

POWER RELATIONS OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS AND THEIR TRANSFORMATION IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE LEARNING PARADIGM

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Abstract. *The article deals with the problems of the power relations of the participants of the educational process. In the educational process, power is usually demonstrated not directly, but it is expressed employing rituals, rules, subtle control mechanisms, etc. Traditional teaching forms and methods, focused on the transferring of knowledge, help to maintain hierarchical relations in the educational process. The scientists (Duoblienė, 2009) notice that it is not possible to avoid power relations, but they can be reflected on. In the context of education, it foresees the perspective of the change in critical thought and power relations. The shift from the teaching paradigm to the learning paradigm is related to the possibility to recognize the expression of power relations and replace the traditional educational practice with a new one, that reflects the activity and equality of all the participants of the educational process.*

The aim of the research is to reveal the expression of power relations of the participants of the educational process and reflect on the situation of their transformation that occurs in the perspective of the learning paradigm.

Problem questions: How do power relations manifest themselves in the educational process? How do they change while moving from the teaching paradigm to the learning paradigm?

The methods of the analysis of scientific literature and written reflection by pedagogues have been applied in the research. The analysis of scientific literature presupposed the possibility to reveal the expression of power relations of the participants of the educational process, the implicit character of power relations and the situation of their change in the perspective of the learning paradigm. Written reflection by pedagogues reveals their efforts of critical thinking recognizing power relations in the context of their professional activity, analysing the causes of these relations and the potential of their change.

Keywords: *participants of the educational process, power relations, learning paradigm.*

Introduction

Power relations in the field of education is not a widely investigated issue, but it is a relevant one. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) believes that the teacher-student relationship is the core of the education process (Donghui, 2019). The findings of the research, that

show that relations in school are not as good as expected, have also been presented. Learners, while evaluating educational environments, distinguish their relations with teachers as the most problematic field. It is noticed that teachers rarely take learners' feelings into account, come up to talk, are interested in their problems (Barkauskaitė et al., 2015). However, there are too few discussions about the deeper causes of these relations and the preconditions of their transformation from the position of power.

A thorough analysis of power relations, that inevitably lie in every society, was presented by philosopher M. Foucault. Referring to the ideas of this author, productivity can be characteristic to power. Power relations are closely related to constructivism, because power is created and maintained in the society, and it is not something that has existed before the society.

The traditional educational process, that reflects the functioning of the teaching paradigm, is characterized by asymmetric power relations between teachers and learners. These relations are conditioned by the traditional understanding of education, according to which education is the transmission of experience, accumulated by the society, to the growing generation. According to M. Foucault, truth is not free in its nature, because its creation is transfused by power relations that have institutional support (Foucault, 1999). Control mechanisms, rituals, and rules employed in the educational process consolidate the epistemic authority of a teacher and a textbook. In the traditional educational process, the manifestations of discourse restriction and limitation can be noticed, when a teacher and a selected content of education get into the centre of attention; and the methods, which are the best to help transmit knowledge to learners, who are passively listening and carrying out instructions, are predominant.

Although power relationship cannot be avoided, it can be reflected on (Duoblienė, 2009). It is a very important idea in the educational context, because it foresees the perspective of the transformation of critical thought and power relations. The theory of power emphasizes that the fights of interests constantly take place, and when the situation changes, power relations can be changed or turned over, too (Volkers, 2008). A. Volkens is sure that there is a great lack of reflective thinking in recognizing power relations in the educational process (Volkens, 2008).

The perspective of the learning paradigm establishes the opportunity for the transformation of power relations in the educational process. Learning becomes learner-focused and reflective. The methods emphasizing collaboration, construction of knowledge, development of competences are highlighted.

A teacher gains the role of an assistant, it is important for him/her to establish favourable conditions for learners to learn. The learning paradigm in the empirical plane manifests itself in implementing the ideas of alternative learning, in emphasizing the importance of experiential, self-directed learning, etc. Nevertheless, in many general education schools, the manifestations of the teaching paradigm and respective power relations are still encountered. It presupposes the idea, that the participants of the educational process must be encouraged to reflect on their experience, interrelations, and, having identified an unsatisfactory situation, look for the opportunity how to reconstruct it.

The object of the research – power relations of the participants of the educational process and their transformation.

The aim of the research is to reveal the expression of power relations of the participants of the educational process and reflect on the situation of their transformation that occurs in the perspective of the learning paradigm.

The methods of the research – the analysis of scientific literature and written reflections by pedagogues – have been applied in the research.

Expression of power relations in the educational process

In the context of the teaching paradigm, a hierarchical model of power relations emerges. The participants of the traditional educational process contribute to the maintenance of hierarchical relations. A teacher is the epistemic authority, knowing the truth and striving to transmit it to learners. Popular forms of the transmission of knowledge (e.g., explanation, demonstration) consolidate asymmetric relations between learners and teachers (Parton & Bailey, 2008). The content of education is presented as objective truth. An education programme, that is focused on the transmission of information, is fundamentally authoritative, consequently, intolerant and limited (Bailey, 2000).

The philosopher M. Foucault, who broadly analysed power relations, very critically spoke about truth that in the educational process is presented as objective. In the thinker's opinion, "we only see truth as richness, fruitfulness, and strength, gentle and at the same time deceptively universal. But we do not know anything about the will for truth – this incredible machinery of elimination" (Foucault, 1999, 14). Referring to the insights of M. Foucault, it has to be admitted that truth is not free in its nature, because it is constructed on the basis of power relations. The concept of the traditional education, as the transmission of the accumulated knowledge to the new generation, is based on the mechanisms of discourse constraint. The methods focused on the transmission of the established contents of education and the role of the teacher, who consolidates strict discipline, also serve this purpose.

One of the most evident ways to consolidate the settled power relations in the field of education is ensuring control. M. Foucault widely wrote about control, that is important for the educational process, while analysing the system of examinations. “In the examination, the technique of a supervising hierarchy and a normalizing sanction is combined. During the examination individuals become open, the opportunity to differentiate them and impose a sanction emerges” (Foucault, 1998, 221).

Some scientists (Peach & Bieberb, 2015) draw attention to the functioning of education as a power mechanism. Nevertheless, in the practice of education, the power mechanisms function probably in one of the subtlest ways, therefore, they are recognized with difficulty and that is why they usually avoid critical transformation. Power does not arise from the subject’s personal choice (Foucault, 1999). Power relations can be compared to disciplining techniques of the institutions of society (school, hospital, prison). Nevertheless, power relations that exist at the macro-level in the society also consolidate themselves at the micro-level, and in the case under analysis it happens in a particular educational process.

A. Volkers, analysing the insights of M. Foucault, revealed the relations between a teacher and a learner, typical to the traditional educational process, that refer to learner’s ignorance and are based on his/her memory (Volkers, 2008). A teacher reveals a learner’s mistakes and helps to find a correct answer. The requirement to be silent when a teacher is speaking comes from here, because only in such a way objective truth can be accepted. These are typical examples of hierarchical relations, consolidated in the educational process, that support the functioning of the teaching paradigm. It is evident that speaking about the learning paradigm and student-centered learning, the transformation of the traditional power relationship in the educational process is also necessary.

Transformation of power relations in the perspective of the learning paradigm

The transformation of paradigms of education have interested scientists for quite a long time (Barr & Tagg, 1995). It is noticed that it gives a great challenge to the change in didactics (Barkauskaitė et al., 2015). In order to successfully implement the learning paradigm, the transformation of the concept of education itself and a new proceeding of the educational process are important. In this context, the necessity arises to replace disciplining power relations with the relations based on the communication of the participants of the educational process (Donghui, 2019).

Looking from the perspective of the learning paradigm, the purpose of learning is to establish the opportunities of various experiences for learners,

which would stimulate learning but not the transmission of knowledge and skills (Jarvis, 2001; Thompson, 2014). Thus, organizing the educational process much attention is paid to the development of learners' powers and self-directed learning. The idea is supported that the educational process should become student-centered, where students are identified as the owners of their learning (Lee & Hannafin, 2016). It is closely related to a new model of power relations and the expression of democratic ideals in the educational process.

M. Foucault considered the following aspiration as important – power should not be hegemonic but it should meet the demands of the democratic society. K. Reich, analysing the works by M. Foucault, explained that a person exists between the aspects of power and resistance (Reich, 2012). Consequently, hierarchical relations that do not meet the interests of the participants of the educational process evoke the need for change. Without the action of the subjects themselves power becomes helpless. In the perspective of the learning paradigm, the participants of the educational process construct democratic relations that are based on the idea of equality. Learners' unique experience and their diversity become an important and valuable accent.

In the theory of power relations, the idea of discourse constraint and restriction is frequent. In the context of the research it is important to pay attention to the fact that under the action of the teaching paradigm not all the participants of the educational process have equal rights to share their experience and contribute to the creation of educational situations. The scientists notice that children's "perspectives are seldom sought by educators, who traditionally hold views of children as being innocent and dependent upon adults to 'know what's best' for nurturing children's wellbeing and future trajectories" (Ruscoe, Barblett, & Barratt-Pugh, 2018, 63). The conclusion is drawn that in the contemporary educational process it is necessary to share power with children. Children are given "voice", and referring to it, a new understanding of learning is co-constructed. Consequently, after that the renovation of the organization of the educational process may follow.

In the context of the learning paradigm, particular attention should be paid to teachers' training and the development of their skills, especially critical thinking (Haydon & Jones, 2012). The biggest opportunity to talk about the change of the roles and relations of the participants of the educational process occurs when, after its reflective evaluation, the situation does not satisfy the needs any more and stimulates the search for new solutions.

Research methodology

Reflecting is considered as one of the essential skills helping the participants of the educational process recognize predominant power relations

(Duoblienė, 2009). Firstly, reflectivity should be characteristic to a pedagogue. Nevertheless, as it is noticed, this skill in the practice of education is not sufficiently developed. In order to encourage pedagogues to think reflectively about the relations of the participants of the educational process and power that manifests itself in them, a written survey of pedagogues was conducted. Pedagogues were asked to evaluate pedagogues' relations with learners, to identify the causes of these relations, and foresee development opportunities in written reflections, while analysing their professional experience.

The sample of the research – 30 written reflections. Target sampling was applied in the research. Written reflections were prepared from December 2018 to January 2019 by pedagogues continuing their studies at university, who have attended the study course of general didactics and gained knowledge about the management of the educational process and experience in reflecting. Reflections served not only as a research instrument but also as an aid for pedagogues to rethink their experience and project the perspectives of its development. In the research confidentiality was observed, the participants of the research did not have to indicate their names and surnames. Written reflections have been analysed applying content analysis, distinguishing categories, subcategories, and illustrative statements.

Analysis of the expression of power relations in pedagogues' written reflections

Analysing their professional experience in education institutions, the pedagogues revealed quite many manifestations of the functioning of the teaching paradigm that shows hierarchical power relations. The pedagogues' responses, distributed into categories and subcategories and illustrated by statements, have been presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Expression of power relations in the educational process

Category	Subcategory	Illustrative statements
Rules set in advance	Strict discipline	In my workplace learners must stand up when the teacher comes in and sit down only after the teacher's permission
		"Releasing the reins" teachers fear of chaos
		The teacher has an opportunity to preserve his/her authority by setting rules
	Elements of force	Forced reading generally takes away the desire to read
		Art classes for children are a forced thing
		The pressure that "kills" children's motivation constantly manifests itself

Control of the educational process	Restriction and directions	The time limit given for a task impedes the expression of creativity
		The instruments, with which the learners have to work, are indicated
		Earlier I tried to structure everything
Learners' role	Passiveness or protest	Contemporary children do not want to do anything at all
		When given freedom, children will not realize what is interesting to them
		Some children obediently carry out instructions, the others demonstratively protest

Generalizing the educational process, the pedagogues pointed out the predominant rules that are set in advance, and that is why they can be alien to learners (and often to teachers themselves). The pedagogues also notice that in the educational process many elements of control manifest themselves in setting boundaries and instructions. In the context of power relations, learners take two opposite roles – they either become passive and obedient or they protest.

Analysing the educational process, the pedagogues often use words expressing destruction: *pressure, force, killing (of motivation)*. It contradicts the concept of education, that is generally related to creation, development, i.e., positive characteristics. In fact, the pedagogues do not directly relate their activity to the maintenance of hierarchical power relations. This insight is closely related to the observation of A. Volkers, that the statement that they apply power seems absurd to pedagogues (Volkers, 2008). Nevertheless, in the context of education, teachers recognize the manifestations of power that do not satisfy them. Consequently, it is expedient to analyse what, in pedagogues' opinion, the origin of power is.

Reflecting on the origin of power relations, the pedagogues pay much attention to determinability, mentality of the society, and insufficient dissemination of good practice (Table 2).

Table 2 *Origin of power relations*

Category	Subcategory	Illustrative statements
Determinability	Set plans	You have to deliver the topics very quickly, otherwise you will not manage to implement the plan of the year
		There is no time to see whether children understand or not
	Pressure on teachers	If you are doing something in a different way, you will be forced to come back to the boundaries
		A teacher does not have another choice
	Sanctioning evaluation	Much attention has to be paid to grades, standardized tests, examinations
		Everyone must meet the standards

Mentality of the society	Established traditional education	Our society still has to grow up for alternative methods
		It is difficult for teachers to change their traditional attitudes
		To change education, the generation must change
		The Lithuanians are afraid of changes ruining our everyday life
Insufficient dissemination of good practice	Reticence	There is a lack of collaboration with other schools
		Competition and pressure is felt
		Teachers usually compare themselves with the others

Pedagogues feel as hostages of the present power relations and they find themselves in a vicious circle. Their activity is conditioned by the directions of administration that are based on the requirements set to them. Responding to that, teachers are forced to give many directions to learners. It confirms the thought, that power is not a choice of separate subjects, although it cannot function without their support.

Analysing power relations, it has been noticed that they are constructed. Various constructs (e.g., related to the traditional concept of education) become deeply established in the consciousness of the members of the society and they become a norm. Nevertheless, the opportunities of reconstruction exist. In the society, the fights of interests constantly take place, and when the situation changes, power relations can also be changed or turned over (Volkers, 2008). It is possible to observe the situation that provokes the change in power relations in the field of education, when the learning paradigm is replacing the teaching paradigm.

While providing insights on how the situation in the educational process should change, the pedagogues pay much attention to the implementation of the aspects of didactics representing the learning paradigm (Table 3).

Table 3 Transformation of power relations

Category	Subcategory	Illustrative statements
Change of the roles of the participants of the educational process	Learners' self-directed learning	Children learn many necessary things from animated cartoons, which we forbid them to watch
		Learners' creativity and self-expression unfold through their chosen activity
	Shared decision making	Learners and a teacher can arrange the topic of the work together
		A child has an opportunity to choose how to dress up during the event
	Change of a teacher's role	A teacher should be a guide, a facilitator
		For a teacher it is important to get involved into creative activity himself/herself

Transformation of the educational process	Variety of educational environments	It is possible to give classes not necessarily in the classroom
		Children should learn in a space that is acceptable to them
	Change of the content of education	It should not be forced what books should be read
		Integrated lessons get learners more interested
	Methods stimulating learning	It is important that children could investigate, experience, discover
		Not to restrict children’s natural desire to learn about the world
		Projects involving children
		Group work methods can answer the purpose

The teachers point out that the transformation in the educational process should take place with a bigger focus on children, responding to their needs. The conditions suitable for that are established by the change of the roles of the participants of the educational process. In the perspective of learners’ self-directed learning a teacher becomes a facilitator. Democratic relations enter into force, when all interested parties are heard when making decisions. There are no more subjects who have a privilege to talk, all the participants of the educational process gain their “voice”.

A new model of power relations in the pedagogues’ reflections emerges, when they model the perspectives of the educational process. The pedagogues try to reject the relics of restrictions, limitation, and force, which are still often identified as the reality of education. A new model of power relations is constructed, which would give more freedom for learners to choose, where and what they want to learn, empower learners’ active common work, and give a sense to their experience.

Conclusions

Power relations in the context of education are not widely analysed, but it is a relevant issue, because they have a big impact on education. The participants of the educational process are not always satisfied with their interrelations, and this might be conditioned by power that is not shared but concentrated in the hands of certain subjects. Power has both destructing and constructing potential. Although there is no society without power relations, if democratic ideals are observed, it is possible to achieve that all interested individuals feel equal, having power, and able to use it.

The expression of power relations in the field of education is well reflected by educational paradigms. In the context of the teaching paradigm, power

relations that express pedagogical impact are consolidating. Much attention here is paid to the determined truth and its transmission to the growing generation. Consequently, the manifestations of discourse constraint occur, “voice” is not given to all the participants of the educational process. On the contrary, in the perspective of the learning paradigm, power relations gain democratic character. In the educational process, the participants’ interaction, distribution of powers, commonly made decisions are predominant. Truth becomes an object of agreements, “voice” is gained by the subjects, who previously did not have it.

The pedagogues, reflecting on their professional experience, describe the relations, predominant in the educational process, as quite often reflecting the action of the teaching paradigm and having destructive impact on students’ learning. The manifestations of strict discipline, control, and force have been identified. It conditions learners’ passiveness, loss of motivation or, on the contrary, protesting. Dissatisfaction with the current situation may become a weighty precondition for the transformation of power relations. It is understood by the pedagogues as the change in learners’ and teachers’ roles, paying more attention to learners’ needs and their “voices” in the transformation of the educational process. Nevertheless, the change in power relations is not rapid, because, according to the pedagogues’ observation, it is mostly conditioned by the mentality of the society, reticence, unwillingness to share good practice, and predominant determinability that often makes pedagogues feel helpless.

The limitation of the research manifests itself in the fact that only pedagogues have been surveyed. Consequently, it would be expedient to continue the research and empower other participants of the educational process to reflect on power relations predominant in it and express their opinion towards the change.

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