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**POSTMODERNISM IDEAS INFLUENCE ON THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS  
IN US ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS**

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*Abstract*

The paper is devoted to the study of the postmodern ideas influence in the sphere of organization of educational activity on example of alternative schools in the United States. The study considers the basic ideas of postmodernism that affect the processes in the sphere of modern education. Considering such postmodern conceptual notions as deconstruction, rhizome and antibinarity, we studied the organization of alternative schools in the United States. A comparative analysis of normative documents in the sphere of secondary education was carried out. The authors analyzed programmes and standards governing the practice of traditional and alternative schools in the United States. It was found out that conceptual strategies in education are formed under the impact of postmodernist ideas of deconstruction, rhizomorphy and antibinary in the style of organizing the training activities, which are fully implemented, in the first place, in the specifics of the alternative schools' organization in the United States.

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## **1. Introduction**

In modern scientific literature devoted to the study of transformations in the sphere of modern education, an ambiguous attitude to the influence of postmodernism on the processes of educational system is being formed. However, one cannot ignore the fact that the modern education is a part of the ideological paradigm, which is a postmodern one. Postmodernism is a project of the non-classical culture existence, while education as a part of this culture inevitably accumulates basic ideas and intentions of postmodernism. If one understands, what postmodernism ideas are needed for in the modern education, it will allow, in our opinion, a deeper understanding of the essence of modern transformations in this area. Therefore, the relevance of certain postmodern ideas influencing the education is obvious today. Since postmodernism primarily spread in the West, and as it manifests itself today most clearly in the system of secondary education in the United States, we chose alternative schools in the United States as the main subject of this study.

The postmodernist philosophy of education is known to be represented by such researchers as Aronowitz (1988), Doyle, (1994), English (2003), Watkins (2005), Slattery (2013), Jacobs and Kritsonis (2017), Cormier (2008) in the United States. Postmodernists in the sphere of education have been asserting "democracy", pluralism of intrinsically valuable practices, speaking out against the "dictatorship" of theories and systems in educational sphere (in this respect, bound up with the "anti-pedagogy" of Illich (2006). The main criticism was directed at the classical model of education, which, from the point of view of postmodernism, was based on the idea of "centrism". In this model, the main role in the educational process belongs to a single structure – to the teacher, the Dean's office, that is to the structure that is directly responsible for the organization of training activities. It serves as the "centre" which organizes and regulates the educational process making it a system of strict regulations, rules and norms.

## **2. Research Questions**

From the standpoint of postmodernism, such a system is not perfect, as it does not reflect the pluralism of the educational environment and the degree of each participant's influence on the formation of the educational process. Education is a complex, continuous, multifactorial process, which includes the subjects of education, objectives, outcomes, general context.

According to the ideologues of postmodern pedagogy, this approach to education allows to see the educational process as a living, dynamic entity. In this process, any subject is important because it affects the variability and content of the educational process. The educational environment should be filled with complementary parts. The question of this research is the attitude of the pedagogy of education, in contrast to the classical system of education, towards the factors affecting the processes in modern education.

## **3. Purpose of the Study**

Our aim is to study of the postmodern ideas in the sphere of organization of educational activity on example of alternative schools in the United States. We consider the basic ideas of postmodernism, such

as deconstruction, rhizome and antibinarity, which influence the processes in the sphere of modern education and the organization of alternative schools in the United States.

#### 4. Research Methods

To study this system of postmodernist education we carried out a comparative analysis of normative documents in the sphere of secondary education. We analyzed programmes and standards governing the practice of traditional and alternative schools in the United States. We conducted a system analysis, which enabled us to evaluate the extent of the problem and to determine the overall logic of the research. We interviewed scientists from the United States, who are analyzing the alternative schools in the United States, their achievements and problems of development. We also used generalization, systematization and classification of information obtained in the course of the work with the respondents and source base of the research.

#### 5. Findings

The ideas of postmodernism, which had a significant impact on the development of education, can be represented in the following conceptual strategies in education:

- The strategy of deconstruction of education. Deconstruction is one of the central notions of postmodernist philosophy, introduced into science by J. Derrida. It is not a method of critical analysis. This is a strategy of disassembling, destruction of any hierarchical structures.
- The strategy of rhizomorphy in the field of education, that is there is an orientation on building a non-linear principle of the educational process organization. As noted by Eco: "A rhizome is constructed so that each track in it has the opportunity to cross another. There is no center, no periphery, no exit. Potentially, such a structure is infinite" (Eco, 2007). We can say that the concept of the rhizome reflects the essence of the process of modern education, which should be rhisomorphic, that is, to take into account the interaction of all active participants of the educational process. The educational activity itself is understood as heterogeneous, variable structure, consisting of ideas, meanings and contexts connected with each other.
- The strategy of antibinary style of organizing the training activities. The binarism is criticized by postmodernism as an essential foundation of classical culture, constructed on the principle of duality, opposition, but not the contextuality or processuality of any social processes.

These strategies are fully implemented, in the first place, in the specifics of the alternative schools' organization in the United States. We shall consider these features in more detail, looking at alternative schools: voucher, magnet and charter ones.

The process of *voucher schools* organization is as follows: every child of the school age shall be issued an educational voucher. For this purpose the Federal budget funds are allocated. The student (or his parents) choose the school and brings the document to the chosen educational institution. The school receives budgetary funds on the basis of the vouchers, it presents to the financial authority. The financial value of the federal voucher varies from state to state and from district to district. For example, in 1998/99 academic year, about 6 thousand students in Milwaukee city (Wisconsin) received funds from the voucher programme, 5 thousand dollars per student. In general, the cost of the programme amounted

to \$ 29 million. In Cleveland in 2000-2002, it was planned to involve 3.9 thousand people in the voucher programme, each of which would get 2250 thousand dollars. The cost of the programme for the state was estimated at \$ 9 million. In Michigan, the programme, which enables 10.5 thousand people to attend fee-paying schools, was estimated at \$ 35 million per year (Young, 2000).

Voucher funding reflects the principle of heterogeneity, rhizomorphy of the educational environment that gives parents the opportunity to freely choose the place their children will get education in and makes schools face the need to offer programs that are in demand and to ensure their qualitative implementation.

Schools with the level of teaching above average, which offer more exciting educational services, will be in high demand and will get more money from the state, expanding the range of their services. On the contrary, the schools, where the quality of education does not satisfy children (and their parents) will lose students and will correspondingly receive less money from the state. Thus, the variability of training is increased, which is essential for postmodern principles in education, as well as the reliance on individual choices and situations pupils' parents face. For example, the level of their income (the situation specifics) determines the range of programmes at the school. Taking into account the individual needs of the students also influences the choice of programmes.

This system provides children from low-income families with the opportunity to study in private schools. This allows the children to have equal opportunities in education, regardless of material wealth of the family. That is, if the child gets educational services of inappropriate level in a free secondary school, parents will be able to easily send their child to the school in which he/she will be able to receive better education, even if they are charged for this training. Thus, on the one hand, the principle of lifelong learning is followed, and on the other hand, it's also the principle of the learning process variability. Any educational process is a way of organizing people's lives, so training must always be contextual and dialogical.

Multiple variety of education also lies in the fact that any educational environment develops its own goals and objectives, with its specialized programmes and additional funding. The main difference between *magnet schools* as another type of alternative schools and other public schools is that magnet schools receive additional funding to support their specialized programmes. The funding allows them to spend more on school needs, books and resources, which help them in maintaining the high standards and reputation. On average, magnet schools spend \$200 per student more than in non-magnet schools. Their funding comes at the expense of local, state, and federal sources through grants and donations. Federal funding is also available under the Programme of Promoting Exemplary Schools that provide Magnet programmes with two-year grants; these are implemented to oppose to segregation (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Perhaps more than any other school, magnet schools depend on the district residents' participation in their thematic expertise, equipment, and, last but not least, in donations of equipment and funds. Each magnet school uses a variety of strategies to engage interested people. Some of them, as mentioned above, form groups to help in this process. Thus, the Advisory Council on magnet schools of Duval County (Florida), consisting of district authorities staff, teachers, principals, and members from districts, higher education institutions, and the private sector, is funded by the Department of magnet schools and organizes such activities as parties to honour some teachers. The main purpose of this Council is to act as

a communication tool for magnet schools. Partnership of Wake County (North Carolina) was also conceived as a means of attracting the private sector's support to the public school system including such financial aspects as student scholarships, funding for teachers, students' training. Hoping to find business partnerships, Houston (Texas) created a Public Relations Department, which is something like a business community. When it identifies a businesses interested in providing their time, services or money, the business community contacts with the school, which needs resources.

Thus, a creative environment made of the community representatives of schools and businesses becomes an active subject of the educational process. This environment allows to expand the context of learning, to create conditions for realizing each entity's potential, to create its own system of values and pupils' achievements. In this regard, we agree with Watkins' opinion regarding the fact that "the modern educational environment must be interactive, because it's interactivity, creative interaction provides the students with an opportunity to feel active participants in their interaction with the teacher. It is more effective than learning from lectures".

Despite the fact that *charter schools* are considered to be public schools, some charter schools practice selective method of enrollment. The USA public schools must register any student who lives within the school territory. This mechanism does not work in charter schools. Charter schools can hold "elections" to admit the most interested learners. Moreover, students get the chance to study in these schools by participating in the lottery.

Many of the charter schools require the parents to be involved in the school activities: often a school has a contract with the parents, which must be signed before a student is registered. Therefore, while parents and students associated with these schools are "dysfunctional" in their broader social context, they may be in a less advantageous position compared to other families within their poor and segregated urban districts. For example, such charter schools register students who have the most involved parents and parents who are able to take them to school and from school every day.

The multivariate character of postmodernism, has found its application in the variability of approaches to the content of education and to sources of funding in schools. There was a kind of deregulation, which allowed schools to make their own decisions, to find creative educational approaches and to seek for new sources of funding independently. However, public funding still remains the main source for these schools, as generally, it is more stable than private contributions.

## **6. Discussion**

Those who criticize alternative schools argue that in the long-term perspective, the impact of charter schools will undermine the funding of standard district schools. In other words, if the more privileged parents and their capital leave the district schools for charter ones, district schools will have fewer students; therefore, the financing will be reduced. To the same extent that charter schools can achieve better results having the same or less money, they can also lead to a reduction in funding. Richard Leone explains: "Although we cannot deny the fact that current costs and the funding of schools contribute to the education of disadvantaged students, innovations related to organizational and managerial changes seem to be particularly attractive because, unlike the old organizational and managerial system, they are less costly. Thus, the proponents of such ideas as the introduction of

vouchers, elections, privatization, the creation of charter schools and various current proposals on amendments in the system of public education found an indispensable support in the whole public sector" (Raywid, 1994).

## 7. Conclusion

The US secondary education system visually illustrates the degree of postmodern concepts and ideas' influence in the sphere of modern education. As an example, we have considered alternative schools. Of course, the organization of educational activities from the standpoint of postmodern philosophy of education has such positive aspects as the principles of plurality and pluralism of the educational process, abandoning the rigid hierarchy of the educational process. It also relies on the language environment in which poly-contextual, heterogeneous, and, therefore, successful education is organized. Yet it has some negative consequences. In particular, there is an open question about the influence and role of public funding for these schools, specific technologies of changing the educational process, methods of rebuilding classical education, cross-disciplinary organization of the educational process itself. Moreover, the cognitive and axiological aspects of the study of postmodernism ideas' influence on modern education are extremely important, that is, in other words, how to assess criteria defining the success of the postmodern ideas' implementation in education, and what values it will give to our future generations.

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