

Muntian S.G., Valentinova L.K. Foreign language teaching at the Master student level: lessons from John Dewey's philosophy of education // Народна освіта. – Київ, 2011. – №1 (№13) : www.narodnaosvita.kiev.ua/vupysku/13/index.htm

Мунтян С.Г.

завідуюча кафедрою іноземних мов Таврійського державного агротехнологічного університету;

Валентинова Л.К.

старший викладач кафедри іноземних мов Таврійського державного агротехнологічного університету

Foreign language teaching at the Master student level: lessons from John Dewey's philosophy of education

Стаття обґрунтовує набір компетенцій та стратегій, пов'язаних із сучасним процесом навчання іноземної мови професійного спрямування, в контексті низки положень філософії освіти американського філософа-прагматиста Дж. Дьюї. Стаття узагальнює дані положення і розглядає їх значення для реалізації компетентнісного підходу при навчанні іноземної мови.

Ключові слова: компетентнісний підхід, навчання іноземної мови, Джон Дьюї, технології навчання.

Problem statement. Teaching a foreign language to the master-level students must meet a number of fundamental requirements. First, educational technologies must be congruent with the training received by students in their professional subjects. Second, the Bologna process calls for enabling the global mobility of labor market participants. Finally, even apart from this mobility *per se*, professional experts must be capable of international communication on professional topics. All these requirements dictate the need for what became known as the competence-based approach to foreign language teaching.

State-of-the-art. The competence-based approach was founded in 1965 by N. Chomsky. According to this approach, students are supposed to assimilate the learning matter in the form of integrated wholes rather than separate and loosely connected pieces of information. The advocates of this approach point out the dramatic rate of societal change

and the futility of making timely adjustments in the learning matter. Instead, they lay stress on the formation of key competences that would enable students to deal with this change as it proceeds. In the course of learning, generic competence development is thus supposed to take priority over the particular contents of professional education.

The competence-based approach is fully endorsed in the Ukrainian strategy of modernization of foreign language teaching. Indeed, the contemporary foreign language teaching is centred around the formation of key competences [1, 2, 3]. Yet, important gaps in the understanding of these competences still persist. It is unclear what competences are to be regarded as the key ones and how they are to be accommodated into the learning matter.

The present article will seek to address these gaps from the perspective of the multifaceted theoretical legacy of John Dewey, an outstanding proponent of philosophical pragmatism and a major reformer of the American educational system of the early XXth century. John Dewey laid the pragmatist foundations for educational reform, and his concerns about the potential inadequacies of the educational process gain particular relevance in the modern Ukrainian context. The basic point of departure of Dewey's educational philosophy is the need to integrate the learning matter into the "life continuum", or the social experience, of the students. The key contention of the present article is that a closer look at the relevant social experience may be helpful in discovering the competences to be accentuated in the foreign language teaching.

Accordingly, **the objective** of this article is to build on selected elements of Dewey's educational philosophy in order to determine the specific bundle of competences and strategies underpinning the modern process of foreign language teaching. The article will proceed by reconstructing some of these elements and subsequently by drawing implications for the competence development strategies in the foreign language teaching.

The main body of the article. Dewey saw the philosophical meaning of education generally in what he called "renewal by transmission", i.e. the preservation and further development of societal civilizational attainments. This societal problem is laid upon the office of education. It is through the education that people become effectively socialized and enabled to fully participate in the societal problem-solving process. Dewey warned, however, of the corrupting effects of rigid traditions and ceremonies that potentially convert the educational process from "renewal by transmission" into static and rigid systems of

ceremonial domination. Dewey contrasted the natural plasticity of students' cognitive capacities with the potential rigidity of the educational process. He argued that the educational process must make students into effective problem-solvers rather than recreate the coercive ceremonial relationships existing in the broader society.

As a leading proponent of pragmatism, Dewey rejected the so-called dualisms of the idealist philosophy, such as those between body and spirit, matter and consciousness, facts and values. He explained them as reflections of excessive social stratification resulting in the disintegration of the social experience. In pedagogical terms, a relevant idealistic dualism is that between body and reason. According to Dewey, idealistically oriented teachers wish that their students bring their reason to a class but not their body, as the latter distracts them from learning. Dewey designated this kind of education as scholastic and remote from practical life, i.e., from the actual social experience. He argued that the really useful education appeals not merely to the reason, but to the personality of the student as a whole. According to him, the students must be able to see the value of the learning matter from the standpoint of the whole social experience of which they continuously partake.

Dewey was particularly critical of all forms of learning by heart. He put forward the original idea that learning by heart is the kind of learning that destroys the ability for critical social inquiry and that is ideally suited for the preservation of the current patterns of ceremonial domination. Ceremonial societies are indeed generally known to favour learning by heart, but this kind of learning is clearly inappropriate for the purpose of making students into critical inquirers.

To Dewey, one of results of learning must be the creation of common interests and understandings among people, i.e., a better integration of the social experience. This is the reason why Dewey was wary of raising "egoistic specialists" and pleaded for general education that makes people more aware of the things they have in common with each other. Among these things, the language ranks foremost, and Dewey was explicit about it. Indeed, to take an extreme example, even if the language is used for conflict escalation, conflict participants still maintain a common interest in making their conflict strategies mutually understandable. Particularly the foreign language helps students to recognize their common interests with the diverse professional stakeholders from all over the world.

Based on the above ideas, there are a number of general implications that can be drawn for the study of foreign languages.

- First, this study must occur within, rather than outside, the life continuum of the students. The students must be encouraged to bring to the class the diverse practical problems that they are facing, and be encouraged to explore how they can solve these problems by utilizing their foreign language competences. They must not be required to “forget” their problems for the time of the class.
- Second, it is crucial to make sure that the teaching strategy is free of any vestiges of ceremonial domination, primarily that of teachers over the students. The teacher must act not as the master, but as the facilitator of intrinsically driven inquiry. The students must be given wide-ranging autonomy in the selection of the learning matter and learning strategies. As mentioned above, ceremonial domination often reveals itself in various forms of learning by heart. Speaking in pragmatist terms, it must be examined whether this learning has ceremonial or instrumental value in particular instances.
- Third, the interaction between teachers and students must be guided by their mutually recognizable common interests. Within these common interests, the students must be able to set their own learning goals that ultimately converge upon becoming effective citizens in the global and increasingly dynamic society. The common interests between teachers and students thus develop into a still broader interest of meaningful citizenship that is shared by a much broader community. This is how education contributes to the integration of the social experience in the sense of Dewey.

There are likewise a number of more specific implications having a more direct bearing on the current Ukrainian professional literature on foreign language teaching. In line with Dewey, it is generally agreed that the foreign language teaching must enable students to acquire the intercultural communicative competence [1, 2]. There are a number of important conceptual distinctions that help adapt the Deweyian educational philosophy to the contemporary Ukrainian context of foreign language teaching. Thus, the modern notion of foreign language communicative competence refers to the ability to attain a mutual understanding with native speakers on culturally acceptable terms [3, p. 3]. It bears repeating that the teaching is expected to not to accumulate a stock of passive knowledge in the students’ minds, but to forge their problem-solving competence in a foreign language

context, and thus, in Deweyian terms, to integrate the social experience across the language boundaries. Another important modern notion is that of the activity competence referring to the general qualification and motivation of personality. The activity competence entails the ability of an individual to solve professional problems and to cooperate with others along professional lines. According to the European system of key competences, the activity competence embraces competences of professional, methodical, and social types. Key competences are understood as the most generic competences that are helpful in a broad range of contexts and thus have metasituational validity.

Thus, the Deweyian perspective requires the foreign language teaching to impart to the students the competence of dealing with diverse professional situations in the future. A feasible strategy for attaining this goal involves the deliberate accommodation of competence development into the foreign language teaching. The learning matter itself must accordingly be designed in a top-down way, while specific learning methods can be selected in the bottom-up fashion.

It is worthwhile to give more details on the above mentioned typology of key competences. Professional competence refers to the mastering of professional terminology and expertise. In agriculture, professional competence primarily includes knowledge about farm planning, agricultural machinery, agricultural markets, and agricultural communications. Methodical competence involves strategies of reading, listening, writing, and speaking in accordance with the specific object of communication; compensatory strategies in case of insufficient foreign language knowledge; ability to work with reference materials; ability to structure the materials being processed; and ability to organize oneself more generally. Social competence emphasizes teamwork skills; ability to articulate oneself and to adequately perceive the communication partner; self-reliance, self-awareness and tolerance, particularly in the intercultural aspect.

The competence model of teaching is explicitly designed not to transmit passive knowledge but to project onto Deweyian problem-solving situations. These situations are not predetermined from outside; it is up to their participants (i.e., the students) to perceive, define, interpret, implement, and control these. Indeed, a widely known deficiency in the foreign language teaching refers to the substitution of learning by heart for critical inquiry into the subject under investigation. It is in the spirit of Deweyian philosophy that the students must learn generic problem-solving skills instead of fixed definitions.

N.F.Koryakovtseva proposes an excellent typology of technologies that effectively orient the foreign language teaching along the suggested lines [4, p. 80]. Interactive learning technology involves the recreation, in a class, of real-world processes of interaction and communication that regularly occur outside of the class. The problem-driven search technology requires the students to engage in open-ended search processes that enable to freely unfold the students' potential. The play technology combines the elements of role plays, emotions, and empathies that the students experience in their real-world social experience. The scenario-based technology recreates business communication contexts requiring the students to make independent decisions and to use the foreign language as a problem-solving tool. The project technology is a related strategy focused on students pursuing particular projects arising from their professional activities.

The practical experience of integrated development of key competences in the foreign language teaching has revealed a number of its prerequisites, such as the professional issue-oriented nature of teaching assignments; professionally appealing learning matter; wide-ranging student autonomy; adjustment of teaching assignment complexity to the specific student abilities; availability of high-quality methodical guidance; continuous monitoring of learning and teaching by students and teachers.

Richards and Rogers identify a number of indicators of success of the above-mentioned technologies: learning effectiveness (referring to student goal attainment); learning efficiency (referring to assimilation of learning matter per unit of learning time); ergonomic dimension of learning (related to stimulating learning atmosphere, mutual emotional support, and a strong intrinsic motivation) [6, p. 87-88].

E.N.Solovova [5, p.80] calls attention to a number of parameters of practical design of foreign language classes, including the relative importance of teaching, communicative, and authentic assignments; the extent of their professional relevance; the relationship between reactive and proactive learning strategies; the extent of the expected student autonomy, e.g., regarding assignment sequencing; the relationship between monofunctional and multifunctional assignments, as well as between relatively more and less structured assignments.

Conclusions. The competence-based approach in the foreign language teaching involves reorienting the teaching process toward the social experience continuum shared by both

teachers and students and toward the development of student competences rather than the accumulation of passive knowledge. The basic practical strategy for implementing this approach is the integration of competence development into the teaching process. The work of John Dewey, an outstanding American philosopher and educator, helped to disentangle the challenges of the competence-based approach in a number of respects. The competence-based approach has been shown to most fully correspond to the Deweyian vision of the general societal meaning of education as “renewal by transmission”. It is only within this approach that it becomes possible to effectively counteract the institutionalized patterns of ceremonial domination that exist in the broader society and are projected onto the classroom situation. Finally, the competence-based approach enables the most effective integration of what Dewey called the social experience across a number of divides, such as those between teachers and students and those between different cultures.

References

1. Загальноєвропейські Рекомендації з мовної освіти: вивчення, викладання, оцінювання. – К.: Ленвіт, 2003. – 273 с.
2. Програма з англійської мови для професійного спілкування. Колектив авторів: Г.Є. Бакаєва, О.А.Борисенко та ін. – К.: Ленвіт, 2005. – 119 с.
3. Ніколаєва С.Ю. Цілі навчання іноземних мов в аспекті компетентнісного підходу // Іноземні мови. – 2010. - №2. – С.11-17.
4. Коряковцева Н.Ф. Современная методика организации самостоятельной работы изучающих иностранный язык. – М.: АРКТИ, 2002. – 176 с.
5. Соловова Е.Н. Методика обучения\иностраннным языкам: продвинутый курс / Е.Н. Соловова. – М.: АСТ: Астрель, 2008. – 272 с.
6. Richards J.C. and Rodgers T., Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching: A Description and Analysis. Cambridge: CUP, 1991, p.p. 87-88
7. Dewey John, 1921. Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education. New York: Macmillan. 434p.
8. Dewey John, 1922. Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction of Social Philosophy. New York: Carlton House. 366p.

Abstract. The article determines the specific bundle of competences and strategies underpinning the modern process of foreign language teaching by building upon the selected elements of educational philosophy of John Dewey. The article proceeds by reconstructing some of these elements and subsequently by drawing implications for the competence development strategies in the foreign language teaching.

Keywords: competence-based approach, foreign language teaching, John Dewey, teaching technologies.

Аннотация. Статья обосновывает набор компетенций и стратегий, связанных с современным процессом обучения иностранному языку для профессиональных целей, в контексте ряда положений философии образования американского философа-прагматиста Дж. Дьюи. Статья обобщает данные положения и рассматривает их значение для реализации компетентностного подхода в обучении иностранному языку.

Ключевые слова: компетентностный подход, обучение иностранному языку, Джон Дьюи, технологии обучения.