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PRIVATIZING MONTESSORI. THE CAPITALISATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE INABILITY TO RENEW MEANINGS

There is an argument, being increasingly recognized, that education should be accountable¹, but this term refers to more than just one meaning, and the notion of accountability is actually a „bundle” of different notions combining measurability, productivity, performativity and responsibility – which might seem a highly divergent concept.

However, this node of notions is not poly-logical, but links them by imposing one horizon of perceiving the world and therefore implying a specific conception of education that can be described by the reference to what M. Power calls ‘the audit culture’². It means that education is viewed as a process of production of *a priori* designed effects, which are measurable in such a way as can make them the basis for the constitution of a set of performance indicators.

In short: education is seen here as subordinated to the conditions for purely formal, algebraic control, that makes out of the high-performance production of the educational outcomes – the sense of education *in extenso*.

This economically rooted perception of education is often linked with the hegemony of neoliberalism³. However for us – in this paper – such a way of conceiving education will function merely as a context for investigation into the transformation of the status of educational knowledge and educational practices – especially those of teachers’ education, that is the practices of reproducing educational knowledge.

¹ A critical analysis of this argument can be found in: G.J.J. Biesta, *Education, Accountability, and The Ethical Demand: Can The Democratic Potential of Accountability Be Regained?*, „Educational Theory” 2004, vol. 54, no. 3; see also G.J.J. Biesta, *Good Education in the Age of Measurement. Ethics, Politics, Democracy*, Paradigm Publishing, Boulder–London 2010.

² M. Power, *The Audit Explosion*, Demos, London 1994; M. Power, *The Audit Society: Rituals of Verification*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1997.

³ See i.e. H.A. Giroux, *The Terror of Neoliberalism*, Paradigm, Boulder 2004; M.W. Apple, *Education, markets, and an audit culture*, „Critical Quarterly” 2005, vol. 47, no. 1–2.

The paper, however, is largely focused on the issue of knowledge distribution within one of the – so called – ‘alternative approaches’ communities, i.e. the Montessori Method community. It must be remembered though that it serves only as a possible, and even perhaps not the best, example of the argument developed in the article. Maria Montessori, herself, once said: „My method is scientific, both in its substance and in its aim”⁴. We are of the opinion that this statement demands both deep and critical investigation of her legacy as well as making it public for reasons that will be described in detail later.

Since we are going to make an attempt to write about the perception of knowledge, a perception that is at times – as Michael Polanyi put it – tacit⁵, we have decided to illustrate it with the use of in-depth group interviews conducted and analysed according to the procedure of phenomenography⁶.

We are going to start the argument with theoretical foundations as well as inspirations and only after that will the outcomes of the empirical research be presented. The article will close with summarizing remarks and conclusions.

THE CAPITALISATION OF KNOWLEDGE

Within the perspective where education is or should be something accountable, knowledge becomes a product of educational processes. In this way education is just a means to upgrade a particular subject with particular, desired knowledge. Hence, it is regarded in terms of efficiency and performativity, as productive or not. By the same token, the work of a teacher is conceived, in terms of professionalism, as effective or not.

In this economic view of education, knowledge is the desired feature of a subject, because it becomes an important part of its economic potency, that is: of its capital. In the times of a knowledge society and a knowledge based economy, the idea of education is therefore transformed into the idea of an accumulation of human capital⁷, in which the acquisition of knowledge plays a decisive role. What one knows or doesn’t know through the category of human capital is perceived in terms of advantage and disadvantage in relation to other participants of the global free market.

Because, in these circumstances, knowledge defines the competitiveness of the individual, education starts to be conceived in terms of an investment in the self⁸ which – in line with the audit logic – should be formally confirmed by the appropriate credentials.

⁴ M. Montessori, *Dr. Montessori’s Own Handbook*, Dover Publications Inc., Mineola, New York 2005, p. 8.

⁵ M. Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, Anchor Books, New York 1967, p. 4.

⁶ F. Marton, *Phenomenography: A research approach to investigating different understandings of Reality*, „Journal of Thought” 1986, 21(3), pp. 28–49.

⁷ See i.e. A. Hargreaves, *Teaching in the Knowledge Society. Education in the Age of Insecurity*, Columbia University Teachers College Press, New York–London 2003, p. 11 – passim.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

However, what is – at this point of the argument – most interesting, is the observation that, according to the logic of the free market, it would be irrational to share one's competitive advantage over the others present in the same market with those same competitors.

If knowing something gives me an advantage over others I shouldn't share that knowledge. Otherwise, my advantage will disappear. Therefore, knowledge being capitalised becomes private, and as private property it can, or even should, to a certain extent, remain secret.

THE PUBLIC CHARACTER OF KNOWLEDGE

Meanwhile, knowledge is essentially a public thing⁹, a thing which we all share, a thing of a common accessibility. Naturally, no one knows everything, and there is knowledge known to only a few. Moreover, knowledge is also always something personal, as it is placed in people minds¹⁰, but – as we will argue – it is not a private thing.

According to H. Arendt the difference between the private and the public was developed in Ancient Athens – as the difference between the domain of *oikos* and the domain of *polis* – in order to make an interspace or to separate the issues concerning one's daily life inside one's home, from the issues exceeding the borders of a House, that is of an *oikos*¹¹.

This excess comes from issues of such a character that every decision about them will affect every House, every citizen. What must be stressed here, is that this antique difference does not mean the difference between two types of properties: the private and the state, because the relation of ownership lies in the domain of *oikos*, and so it cannot refer to this difference as a whole. Instead, the difference between the private (*oikos*) and the public (*polis*) refers to two types of issues¹².

Following the argument developed by J. Habermas, we can say that the essence of this difference between two types of issues lies in the principle of *Publizität*, that is the principle of publicity / making public¹³. The issues concerning the House (*oikos*) were hidden from the eyes of the external world, they were latent, they were things of interest to no one outside the household. Public issues – like war, a harbour, or a road – are known to everyone, and are considered by everyone, so they are disclosed.

⁹ B. Latour, P. Weibel (ed.), *Making Things Public. Atmospheres of democracy*, The MIT Press, Cambridge MA–London 2005; T.A. Rømer, *The Educational Thing*, in: *Making Sense of Education. Fifteen Contemporary Educational Theorists in Own Words*, G.J.J. Biesta (ed.), Springer, Dordrecht 2012.

¹⁰ J. Bruner, *In Search of Pedagogy*, vol. 1. Routledge, London–New York 2006.

¹¹ H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago–London 1998.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 22–78.

¹³ J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, transl. T. Burger, F. Lawrence, The MIT Press, Cambridge MA 1989, p. 52–53, 89–140.

Naturally, starting from antiquity, the difference between the private and the public has constantly undergone redefinition, as has been the function of the principle of making public / disclosure (*Publizität*)¹⁴. However – as the inquiry of P. Dybel shows – despite these transformations – it is very dangerous to reduce one sphere to another or to eliminate this difference as such¹⁵. Just as the public without the private leads to totalitarianism¹⁶, so the private without the public means that social atrophy which becomes the war of all against all¹⁷. Only the interaction between the two spheres – private and public – while providing the possibility of passing from one to another, is the condition for our freedom. What is a matter for discussion however, is the course of the borderline between them¹⁸.

Nevertheless, it is the interaction between the private and the public which is the clue of both: the existence of a living public sphere and the production of knowledge itself. We will try to investigate this similarity now.

According to J. Habermas the political realm of the liberal public sphere arose from the public sphere in the world of letters, and thanks to that it was constituted by „audience-oriented privacy”¹⁹. Reading a novel is – after all – a private activity, performed in solitude which affects an intimate part of our selves. However the intimate, private experience of reading was oriented not only for direct change in the self (*Bildung*), but also for a public discussion on the read text. So the reader came out from his or her private room – designed also for the private act of reading – into the reception room, the salon, in order to discuss publicly (that is, to discuss also with strangers) about what he or she has read²⁰. In this way:

[...] from the outset the familiarity (*Intimität*) whose vehicle was the written world, the subjectivity that had become fit to print, had in fact become the literature appealing to a wide public of readers. The privatized individuals coming together to form a public also

¹⁴ J. Habermas shows that recently it has changed from its critical function of citizen control over decisions of the government, into a form of show, a staged display, demonstration of differences (*ibidem*, p. 206). This transformation is conceived by J. Habermas in terms of the refeudalisation of the public sphere.

¹⁵ P. Dybel, *Kategoria polityczności a podział publiczne-prywatne w (po)nowoczesnym państwie demokracji parlamentarnej*, in: P. Dybel, S. Wróbel, *Granice polityczności. Od polityki emancypacji do polityki życia*, IFiS PAN, Aletheia, Warszawa 2008, p. 271–539.

¹⁶ See: H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Harvest, San Diego–New York–London 1979; G. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in: *George Orwell Complete Novels*, Secker & Warburg/Octopus, London 1976; J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation...*, p. 97.

¹⁷ See: T. Hobbes, *The Leviathan*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge–New York 1996; A. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel. Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, transl. J.H. Nichols, Jr., Cornell University Press, Ithaca–London 1980; J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation...*, p. 142.

¹⁸ See P. Dybel, *Kategoria polityczności...*

¹⁹ J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation...*, p. 51.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 45–50.

reflected critically and in public on what they had read, thus contributing to the process of enlightenment which they together promoted²¹.

The existence of a public sphere lies therefore in the hands of the public-oriented privacy of those who make public the things of their private, intimate consideration. To make a thing public, to indicate an issue as one of public interest, the practice of a prior study needs to take place. *Bildung*, the process of education, of individual exploration, of autonomous research is the condition of the emergence of the public. One has to form and clarify one's opinion on a matter in order to discuss it in public, and conversely: a thing can become a public matter only by the introduction into the public made by a particular, private individual study of it.

Multiple, individual perspectives of viewing an issue, developed in the private domain while meeting each other in the public sphere can transgress their particularity and form more advanced, multidimensional public judgement²² thanks precisely to the type of public-oriented privacy of these individuals. This diversity of views, as a diversity of meanings being given to a thing of public interest, causes its constant renewal. The issue of public deliberation being kept alive in the sense of a permanent effort towards its re-definition, re-articulation, re-construction that is undertaken by interlocutors in the public sphere.

What is interesting is the extent to which this public clash of multiple research-based particular opinions, made in order to gain a more advanced insight into the matter of concern, is also the principle of the scientific production of knowledge. The process seems to be very similar: individual study, private, but publicly oriented reflection of the individual (scientist), that is private reflection aimed at a public disclosure, where it can be confronted by other propositions, coming from other individuals, other researchers, all in order to transgress the particularities of their views, and to gain a more general, universal, shared view on the matter – a theory. Critique – as the essential practice of scientific knowledge production – is conditioned by the prior disclosure of scientific research. Making such research public is repeated on many levels, from sharing the researcher's reflections with their closest team during their seminar, up to the stage of publishing a paper in a scientific journal. Despite the differences of range, the mechanism is always the same: latent knowledge (of one, or of a few) is disclosed, made public.

Exactly this movement from secrecy towards making public (being known) – common to the functioning of the public sphere (polis) and the production of knowledge – is being tamed in the process of the privatisation of knowledge. We will argue that the two levels on which this process occurs are complementary.

²¹ Ibidem, p. 51.

²² See: D. Yankelovich, *Coming to Public Judgment. Making Democracy Work in a Complex World*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse–New York 1991.

EXHAUSTION

The first level of the privatisation of knowledge refers to the marketing strategy of making a product elite and luxury. Commodities of this kind are highly expensive and heavily rationed. Making knowledge a rare private good means organizing a highly selective training, providing very strong, elite credentials.

As we were arguing before, knowledge which is the basis of such credentials – that is the knowledge which is the basis of competitive advantage – cannot be disclosed. Its realm is secrecy. This – however – affects the knowledge itself. Without making it public, that is, without letting it be publicly, openly considered, we take away any chance of its renewal. Knowledge that functions as a rare capital distinguishing its owner from others, cannot be shared with them without losing the advantage it gives, and so – being kept latent – it is not the subject of multiple efforts to its re-articulation or critique.

Being deprived of being made public, privatised knowledge of a rare kind gets absolutized as the incarnation of Truth for its stakeholders. Dealing with knowledge of such a kind consists of its iteration. Reified repetition that doesn't alter²³ wastes the possibility of renewing the meanings of such knowledge, and so makes it barren. What is left is the practice of a mindless circular repetition of the Truth revealed by such an absolute knowledge – even if this Truth gets more and more exhausted of any significant meaning, and therefore more and more petrified.

TRIVIALISATION

The second level of the privatisation of knowledge refers to the opposite of wealth. Apart from rare, luxury, high-quality products, the market is filled with cheap products for all. In this multiplicity of cheap products available to everyone, consumers' decisions are framed by the strategy called by R. Sennett 'gold-plating'.

To sell a basically standardized thing, the seller will magnify the value of minor differences quickly and easily engineered, so that the surface is what counts. The brand must seem to the consumer more than the thing itself²⁴.

What must be stressed is that we are referring to this mechanism differently from, if not the opposite to, the way it is put by R. Sennett himself. According to him gold-plated products are of similar quality to those which do not glitter but can be sold for a much higher price²⁵. So the differences between products offered by the market *in extenso* do

²³ See: J.D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics. Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington–Indianapolis 1987, p. 130.

²⁴ R. Sennett, *The Culture of the New Capitalism*, Yale University Press, New Haven–London 2006, p. 144.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 145.

not concern their quality conceived in terms of use value, but are constituted by what J. Baudrillard calls as the sign exchange value²⁶.

We want to argue that – in the case of knowledge-product – these differences concern quality, and that the gold-plating mechanism is used to make a low quality knowledge glitter like a high quality brand (the Montessori Method). Following on from this, it is obvious that not all that glitters is gold, as it sometimes just has a gold-plated surface.

It is the case of education, promising high quality credentials for a low price – when the latter is conceived of in both senses: of the purely economic money value of the training, and of its substantive difficulty measured *inter alia* by the time needed to complete it. However, being gold-plated to resemble a world-famous, „celebrity like” brand (vide Montessori) fast and cheap education as attractive to those who have not got much (time and money) offers only the introductory surface of the branded knowledge. Such a training can be entertaining, in order to give the conviction of being professionally prepared and of something having been performed, but apart from the entertainment, it gives to its participants only the sense of *not being able to*²⁷. This is because the knowledge being offered here stays latent throughout the course of the training, and so it is not the subject of the study at all. In such cases the training is composed in order to attract the students by lightly touching the surface of the matter – without getting involved in the structures (notions, differences, devices...) decisive for the originality of the subject of study (which, in such a case, is not study at all). The promised subject of education is being therefore reduced to a few generalities, made trivial. Hence, fast and cheap education for the masses fakes the disclosure of knowledge which – as a private good of the few – cannot be sold for a low price. What is sold is the surface – dabbed on throughout the training – and the gold-plated, but empty credentials. It is an education that at the same time opens and closes or blocks the potential of students.

EMPIRICAL ILLUSTRATION

As mentioned above, we have incorporated one of the qualitative social research approaches known as phenomenography²⁸. In the research presented here we used a semi-structured, focused, in-depth interview with a group of Montessori teachers and school owners working for one of the primary Montessori schools in the north of Poland. The interview was first recorded and then transcribed and analysed according

²⁶ J. Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, in: J. Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, M. Poster (ed.), Stanford University Press, Stanford 1988.

²⁷ See: J. Masschelein, M. Simons, *In Defence of the School. A public issue*, transl. J. McMartin, Education, Culture & Society Pub., Leuven 2013, passim.

²⁸ F. Marton, *Phenomenography: A Research...*, pp. 28–49; A. Barnard, H. McCosker, R. Gerber, *Phenomenography: Qualitative Research Approach for Exploring Understanding in Health Care*, „Qualitative Health Research” March 1999, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 212–226.

to the suggestions made by S. Kvale²⁹. The focus group consisted of eight participants and a moderator, and the conversation lasted about sixty-two minutes. The result of the analysis is an outcome space that consists of two descriptive categories named as „tempting introduction”, and „luxurious craft”.

Tempting introduction

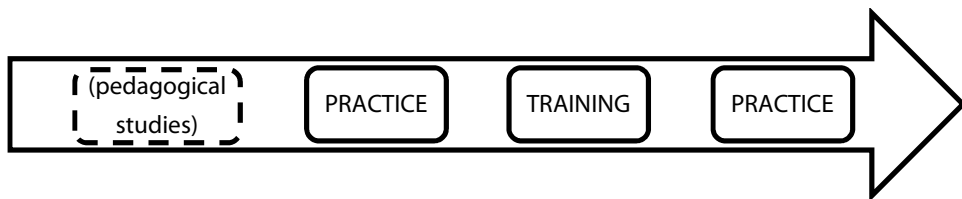
When writing about this discrete category identified in the analysis process we refer to those aspects of the analysed narratives that are connected with the beginning of a career in the Montessori community. Here we identified two trajectories.

The first option has three subsequent moments or stages: practice – training – practice (PTP). It means that those whose professional experience can be described with this trajectory for one reason or another started with practising the method without any formal theoretical preparation or with some experience in educational institutions of another type.

Their understanding of pedagogical knowledge, therefore, has got „ground source”³⁰ (i.e. working for Montessori educational institutions) and only after some time did they decide, or were forced, to take part in various forms of Montessori pedagogy training, and only then, as „certified teachers or administrators” did they come back to practice.

This option has one „subgroup” in which the first cycle of practice is preceded by general pedagogical studies usually achieved at universities or other higher education institutions, which means that we have also identified educators whose trajectories include this ‘initial stage’.

The diagram below presents this type of trajectory (PTP trajectory).



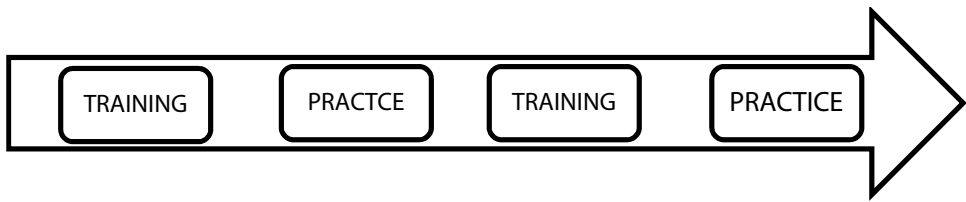
The second trajectory has got two distinctive stages, the first of which is training and, only after that, practice. It means that before entering the classroom these people had been formally trained and certified within the Montessori method. It is interesting, however, that this group in the discussion share a characteristic that is not present in the PTP trajectory.

²⁹ S. Kvale, *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, California 1996, p. 88.

³⁰ We use this metaphor here with reference to „grounded theory” in the version proposed by K. Charmaz. See: K. Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory. A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*, Sage Publications Ltd., London–Thousand Oaks–New Dehli 2006.

They are interested in and from time to time, take part in training courses (unlike the interviewees described above) and therefore we have decided to label theirs as the TPT trajectory – though we have a feeling that the illustration of an on-going process could also be applicable here, but since it would be difficult to appoint a starting point in such a case we have stuck to the linear structure.

The diagram below presents this type of trajectory (TPT trajectory).



The adjective „tempting” as well as the noun „introduction” in the context of the two trajectories mentioned above refer to two different conceptions of meanings.

In the first case (i.e. including the initial stage) the interviewees describe their introduction to the world of education as something that is tempting in the sense that it provokes the intellect, or – in other words – it is intellectually tempting.

The temptation is connected with a deeper understanding of social reality by gaining and being able to „have” various perspectives on „the same” social or pedagogical issue. As one of the interviewees said:

Never ever will I forget our university debates on what is [indicating inverted commas] good schooling. One of the anecdotes that I have in my mind is the story told by one of the lecturers about a pupil who had broken a school window with a bottle of beer. We had to decide what to do and justify our choice with the knowledge of educational ideologies. I learned then that it is not the content of a given fact, but rather the perspective – or ideology if you prefer [laugh] that tells us what to do. [Dorota³¹]

In the limited version trajectory (i.e. without pedagogical studies) the temptation comes from everyday teaching practice, especially at the beginning of one’s professional career, although not necessarily. This group of education practitioners seems to be tempted by a given practical dilemma. Either they cannot find a satisfying (for them) answer for their work and existence or they are tempted by an event that becomes a critical incident for their (also professional) biographies³².

³¹ All the names have been changed.

³² Critical incident as well as the process of an event becoming critical is understood here according to the sense that has been defined by D. Tripp. See: D. Tripp, *Critical Incidents in Teaching. Developing Professional Judgement*, Routledge, London–New York 2012.

The dilemmas of these incidents are the beginnings of internal learning³³ and such a situation is described by J. Rutkowiak as the modus in which „must” (understood as internal necessity) meets internal affecting, giving birth to the *passion of learning*³⁴. Passion is therefore always tempting, but only when this temptation concerns issues essential for one’s existence can it be developed into passion. In such a case we can talk about a tempting introduction understood as the birth of intellectual passion.

Maria Montessori herself is said to have experienced such a situation when she was asked by a child: „Help me to do it by myself”, which later became both a critical incident leading to the world-wide known passion as well as the motto of her pedagogy.

One of the interviewees recalls this situation as follows:

Patryk – one of my pupils, was so eager to learn all the names of his family members in English that he did nothing but repeat them all the time. The problem was that he used to forget them every single day. He got frustrated, but didn’t surrender. I wanted to help him learn that and quickly learned that he had dyslexia. First, I went to the university library and read what I could about it. [...] Then I had wood labels done by a friendly carpenter. [...] One day I gave them to Patryk and asked him to close his eyes, trace the shape of the words, and read them. He did it; we were so happy. [...] Next day he forgot everything. I decided to diagnose his learning style and it turned out that he was a [indicating inverted commas] kinaesthetic. [...] I didn’t know what to do, I was almost obsessed about it. [...] My husband said that I was going crazy about it since this was the only issue I could talk about. I did everything – consulted the therapists at the university, took a Coursera course on dyslexia, created toys for him and even started writing a diary about it, when his parents decided to move to a different city. [...] Anyway, I can easily say that Patryk changed me forever. [Emilia]

It is striking how different the tempting introductions are in the second trajectory.

Firstly, the issue of internal necessity or craving for learning does not appear, instead there is an abundance of external and – to put it bluntly – materialistic motives. Those who start their career with training are successfully tempted during short workshops or popularization conferences, where they have the opportunity to meet „the community celebrities”, and just „smell” the method.

It is the „wow effect” that serves as the tempting introduction here. It is therefore not too complicated, closely related to teaching practice, focused on the techniques and tricks that can be consumed in the upcoming future, all presented in a friendly and fraternising atmosphere. The organisers of the conferences offer long-lasting and very expensive training, so during and after such events all the participants are warmly invited and offered courses which will let them be elite teachers, full members of the community and of course certified experts in the method.

³³ We refer here to the distinction created by J. Rutkowiak, who differentiates *internal learning* from *external learning*. See: J. Rutkowiak, *Uczenie się jako problem etyczny. O zewnętrznym i wewnętrznym uczeniu się*, in: *Uczenie się jako przedsięwzięcie na całe życie*, T. Bauman (red.), Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls, Kraków 2005, pp. 45–61.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 61.

The extract below is a representation of this type of thinking:

How did it all start? I'm not sure, but think that I was sold on it during my first Montessori conference in [name of the city] in [year]. [name] gave a lecture and spoke in such a way that I just couldn't fall asleep. I loved the films he showed especially one – showing a child building a structure. [...] After that I knew I wanted to become a Montessori teacher. [Maria]

Luxurious craft

Luxury, as a noun, functions in English both as a mass noun as well as an ordinary countable noun. In its first form it is understood as „a state of great *comfort* or *elegance*, especially when *involving great expense*”³⁵. Having said that it becomes clear that this notion refers to the **feeling** or **perceiving** of something as comfortable and, at the same time, not easily accessible.

Luxury in its second form is defined as: „[a]n *inessential, desirable item* which is *expensive or difficult to obtain*”³⁶, which provides a new „flavour” of the term.

Combining these two definitions, we can say that when thinking about something that is luxurious we refer to a feeling or perception as well as to an item. Hence, from one side it gives the privileged possessor a state of comfort, but looking from the other perspective, it is sometimes not essential, though desirable. This connection between an item and a feeling is crucial here since it links an immaterial feeling of comfort with a material, desirable and expensive product.

Craft, on the other hand, is a **skill** that makes it possible to execute a procedure in a smooth and effective way. Craft is therefore closely connected with performativity, usefulness, and effectiveness. The interviewees thematise some aspects of their „Montessorian education” in this very context, that is to say, in the context of gaining access to a highly luxurious craft.

The extracts below illustrate this type of thematization of pedagogical knowledge and teachers' education:

The one-year course that I went through in 2013 gave me the feeling that I am at home in my kindergarten. I know the material and I know what to do. [...] I am certain now and I am very happy about it because before the course I was blind and completely lost in the classroom. [Anna]

I had to spend a lot in order to take part in the course and that's why I'm not going to pretend that I am willing to share that. No! I am one of the few who were able to accomplish the course, pass the exam and survive all the tests that we had to take. [...] After the course my situation changed completely. I wouldn't have any problem with finding a job; I know how to convince parents; I know how to work with the material [i.e. Montessori educational

³⁵ <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/luxury> (access: 21.04.2015).

³⁶ Ibidem.

aids – J.J.; P.Z]. *Before that I was always stressed [...]. When a kid approached me [...] I just didn't know what to do.* [Ela]

In some of the thematizations the interviewees pay attention to the moment of certification, which is understood as a symbolical entering into the world of those who are in possession of the highly valued credentials. Naturally, this type of thinking has been severely criticised by the theorists dealing with an attitude known as „credentialism” and sometimes referred to as „diploma disease”³⁷.

Finally, after ten months of struggle with difficulties of different sorts – I got it. [Name of the manager of the teacher training institution] *gave me the certificate. I had to stand out, approach her and finally [raising intonation] was handed the certificate. The atmosphere was a bit like at the end of school year* [laugh] [pause 7 sec.] *Yes, I felt a bit like a proud pupil being given her beloved diploma. All the tensions and worries had gone, I was relieved, happy and proud.* [Sonia]

It is worth mentioning once more that the qualities of knowledge understood as „elite know how” might provoke not only unwillingness to share it, but also inability to question it. Teachers who are proud and happy, feeling at home after the course will probably not wish to leave that sphere of comfort.

Their identity as someone who was able to accomplish this cycle of training, someone not like all the others will remain ‘untouched’ by the mechanisms of public circulation of knowledge, and even if someone that has nothing in common with this community tries to present an idea that seems to be innovative or thought-provoking they will probably hear that „Montessori had already talked about it one hundred years ago”. The pedagogical concept studied during long-lasting and not easily accessible training must be complete, closed and have the answers to all the doubts that might appear – otherwise the sense of being special, effective, highly qualified, and self-confident might be ruined, and the flavour of luxurious craft will vanish.

CONCLUSION: MAKING MONTESSORI PUBLIC?

In this paper we have tried to show that knowledge being capitalised becomes latent, and therefore closed to the renewal of its meanings. In the case of Montessori pedagogy it means that this educational knowledge at first sight is perceived as tempting and seductive. The first contact with the Montessori method is something glittering that persuades its adepts that the real secret, that is the essence of the educational knowledge of their interest, is in possession of „an elite know-how”. In order to gain the luxurious craft this knowledge provides, in order to know and to be able, one has to dedicate oneself to a long-term specialized training, that is, a long-term investment in oneself.

³⁷ R.P. Dore, *The diploma disease: education, qualification, and development*, Institute of Education, University of London, London 2000.

Montessori pedagogy as the object of an investment of such a kind seems to play the role of capital that private individuals have at their disposal. Therefore, it is managed, used, performed, and repeated (iterated), but not discussed, criticised or renewed.

In other words: the capitalisation of knowledge threatens its very existence, as it cuts this knowledge from the life-giving practices of meaning renewal. Montessori pedagogy is threatened as it is especially exposed to the process of its privatisation³⁸. The question we have to pose in such a situation is: what can we do to save Montessori from being privatized, from being closed in the frames of the community of discourse³⁹? How can we make Montessori public again?

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³⁸ G.J.J. Biesta, *Skills for the future or education for the present?*, Invited keynote address at the 15th Montessori Europe Congress, Lund, Sweden, 10–12 October 2014. See also: J. Jendza, *Od kształtowania kompetencji XXI wieku ku kulturze audytu w edukacji montessoriańskiej – impresje na marginesie XV Kongresu Montessori Europe*, Lund, Sweden 10–12 October 2014 r., (in press).

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J. Jendza, P. Zamojski: Privatising Montessori. The capitalisation of knowledge and the inability of meaning's renewal

Abstract: The main aim of the article is an analysis of the privatization of pedagogical knowledge using an example of one of the alternative pedagogies (Montessori Method). We claim that nowadays, pedagogical knowledge is treated as economic capital, and therefore subject to modifications characteristic for neoliberal culture.

In our analysis we implement qualitative focus interviews conducted with various members of the Montessori community (teachers, owners and administrators of schools) who have gained access to a rare commodity – that is, knowledge regarding the teaching methodology of this particular pedagogical approach.

The results of this empirical research point to mechanisms characteristic for making pedagogical knowledge classified and „gilded”, mechanisms that limit it to the closed space of a particular discourse society.

We conclude that this ‘inbred’ form of knowledge transfer can lead to an inability to renew meanings and, as a consequence, to the replacement of critical and in depth pedagogical considerations with a form of dogma that may be culturally inadequate and reproduced as a technical procedure, which is far from what Montessori herself wrote about the method.

Keywords: Montessori method, privatisation of knowledge, public character of pedagogical knowledge

Tytuł: Prywatyzacja Montessori. Kapitalizacja wiedzy i niezdolność do odnawiania znaczeń

Streszczenie: Celem artykułu jest analiza procesów reglamentowania i prywatyzacji wiedzy pedagogicznej na przykładzie jednej z alternatywnych koncepcji wychowania tj. pedagogii Marii Montessori. Stawiamy tezę, zgodnie z którą wiedza bywa traktowana jako kapitał ekonomiczny i jako taka podlega przekształceniom charakterystycznym dla kultury neoliberalnej.

W analizach wykorzystujemy jakościowy wywiad fokusowy, którego celowo dobranymi uczestnikami są osoby związane ze środowiskiem montessoriańskim (nauczyciele, właściciele i administratorzy placówek), a które uzyskały dostęp do dobra rzadkiego, jaki w ich wypadku stanowi wiedza dotycząca metodyki pracy w tym systemie. Rezultaty powyższego przedsięwzięcia badawczego umożliwiają nam wskazanie na charakterystyczne mechanizmy utajniania i „pozłacania” wiedzy, za sprawą których krąży ona w zamkniętej przestrzeni określonego towarzystwa dyskursu.

Konkludujemy, iż ów wsobny charakter transferu wiedzy może przyczynić się do niezdolności odnawiania znaczeń, a co za tym idzie zastępowania krytycyzmu i pogłębionej refleksji pedagogicznej stechnicyzowaną i dogmatyczną wiarą w adekwatność kulturową i skuteczność Metody.

Słowa kluczowe: metoda Montessori, prywatyzacja wiedzy, publiczny charakter wiedzy pedagogicznej