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## **ROUTINE AS AN EXTRAORDINARY EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF PRAGMATISM<sup>1</sup>**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Considering the problem of routine as an extraordinary educational experience, based on the concept of pragmatism, at the beginning it is worth explaining what “everyday life” is in fact. Analysis of relevant literature indicates<sup>2</sup>, that the term is complex and variously defined. Its wide range of applications makes it problematic to establish a consistent definition. The understanding of the concept of “everyday life” has changed with the development of culture. In the past it was associated with routine, monotony, boredom. Each day resulted from the

<sup>1</sup> Originally published: Iwona Paszenda, “Rutyna jako nie-codziennie doświadczenie edukacyjne w perspektywie pragmatyzmu”, *Studia z Teorii Wychowania* 2017, vol. 8, No. 4, p. 223-233, <http://files.clickweb.home.pl/4f/66/4f66472a-2bfe-4992-8979-fe86bf70ff3c.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> See Z. Bauman, “Niecodziennosc nasza codzienna”, [in:] *Barwy codzienności. Analiza socjologiczna*, ed. M. Bogunia-Borowska, Warszawa 2009; *Między rutyną a refleksyjnością. Praktyki kulturowe i strategie życia codziennego*, ed. T. Maślanka, K. Strzyczkowski, Warszawa 2012; *Socjologia codzienności*, ed. M. Bogunia-Borowska, P. Sztompka, Kraków 2008; R. Sulima, *Antropologia codzienności*, Kraków 2000; R. Sulima, “Moda na codzienność. Kategoria »codziennosci« w kulturze ponowoczesnej”, *Kultura Współczesna* 2011, No. 4; A. Zadrożyńska-Baraź, “Codzienność – Niecodziennosc – Święto”, [in:] *Wychowanie – Pojęcia – Procesy – Konteksty. Interdyscyplinarne ujęcie*, vol. 5: *Codziennosc w szkole. Szkoła w codzienności*, ed. M. Dudzikowa, M. Czerepaniak-Walczak, Gdańsk 2010.

previous one and gave an outline to the next day. This provided the basis for safety, certainty as to what would happen and could not happen: what to do and what to avoid. Thus, one may agree with the thesis proposed by Zygmunt Bauman that in the past "everyday life was the enemy of everything what was out of the ordinary"<sup>3</sup>.

In postmodern culture the term "everyday life" is associated with surprises, astonishment and the extraordinary<sup>4</sup>. As a consequence, this leads to a combination of everyday life and extraordinariness. The uncommonness, permeating every day of human life, makes the dominant experience, which he can be sure and which is routinely repeated from day to day, is the conviction that "a high probability of unusual events is nowadays an ordinary experience"<sup>5</sup>.

Nevertheless, the extraordinary time, the time of celebration, as more contemplative, requires prior preparation and happens less frequently. On the other hand, everyday life, which is devoid of deeper interpretation, always returns automatically without much human involvement<sup>6</sup>. For most people, understanding everyday life does not require special efforts. What is everyday and routine seems to be natural, known and therefore understandable, not requiring more intense reflection. In these circumstances, the normality of everyday life is associated with something boring, uninteresting or, because of the predictability of everyday practices, with something limiting rather than deserving a broader analysis<sup>7</sup>.

In conclusion, we can assume that "everyday life" is an automated time, abounding in routine activities that do not require special attention and reflection. On the other hand, "the extraordinary" is a festive time, occurring rarely, and giving the opportunity of non-schematic, reflective action.

These different perspectives on the extraordinary prove that they cannot be considered as a whole. In the article I would like to show that – metaphorically speaking – "routine" is also such an extraordinary concept, difficult to define unambiguously. This is evidenced by two different ways of understanding it which were proposed by John Dewey

<sup>3</sup> Z. Bauman, "Niecodziennosc nasza codzienna", op. cit., p. 77.

<sup>4</sup> See ibidem, p. 78.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>6</sup> See ibidem, p. 171.

<sup>7</sup> See T. Maślanka, K. Strzyczkowski, "Wstęp", [in:] *Miedzy rutyna a refleksyjnošcia*, op. cit., p. 10.

and Richard Sennett<sup>8</sup> who represented one intellectual tradition i.e. pragmatism.

The aim of this article is to analyze and interpret pragmatic thoughts of both researchers, which can be a source of inspiration and instruction for contemporary pedagogy as a scientific discipline.

The key considerations will be preceded by a reference to the essence of pragmatism. The characteristic feature of this current is the connection of the category of experience with life and action. This connection not only became the reason why pragmatism made a key breakthrough in the tradition of empiricism, but also created a link between pragmatism and the issue of the philosophy of life, which was fashionable at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

## THE ESSENCE OF PRAGMATISM

The most important elements of the philosophy of pragmatism were presented by its co-founder William James. In his understanding pragmatism was supposed to be such a philosophical direction that would oppose determinism and rationalism, allowing people to think and act according to their needs and confirmed in their real life. In his treatise *The Meaning of Truth*, James proves that the truth is what a person is convinced of at a given moment. In this way, he wants to prove that the criterion of truth is included in man's active attitude towards reality and consists in the sovereign conviction that his predictions will be confirmed. According to pragmatists, the ideas that an individual is able to adopt, justify, confirm and verify are true, and "any truth that helps us to deal practically or intellectually with a certain reality is something that belongs to it"<sup>9</sup>. The problem is that this "belonging" is not a constant but a changeable phenomenon, i.e. it happens to our ideas at one time and not at the other, and whether we are dealing with the first or the second case is determined by the "benefit of our thinking". However, whether an idea is useful or not is determined by whether it helps us or "does not help us to deal practically or intellectually with a certain reality or something belonging to it".

<sup>8</sup> In one of his works Sennett points at himself as the contemporary representative of pragmatism, see R. Sennett, *The Craftsman*, New Haven & London 2008, p. 287.

<sup>9</sup> See W. James, *The Meaning of Truth. A Sequel to 'Pragmatism'*, New York 1997, p. ix-x.

This statement indicates that not only an idea must appear, but also an action that will define the “meaning of truth”. Therefore, one can say that the pragmatist perspective (from Greek *prágma* – action, activity) is expressed in the attitude towards action (practical or intellectual)<sup>10</sup>. Because for the philosophy of pragmatism practical consequences which result from experience are quite important and only they are a gauge of truthfulness<sup>11</sup>. Truthfulness, on the other hand, is related only to what is most beneficial for experience, what is useful, and thus practical. Nothing that is not proven can be true. Truthfulness is therefore something that takes place within experience and is subject to the control of experience<sup>12</sup>.

This viewpoint indicates that everything one knows about the world is the result of self-organising reason, which is at the same time self-controlled and self-regulating reason. An objective reality, even if it existed, according to the idea of pragmatism, would be superfluous. The complexity and diversity of everyday human experiences, as well as their needs, could never be contained in its essence. As pragmatism postulates a subjective look at reality, devoid of objective facts.

The philosophy of pragmatism has also broader connotations, as certain theories of truth have also begun to be denoted by pragmatism. The most important role was played by inductive logic, i.e. the study of the conditions in which knowledge was developed. At the time when the first mathematical, logical and natural rules were discovered, when the first laws were known, people were delighted with the clarity, beauty and simplicity of these results. They believed that they deciphered the authentic thoughts of God. But as knowledge progressed, the view that most, if not all, laws were merely approximations became more and more established. Moreover, the laws became so numerous that it was difficult to count them. In all branches of knowledge, so many contradictory formulas have been proposed that researchers became accustomed to the view that theories are not an absolute copy of reality, but that some of them may be useful from a certain standpoint. Their great importance lies in the fact that they balance old facts

<sup>10</sup> See Z. Drozdowicz, “Pragmatyczna racjonalność religii i religijności w ujęciu Williama Jamesa”, *Przegląd Religioznawczy* 2010, No. 1, p. 32.

<sup>11</sup> See W. James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*, [in:] W. James, *Writings 1902-1910*, New York 1987, p. 505-522.

<sup>12</sup> See H. Buczyńska-Garewicz, *James*, Warszawa 1973, p. 85-99.

and lead to new ones<sup>13</sup>. This trend of scientific logic was set by John Dewey, an outstanding American philosopher and educator.

## ROUTINE AS "EVERYDAY" EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE – PERSPECTIVE JOHN DEWEY'S

Dewey's understanding of pragmatism was specific from the beginning. Based on Darwin's philosophy, he understood human thought as a tool in the struggle for existence. For this reason, to define his own philosophical position, he preferred to use the name "instrumentalism" rather than "pragmatism".

Dewey broadened the concept of instrumentalism and presented thinking as an "instrument" of human growth<sup>14</sup>. The key to his theory was the understanding of experience, which has always had a humanistic dimension, as it could be understood as a human experience. Dewey's concept of experience was not only opposed to objective idealism, but also to those empirical directions, according to which experience is a subjective sensation, at most signalling the existence of reality, but not reflecting it at all. Contrary to these concepts, Dewey understood experience as a process of gaining knowledge about the world and oneself, and as a process of own development and growth achieved through the accumulation and exchange of ideas<sup>15</sup>. However, as he claimed, not every experience has an educational character. The pro-development experience is the one that stimulates progress, "which arouses interest, joy and challenges in the child's direct perception". The researcher emphasizes that "To learn from experience" is to make a backward and forward connection between what we do to things and what we enjoy or suffer from things in consequence"<sup>16</sup>.

This statement indicates that the activity will be conducive to the student's development, provided that, thanks to it, the student is aware of the links between the activities and anticipates their consequences.

The philosopher was convinced that experience is not something fixed and contained in itself, but that it is alive and therefore growing.

<sup>13</sup> See *ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> See B. Suchodolski, "Wstęp", [in:] J. Dewey, *Demokracja i wychowanie. Wstęp do filozofii wychowania*, Wrocław 1972, p. XVII.

<sup>15</sup> See *ibidem*, p. XVII-XVIII.

<sup>16</sup> J. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, Hazelton 2001, p. 146.

However, if it is ruled by the past, custom and routine, it is often opposed to the position of rational reflection. In his or her consciousness, experience contains a reflection that frees man from the limiting influence of senses, desires and traditions. Experience can accept and assimilate everything that is discovered by the most penetrating thought<sup>17</sup>. A thought is penetrating only if the grounds for a claim are reliably and conscientiously sought and examined to what extent they are sufficient to justify it. This process is called reflective thinking and only this type of thinking has educational value<sup>18</sup>.

The frequent subject appearing in Dewey's writings is "professionalism". His works include reflections on the relationship between solving and discovering problems, the relationship between technology and expression, or work and play. Dewey combines these themes best in his work *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*<sup>19</sup>. The author analyzes in this book the notion of "education", showing its meaning as a social function of natural growth and as a conscious guide. Since he noticed that in the process of education routine kills the development of a pupil and a teacher<sup>20</sup>. School subjects are taught mechanically, thus limiting the learners' cognitive power. Teachers' routine is based on the use of a relatively easy teaching technique, which involves training in memorizing, observing, remembrance, attention, etc. Routine activity does not contribute to new insights, it narrows rather than broadens the scope of concepts<sup>21</sup>. Automatic repetition of the curriculum and teaching methods creates a kind of permanent immobility, which in turn leads to a monotony of the repeated content<sup>22</sup>. In Dewey's opinion, the teacher's acquisition of proficiency, uniformity, taking the shortest way to achieve the desired goal, dictating every step, mechanical training, are such features which can have a disastrous impact on the power of reflection<sup>23</sup>. However, routine efficiency, which is often the subject of someone's pride, is completely useless<sup>24</sup>. A rigid and uniform method of behaviour/action can be disastrous for the actor at a critical

<sup>17</sup> See J. Dewey, *How We Think. A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process*, Lexington 1933, p. 201–202.

<sup>18</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 3–4.

<sup>19</sup> See J. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, *op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 57–60.

<sup>21</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 83.

<sup>22</sup> See J. Dewey, *Experience and Education*, New York 1997, p. 62.

<sup>23</sup> See J. Dewey, *How We Think*, *op. cit.*, p. 61–68.

<sup>24</sup> See *idem*, *Democracy and Education*, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

point in time. As he writes: “Everything that inhibits growth is actually the end of life: also mechanical routine, enslaving habits, indifference and disappearance of curiosity”<sup>25</sup>. Dewey believes that life, which ceases to be a process of growth, is not a full human life, and following a routine means giving up a life worthy of a human being<sup>26</sup>. However, the philosopher realizes that using in the process of education some monotonous and routine exercises may in result lead to a great proficiency when it comes to mastering one, individual action, but as he claims, it will be a limited proficiency<sup>27</sup>. In this context, the tasks of school education are formulated as stimulating and developing the need and ability to think. Because he believes that thinking is the only way to avoid a routine in action<sup>28</sup>.

## ROUTINE AS “EXTRAORDINARY” EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE – PERSPECTIVE RICHARD SENNETT’S

Richard Sennett presents a diffident approach to understanding routine. In his book *The Craftsman*<sup>29</sup>, similarly to Dewey, the scholar devotes his attention to the dimensions of professionalism, which, in his opinion, is based on carefully developed skills. Professionals are focused on the pursuit of quality, on doing good job, and this is – as he emphasizes – a basic feature of a skilful person<sup>30</sup>. A good professional is a skilful, competent and committed person who, in his thoughts, engages in a dialogue with specific practices that take the form of habits. Habits shape the cycle “from solving problems to discovering problems”, and each answer found leads the professional to ask himself an array of new questions<sup>31</sup>. A skilful man uses the solutions he has developed to explore new territories. Curiosity makes the professional ask “why?” and “how?”. Sennett believes that in today’s world it is difficult to be a professional because of three oppressive methods of organizing professionalism<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> B. Suchodolski, “Wstęp”, op. cit., p. XXXV.

<sup>26</sup> See ibidem, p. LXIII.

<sup>27</sup> See J. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, p. 70-71.

<sup>28</sup> See B. Suchodolski, “Wstęp”, op. cit., p. LX.

<sup>29</sup> See R. Sennett, *The Craftsman*, op. cit.

<sup>30</sup> See ibidem, p. 20-25.

<sup>31</sup> See ibidem, p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> See R. Sennett, *Together. The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation*, New Haven and London 2012, p. 7-8.

The first problem is related to institutional attempts to motivate people to work well. Competition between individuals, not the community, is the best incentive to do a good job. However, success is achieved first and foremost by companies that rely on cooperation.

The second obstacle is related to the development of skills. Skill is a well-trained practice. The sociologist claims that we misuse the modern technology if it deprives its users of repetitive self-controlled training. In his opinion, when the head and hand are separated, the result is a mental mismatch.

The third issue is related to conflicting quality measures. One measure assumes the need to adapt to certain standards, while the other assumes the need to act in accordance with practical experience. A professional who tries to do his or her job is pushed in two different directions at the same time. An example is when politicians conducting a health or education reform introduce absolute evaluation criteria that are incompatible with rooted practices.

Philosophy describes this phenomenon as a conflict between the various demands of implicit and explicit knowledge<sup>33</sup>. Silent knowledge gives people an anchor and certainty that they do their job well. On the other hand, self-awareness, subjecting one's work to reflection and, on its basis, adopting new reflexes and meanings in one's works, gives the opportunity for criticism and making corrections. Then the quality of a profession results from decisions that are based on habits and assumptions about new ways of doing things.

Unfortunately, as Sennett notes, these days, constant changes in work, caused by short-term contracts, are not conducive to the development of silent knowledge. People lack the necessary experience to make decisions. Instead, they receive a set of abstract recommendations from their employers regarding high quality work.

The sociologist is of the opinion that only when people learn to do what they are doing really well can they start to feel their work to the full. They can also become able to think about it in more depth<sup>34</sup>. A set of rituals can be helpful to do it.

One of the ways of shaping rituals as autonomous practices is repetitiveness identified with routine, which supposedly dulls the senses of man, and yet, according to a sociologist, has an educative power. Repeating an activity teaches criticism and allows us to focus on details,

<sup>33</sup> See R. Sennett, *The Craftsman*, op. cit., p. 50–52.

<sup>34</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 25.



which Sennett has confirmed on the example of musical rehearsals<sup>35</sup>. Admittedly, the sociologist realizes that work based on routine can be regarded as dull and identify routine with boredom. However, as the example of people who develop their manual skills proves, it shows that it can be different.

Doing something over and over is stimulating when organized as looking ahead. The substance of the routine may change, metamorphose, improve, but the emotional payoff is one's experience of doing it again<sup>36</sup>.

However, "Modern education fears repetitive learning as mind-numbing. Afraid of boring children, avid to present ever-different stimulation, the enlightened teacher may avoid routine – but thus deprives children of the experience of studying their own ingrained practice and modulating it from within"<sup>37</sup>.

This statement indicates that when a person opens up to the opportunity to learn by trial and error, when he masters the art of correct repetition, he stops being afraid of mistakes. As a result, he strengthens himself, he can also introduce new ideas and explore the world of similarities and differences<sup>38</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

The above mentioned perspectives of understanding routine show two different ways of perceiving it. On the one hand, it has an educational value because it contributes to human growth. On the other hand, it is devoid of this value because it "distances itself" from reflective thinking.

The first perspective, proposed by John Dewey, is a metaphor of everyday life, in which the mechanized routine, speed and automaticity of actions do not foster human development. The work based on routine shows that he has reached the moment when he is not curious or puzzled. This means that he does not develop, does not seek answers to professional questions, such as: how? or why? He does not even take

<sup>35</sup> Sennett, who in his youth was a professional musician (a cello player and a conductor), experienced by himself that thanks to painstaking exercise, which consisted in critical studying and modifying his behaviour, a musician can achieve professional perfection. See *ibidem*, p. 37.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 175.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 38.

<sup>38</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 160.

the trouble of asking such questions. As a result, he does his work automatically, without reflective thinking.

The perspective articulated by Richard Sennett can be regarded as a metaphor for uncommonness. In this approach, work based on routine allows for careful consideration, reflection and modification of one's own ways of doing things. However, as the sociologist emphasizes, in order to do one's work well, one has to be curious, one has to study, learn through ambiguous situations, open oneself to learning by trial and error. Enthusiasm for experiments which are characteristic for a professional way of working as well as acting according to the rhythm whereby, having solved one problem, one immediately searches for the next one, is the best incentive to do a good job.

The attempts to understand the routine described by the representatives of pragmatism can be a source of instruction and inspiration for contemporary pedagogy and, more broadly, for the reconstruction of one's own work by educators. By working out two definitions of routine, an education practitioner gains more freedom to choose a "tool" to do the work, which can be completed in two ways.

The first method is to escape from everyday routine and employ rational analysis, i.e. a reflection on action, which makes it possible for a person to better control the practical side of the process. The second option is work based on repetitiveness of actions, which teaches criticism and concentration on details; embracing the right to make a mistake, which has a teaching power, because only by making mistakes can a person profoundly understand the rules of his or her work. The choice of the "tool" to work will depend on person's individual convictions. This is in line with the basic principles of pragmatism, for which it is important that people, depending on the context, choose what is most beneficial for them, and thus most useful.

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### **Abstract:**

The aim of the article is to analyze and decode, for the theory and practice of pragmatistic education, the thought of the renowned philosopher and educator – John Dewey, and the American sociologist – Richard Sennett. Among many important concepts and solutions that can be drawn from the legacy of both philosophers, the author distinguishes the issue of routine, understood by each of the philosophers in a different way. John Dewey claims that routine leads to the blockage of human development, whereas Richard Sennett believes that routine has an educational power. These two distinct approaches to routine may be a source of instruction and inspiration for modern pedagogy as a scientific discipline.

### **Keywords:**

routine, everyday life, uncommonness, pragmatism, John Dewey, Richard Sennett, pedagogy

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