

A MODEL OF AN EDUCATIONAL EVENT

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Abstract: The aims of the paper are to define and explain a concept of process education and an educational event as its basic unit. Education is conceived as a process of adaptation of humans to their environments. An important part of the survey is to find and describe criteria for choosing such psychological concepts which are consistent with the process paradigm. Then it is possible to elaborate an eight-phase model for an educational event as a basic unit of educational process. The paper concludes by listing advantages and difficulties of the model.

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Introduction

Each person knows that there is a strong connection between the general worldview and understanding of human nature – his position in the Universe, his main direction of development and a set of basic values which should be realized during his lifespan. Serious thinking about education forces us into questioning all these issues. From the perspective of areas of knowledge such as process philosophy, ecology, evolutionary psychology, etc. then one can provisionally define education as a *process of adaptation of humans to their environments*. This simple statement contains four key words, but each of them has many meanings. Below we elaborate on these meanings that can be reconciled within the general worldview pictured by process metaphysics.

Process

The classical view on process developed by Heraclitus, Hegel, Bergson, etc. is based on the intuition that becoming (process) is something continuous. It leads to the idea of education as a constant increase of knowledge and the development of different abilities, etc. The inner structure of such a process is determined by its phases and their

contents. The range of a given phase is defined by a factor chosen in a more or less arbitrary way (by means of outer criteria).

The non-classical view on process developed by Alfred North Whitehead is based on a totally opposite intuition than the classical one: process as such is not continuous in a strict sense. Continuity is not a well-defined feature of a process. Explaining how this is possible requires an explanation by means of a suitable theory (philosophy). Below we present a couple of main theses of Whitehead's metaphysics in a nutshell:

The Universe is a creative macro-process, which consists of indivisible, instantaneous complex and dynamic units, so called actual entities (micro-processes, "metaphysical organisms" - called further simply "organisms"). Every past organism participates in the becoming of new generations of organisms. Every new organism becomes as a synthesis (conrescence) of feelings (prehensions) of all past organisms (the relational idea of becoming). Becoming of a new organism requires an analysis of contents of given feelings, followed by a synthesis of selected items into a new organic whole. Becoming of a new organism takes place in several phases which lead to an increasingly integral organic entity until it is fully definite and then the organism passes into the past. Organisms both emerge from and constitute the environment. The environment has several types of orders which can be more or less persistent. Continuity of process is a derivative feature of the macro-process, which primarily concerns its past parts and is constantly re-built when new generations of organisms undergo a transition from becoming in the present to being in the past.

Let us propose educational equivalents of the above metaphysical theses:

The Educational Universe is a creative macro-process which consists of organic units, so called educational events. Each past educational event participates in the becoming of new generations of educational events. Every new educational event becomes as a synthesis (conrescence) of feelings (prehensions) of all past educational events. Becoming of a new educational event requires an analysis of the contents of given feelings, followed by a synthesis of selected items into a new organic whole. Becoming of a new educational event takes place in several phases which lead to an increasingly integral organic entity until it is fully definite and then passes into the past. Organisms both emerge from and constitute the educational environment. The educational environment has several types of orders which can be more or less durable.

The above paragraph gives a rough description of the non-classical concept of process and introduces a couple of additional philosophical

terms into the educational context, like feeling, synthesis, emergence, organic unit, etc., that require further interpretation.

Environment

One can discern in an educational environment several main types of order which define different societies. We use the term “environment” in preference to “society”, which is more technical in process philosophy and sounds less appropriate in the educational context. Thus, an educational environment consists of many more special environments like the (inner) psycho-physical environment, outer environments like social, cultural, technical, natural (etc.) environments and finally, non-localized – a spiritual environment. The educational influence of these environments on humans is possible because of different types of sensitivity of humans or, in terms of process philosophy, different types of feelings which constitute human nature.

Adaptation

The first and most basic need which should be fulfilled by an organism (whether metaphysical or human) during a process of maturation is its adaptation to its appropriate environment(s). The adaptation of an organism consists in shaping a temporary representation (model) of its environments as adequately as possible. It results from properly interpreted (analyzed and synthesized) interactions between the organism and its environments. Interactions modify both the organism and its environment. The model of the environment is constantly corrected and influences the mode of interaction between the organism and its environment. It would be very interesting to reconstruct the notion of “adaptation” in a framework of process philosophy, but this is not the aim of the paper.

Educational process and educational event

Whitehead’s idea of the rhythms of education is made concrete in the concept of educational process. It consists of many educational events and has its own rhythm and character. The events are determined by their inherited informational, emotional, esthetical, social, and other aspects. The relative stability of the educational process is ensured when it is harmonized with all other processes, such as natural, social, cultural, emotional, spiritual, etc. which are intertwined with the educational

process (or – speaking less “procesually” - in which participants of the educational events are engaged). One can see that the concept of an educational process is based on the concept of an educational event (which is an analogue of an actual occasion).

The educational event is an organic whole which becomes, in a period of time, necessary for achieving its full determination (satisfaction). It consists of feelings that mutually connect all participants of the event and their environments and gradually constitute a subject of the event. The subject is understood in a similar way as a group in a group process widely described by psychologists as an encounter group, T-group, etc. The group is treated as something individual, developed by its own rhythm towards maturity and fulfillment. The end of such a group process is a kind of satisfaction, which is distinctly felt by participants of this process. There are a couple of indications of the last phase of a group process.

An educational event becomes in a few phases which consist of successive analyses and syntheses of particular selections of data which are “contained” in feelings. One can try to interpret Whitehead’s philosophical terms from his theory of actual entity in a way that applies them to psychological and educational phenomena. This would be an aim of future research but for current applications it is enough to find psychological (anthropological) concepts of consciousness consistent with the process paradigm. The question is: what criteria for such a concept would support a consistent and applicable model of an educational event? Such a concept of consciousness should take into account: the evolutionary character of human and social development, results of psychological, sociological, anthropological and other educationally relevant research. In addition, such a concept should be in harmony with the broader theoretical context of process philosophy and be relatively easy to apply to education.

Among many interesting psychological and anthropological concepts we chose Jean Gebser’s concept of consciousness structures. He said in his *opus magnum* “The Ever Present Origin”:

“True process always occurs in quanta, that is in leaps, or, expressed in quasi-biological terms, in mutations. It occurs spontaneously, indeterminately, and, consequently, discontinuously. Moreover we become aware of such presumably invisible processes only when they have reached sufficient strength to manifest themselves on the basis of their cumulative momentum. [...] The apparent continuity is no more than a sequence

subsequently superimposed onto overlapping events to lend them a reassuring appearance of a logically determinate progression".¹

We can sum up Jean Gebser's concept of a consciousness structure in the following way: the human mind has many simultaneous consciousness structures. Each new structure of consciousness arises from the previous one (epigenesis) and subsumes it. Each new structure of consciousness emerges in parallel to new social structure and vice versa. The development of consciousness of each individual human reconstructs the main stages of the social development of humankind by analogy with human individual ontogenesis which reconstructs the main stages of human species phylogenesis.

Five structures of consciousness according to Jean Gebser are as follows:

Archaic – this is the structure with an indeterminate and vague content. These are our primordial drives, impulses, inclinations. Somatic feelings and the direct presence of the environment dominate in the organism. It is a pre-linguistic, unconscious and, in fact, pre-human structure of the human consciousness.

Magical – a non-reflective structure, which is about group identity. It enables synchronization with other subjects (humans, animals, Nature) and also mimesis. Attuning to group or tribal rhythms (for instance during rites) is a very important feature of this structure.

Mythical – this structure allows participation in the personal, the group (tribe) and the history of the whole environment. This participation is boosted by emotions and words (storytelling) but not by intellect (logical reasoning). Rites and myths bind humans not only with the tribe, society, etc. but also with the world, and determine their position in it, who they are and what is important for them.

Mental – this structure objectifies, enables critique, reasoning, analyzing, abstraction. It makes possible the reflection and meta-reflection. Its products are philosophy, science, technology, etc.

Integral – this structure enables the unification of previous structures of consciousness with the mental structure. This helps us to re-locate ourselves in the universe and re-identify ourselves through our philosophical, artistic and spiritual activities.

In our time first four structures of consciousness are present simultaneously in the adult mind but integral structure is rare because in

¹ Jean Gebser, *The Ever Present Origin. Foundations of the Aperspectival World. Vol. 1*, p. 37. Authorized translation by Noel Barstad with Algis Mickunas, Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991

our contemporary epoch it emerges only in places where social structure makes it possible. Thus a question arises: what social structure is optimal from the perspective of the emergence of the fifth structure of consciousness? The working hypothesis is that some kinds of intentional societies are able to foster such process. Good examples of intentional societies are certain religious communities: Christian or Buddhist monasteries, Hindu ashrams or less formal groups of believers from different denominations, artists, scientists, ecologists or charity organizations. Intentional societies can be also formed through social media. Existence of such societies is only a necessary condition for the emergence of the fifth structure of consciousness but not a sufficient one. To describe the sufficient conditions would require additional research and could not have been done in this paper. We postulate that it is possible to simulate the functioning of an intentional society by building a proper educational environment, carefully forming of a group of participants, conducting group processes by professional educators, etc. It is much easier in non-formal education than in formal educational settings.

Whitehead in his "The Aims of Education and Other Essays" described a concept of a rhythm of education based on a hierarchy of eddy circles.² One can interpret a single eddy circle as something similar to an educational event, especially if such a circle encompasses a distinctive unit of an educational process like a single lesson which is a part of a semester, which is a part of school year and so on. Whitehead proposed a kind of "genetic division" of a single eddy circle into three phases: romance, precision and generalization or, in other words, succeeding phases of fascination, analyzing and synthesizing which proceed until final satisfaction. The above concept of a three-phase educational circle unit was developed into an eight-phase model of an educational event by combining the first with Gebser's concept of five successive structures of consciousness.³

The model of an educational event was examined in ecological education with groups of ten year old children.⁴ Each event was four hours

² Alfred N. Whitehead – *The Aims of Educations and Other Essays*. Macmillan Company, 1929.

³ "In Gebser's model, the ever-present origin is sensed by the archaic structure, felt by the magic, imagined by the mythical, conceptualized by the mental, and concretely perceived by the integral." Bernie Neville: *Educating the Five-Minded Animal*" in "Adventures of Educations" Ed. Adam C. Scarfe, Rodopi Press, Amsterdam - New York, NY 2009

⁴ The first formulation of the model of an educational event was made in: Ogrodnik B. Kulik R. Skubala P. "Philosophical, Psychological and Ecological

long and consisted of eight phases divided into four groups. The whole educational process consists of five educational events (which take place for instance once every week or two) and are connected by special activities between subsequent educational events.⁵

An eight-phase model of an educational event

I. Fascination, romance (introducing the initial aim of the event).

1. Sensing, feeling (activating the archaic structure of consciousness).
2. Participating in rituals & listening to stories, myths (activation of the magical and mythical structures of consciousness).

II. Precision (activation of the rational/mental structure of consciousness).

3. Experiencing, observing.
4. Analyzing & research activity.

III. Generalization (activation of the integral structure of consciousness).

4. Concept formation, seeing the whole behind the parts, achieving a so-called “small wisdom”.
5. Synthesizing all the experienced elements of the event by artistic means.

IV. Satisfaction (a phase absent in Whitehead’s early works but fully introduced in later ones).

7. Recollecting the whole event and sharing the most important experiences, discoveries, truths, etc.
8. Anticipating next educational event(s).

It is strongly recommended that activities are carried out in the period between subsequent educational events in order to connect them into a single educational process.

Advantages and difficulties of the model

A1. Process education based on the above model is much richer than formal education because it allows learners to be in touch with different aspects of the human mind in the most natural and effective way (according to Gebser’s concept) and also initiate and strengthen a process of integration of all these aspects.

Foundations of Education for Sustainable Development”. Mikolow 2010 (in Polish)

⁵ We examined 10 groups with 8-12 participants each in a specially chosen location in a semi-wild forest.

A2. 100% of the participants in the five educational event cycles declared readiness to take part in the next series of educational events

A3. Teachers observed positive changes in children's attitudes expressed as more mature reactions and evaluations, higher sensitivity during their contact with the natural environment and its threats, thus indicating their growing adaptation to the natural environment.

D1. Process education needs educators with many competencies, who are able to feel the relational nature of an educational event and follow it or modify it, if necessary.

D2. Special tools adequate for examining effects of programs based on model of educational event need to be researched.

References

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