaustive one) that is inspiring for social pedagogy and, by extension, the humanities.

The issues of human interaction and the process of creating identity through religious views are unquestionably preferential areas of interest in social pedagogy. Dealing with religious diversity in the classroom environment is one of the research areas that the Department of Social Education of the Faculty of Education of Masaryk University focuses on in cooperation with an Austrian partner university as part of the Aktion project. Thus, this dissertation is an entrance way into increasing sensitivity to viewing religion as one of many

factors important in society / education.

The use of discursive approaches in social pedagogy opens the door to studying the construction of meaning in various discursive worlds (religious, political, cultural, and everyday worlds). Peeking under the hood of different discursive contexts eliminates mutual misunderstanding of the subjective constructs of individual actors in social reality and supports tolerance. This seems to be something important in light of the multiculturalism of today's world.

6 References

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