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METHODOLOGICAL POTENTIAL OF THE US GENERAL EDUCATION IN SHAPING STUDENTS' LIBERAL CULTURE

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The article highlights communication in the general education in the US as an effective tool for shaping students' liberal culture. Goals and specific characteristics of communication training as a compulsory part of the bachelor program in the US higher education provided by the cycle of courses on the theory and practice of communication are considered. It is noted that communication-based courses provide students with communication models aimed at pragmatics of written and oral communication, which develops their effective communication skills as a part of the communication component of students' liberal culture and at the same time serves as a tool of its shaping. The priority of communication in the US higher education as a basis for students' entry into the academic, social and cultural life is specified. The peculiarities of discourse as the unity of sociocultural meanings of higher education and individualized educational practice are covered. It is focused on its specific process of creation and production of social and cultural meanings of life of every student in the course of the US general undergraduate education.

Keywords: the US higher education; students' liberal culture; discourse; the US general education; communication skills.

Introduction. Nowadays society is characterized by active social communication transformational processes that affect all spheres of human activity. At the same time, the effectiveness of their course depends on the in-depth communication training of participants in these processes. It is well-manifested in democratic systems, the USA in particular, people who have experience of taking a direct part in the democratic transitions through public debate and open discussion being aware of their strengths of producing individual verbal effect. In the United States, there is a tradition of the most advanced communication training of students that embraces mastering the art of writing and proclamation of not only public speeches but essays and texts on different sociocultural issues as well. The US students also learn classical political and legal speeches, which is closely associated with high democratic culture of the American society where communication is considered to be the art of expressing and exchanging meaning among people.

The purpose of the article is to highlight the undergraduate students' communication training as an essential component of the US general education.

Communication training of undergraduate students in the US higher education. Communication is "a multi-faceted discipline that studies the processes, practices, and products of human signification as its central defining characteristic" [8, p. 4]. As such, communication is a key, vital foundation of all other academic, professional, and social experiences, including education of responsible citizens of the world in social and cultural contexts [8, c. 17]. By and large, communication skills pervade all dimensions of personal development, including shaping of their liberal culture.

Communication has been clearly identified as a critical factor in educating undergraduate students as active broad-minded citizens of the 21st century. As Cronon argues, liberally educated people listen and hear, they are able to talk with anyone at all no matter age or intellect, able to clearly communicate with their writing [3, p. 74].

As far as communication courses are concerned, they are a foundational part of the US general education, the component of the undergraduate curriculum devoted to the areas of knowledge, methods of inquiry, and ideas common to well-educated people.

Characteristically, the students in the general education face communication models which are aimed at pragmatics of written and oral communication with a view to developing effective communication skills, both interpersonal and intercultural. These skills form the basis of the

communication component of students' liberal culture and at the same time, they serve as the tools of its effective shaping.

At present, the US universities and colleges are introducing obligatory communication courses for undergraduate students with the aim of ensuring the development of their ability to choose an effective communication strategy in different spheres of life through specific speech behavior. As an example, at Western Illinois University knowledge is developed as teachers and students share insights, exchange ideas, and debate positions. Reading, speaking, and writing play important roles in the construction and extension of knowledge. The writing course sequence enables students to use the language actively in diverse ways and settings to gain and share knowledge about their experiences and concepts. They also reflect on that language use by examining their processes of writing and reading in order to understand both the texts they create and the texts they encounter. The oral communication course develops students' awareness of the communication process; focuses on the skills of invention, organization, and expression; promotes understanding of, and adaptation to, a variety of communication contexts; and emphasizes critical skills in listening, reading, thinking, and speaking [14, p. 67-68].

Engleberg & Wynn provide students with questions reflecting upon their communication skills. Through the process of self-evaluation, they can make an assessment of their strengths and weaknesses within personal (*'Do I have meaningful personal relationships?'*), professional (*'Do I communicate effectively within and on behalf of work team?'*), intercultural (*'Do I understand, respect and adapt to people from culturally diverse backgrounds?'*) and intellectual (*'Do I analyze and evaluate the meaning of multiple and complex messages in an ever-changing world?'*) situations [4, p. 4].

Such pragmatic communicative practices allow American students to gain knowledge ensuring their adaptation to life in society in general and the educational environment of the higher education establishment in particular. This is maintained by the objectives of communication training for undergraduate students in the course of the US general education, which are as follows:

- fostering a dynamic process between faculty and students in which ideas and knowledge are communicated and discussed in a reflective, critical, and engaging manner;
- enhancing the intellectual skills necessary for analyzing and solving complex issues and problems;
- addressing analytical strategies, organizational methods, and grammatical correctness;
- developing students' individual style of academic communication (oral and written) which should be different from that which they used to have in high school [2, p. 5]

In view of the foregoing, we point out the priority of communication in the US general education as a universal sociocultural reality of life where communication skills permeate all aspects of students' personal development and serve as a basis for entry into the academic, social and cultural experience, contributing to the development of students' liberal culture.

The discourse as a means of interiorization of students' values and ethical patterns of behavior. The above-mentioned information allows us to consider the communication training from the standpoint of a discourse as a process and result of the interaction between participants of education as well as the unity of sociocultural aspects of the US general education. These meanings are understood and interpreted by students' individual communicative activity.

The latter, in its turn, ensures the formation of students' liberal culture through the "sociocultural text" in the broad ontological context (nature, people, technology, art) and "language" in the transdisciplinary philosophical and pedagogical rather than linguistic aspects: scientific, literary, political and other texts as objects of knowledge, and value-normative samples which are imported in the educational process. In the course of the process mentioned the targeted integration of students into a broad sociocultural context is based on their ability under any circumstances to understand and interpret their life-sustaining activity as a "sociocultural text" and find themselves and their place in the world by exploiting the "language" adequate to various sociocultural situations.

The results of our study give ground to consider the “sociocultural text” and “language” as the main means of educating students in the course of general education which create a conscious interactive environment for interpreting educational information through the organization of meaningful communicative educational process, i.e. discourse which functions not only as a specified type of communication, but also as an effective factor in shaping students’ liberal culture.

It is well-known that the concept of “discourse” is derived from classical rhetoric (*Latin* – “speech in activity”). However, modern philosophical and linguistic reflection of discourse indicates its multidimensional nature in various fields of humanities (philosophy, logic, communication theory, sociology, etc.): 1) discourse as an institutional, specified type of communication in the sociocultural context; 2) discourse as an integral communicative situation (event) with determinative sociocultural and ethical factors into which communicants are immersed.

Van Dijk’s achievements are of great importance and the most famous ones in this area. He interprets discourse as a communicative event that takes place between someone who says the fact and someone who hears in specified time, space and other contexts. This communicative action can be oral or written, have verbal and nonverbal components (e. g. casual conversation with a friend, reading a paper, seminars etc.). In a narrow sense discourse, according to the scholar, is the product of verbal communicative action with verbal components [1].

At the same time van Dijk has developed the theory of cognitive models, according to which discourse consists of general, stereotypical frames that reflect the sociocultural context. These conceptual frames, on his view, determine human behavior and make it possible to interpret it [1].

A characteristic feature of the discourse is its topological orientation on communicative processes and actions. According to Mills, “discourse covers the entire scope of communication” [9, p. 5]. “It is through discourse and discursive structures that people understand reality” [9, p. 54].

Ricoeur sharing Mills’ thought considers discourse the intersection point of such issues, as knowledge of self and knowledge of others through communication. To communicate, according to Ricoeur, means constantly discovering the world [12, p. 36-36]. The statements outlined by Mills and Ricoeur reflect the overall purpose of general education in the USA.

The achievements of modern epistemology have conclusively proved that human progress depends on certain discursive strategies in practice, including education. As Raelin argues, the social and cultural structure of society could also be considered in the light of the discourse which is interpreted as a means of spreading knowledge for the improvement of the efficiency of the world through reflective communication activities and experience [10, p. 73].

Similar considerations are expressed by Fairclough. Exploring the role of communication in gaining experience, he notes that discourse as a sociocultural phenomenon is an integral part of human experience. The scholar is convinced that “acquiring experience embraces together: various activities, subjects and their social relations, tools, facilities, time and place, forms of consciousness, values and discourse” [5, p. 167].

The findings in the field of discourse make it possible to conclude that its methodological value which involves not only mere communication, but also the broadcast of meanings between the subjects of communication and mutual acceptance of these meanings providing the subjects with certain sociocultural experience.

Grice has put forward the idea that human communication is based on universal and rational principles (“maxims”) that organize the process of developing the communicative value and contribute to its success [6]. According to Grice, all communication activities are based on the general principle of cooperation: in any situation of verbal interaction “all communicants subconsciously understand that they make a contribution to communication which is required by the communicative situation in accordance with the objectives or scope of communication” [6, p. 45].

As stated by Grice’s, effective communicative interaction is based on the compliance with four basic principles (maxims) which together make up the principle of cooperation:

- 1) the maxim of quantity (where one tries to be as informative as one possibly can, and gives as much information as is needed, and no more);
- 2) the maxim of quality (where one tries to be truthful, and does not give information that is false or that is not supported by evidence);

3) the maxim of relation (where one tries to be relevant, and says things that are pertinent to the discussion);

4) the maxim of manner (when one tries to be as clear, as brief, and as orderly as one can in what one says, and where one avoids obscurity and ambiguity) [6, p. 46-47].

As stated by Readings, communication itself may not transfer prepared meaning because the meanings of words vary from statement to statement, or rather from idiolect to idiolect. The words of sender occupy a definite place in the mass of audience idiolects, and the conversation takes personal meaning in the discursive act [11, p. 245].

The term “idiolect” comes from two Greek words: *idios* – “own, peculiar, special” and *lect* – *diálectos* “talk, speech, debate, the manner of speech, style” > *lectós* “able to talk”. This conceptual essence of idiolect would be incomplete if we avoided its relation to discourse as a complex communicative phenomenon that includes not only the act of creating a text, but also reflects the dependence of linguistic work on many extralinguistic conditions – knowledge about the world, views, and a specific purpose of a speaker as its creator. From this standpoint, the use of the concept of “discourse” is relevant to idiolect with all its extralingual aspects.

With consideration of Readings’s ideas and the importance of communication in the system of the US general education, we consider the student’s idiolect as a complex of individual linguistic and extralinguistic means formed in the course of multiple-aspect language acquisition during the educational process. These means are determined by sociocultural and psychophysical factors which find their manifestation in individual communicative activities, both oral and written.

It should be noted that today writing communication is an integral element of the US general education. A broad range of topics for written assignments give students the opportunity to write in different styles and genres, providing them with the opportunity to acquire knowledge of various accepted norms of writing necessary for further study. Writing promotes the development of students’ idiolects, and is determined by the two main didactic approaches:

1) procedural approach which is primarily based on the process of writing as a creative process, including the development of various strategies to address rhetorical questions; in the course of writing a text students formulate, develop and express their own thoughts;

2) genre approach which is aimed at mastering the genre features and leading typological characteristics of their implementation in texts of different genres [7].

Genres develop and change over time in response to the interactions between discourse communities and recurring rhetorical situations [13, p. 216]. Because genres are not stable over time or across communities, students who study writing benefit from examining the way genres develop as well as from the relationships between genres.

Altogether, besides the development of idiolect, the goals of written communication in the system of general education in the United States include:

– development of critical thinking, logical argumentation and perception of writing is a form of thinking and logical expression of different ideas;

– incorporating education about plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty in accordance with university(college)-wide policy;

– addressing analytical strategies, organizational methods, and grammatical correctness, although they are not designed primarily to teach the mechanics of writing [2, p. 6].

Therefore, it should be emphasized that the discourse is a means of introduction of norms in the process of creation and production of meanings in different spheres of students’ activities, familiarizing them with the sociocultural models and norms of behavior in society that affect the self-reflection, realization of their creative potential by setting goals and explaining motives of self-development.

Conclusions. The results of our study allow us to conclude that the content of the US general education is aimed at broadcast and reproduction of social and cultural experience through discourse as a set of tools that provide the optimization of students’ liberal culture development. From this standpoint, we consider discourse as a way of interiorization of values and ethical standards into the life-world of students which in general contributes to shaping their liberal culture. In this perspective, the discourse transforms the meaning and goals of the educational process, and most relationships in

it, directing them to designing, producing and supporting universal values and sociocultural samples of behavior through communicative space of the educational process.

Further research in this sphere should be directed on the detailed study of the syllabus of communicative courses in the US general education.

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С. В. Федоренко. Методологічний потенціал комунікації у формуванні гуманітарної культури студентів у вищій школі США. У статті висвітлено використання комунікації в системі загальноосвітньої підготовки студентів бакалавріату в США як ефективного інструментарію формування їх гуманітарної культури. Розглянуто цілі та специфіку комунікативної підготовки як обов'язкової частини бакалаврської програми в американській вищій школі. Зазначено, що в ході цієї підготовки студенти стикаються з комунікативними моделями, спрямованими на прагматику письмової й усної комунікації, що забезпечує формування в них навичок ефективного спілкування, які входять до складу комунікативного компонента гуманітарної культури студентів та водночас виступають інтенсивним інструментарієм її формування. Вказано на пріоритет комунікації в американській вищій школі як універсальної реальності суспільного буття, де комунікативні навички пронизують усі аспекти особистісного розвитку студентів, слугуючи підґрунтям для набуття ними академічного та соціокультурного досвіду. Окреслено особливості дискурсу як засобу виховання, що інтеріоризує цінності, морально-етичні норми і правила поведінки, а також емоційно-естетичний досвід у життєвий світ особистості. Розглянуто специфіку дискурсу щодо унормування процесу творення та продукування соціокультурних смислів життєдіяльності кожного студента в ході загальноосвітньої підготовки у вищій школі США.

Ключові слова: вища школа США; гуманітарна культура студентів; дискурс; загальноосвітня підготовка студентів бакалавріату в США; комунікативні навички.

С. В. Федоренко. Методологический потенциал коммуникации в формировании гуманитарной культуры студентов в высшей школе США. В статье освещено использование коммуникации в системе общеобразовательной подготовки студентов бакалавриата в США как эффективного инструментария формирования их гуманитарной культуры. Рассмотрены цели и специфика коммуникативной подготовки как обязательной части бакалаврской программы в американской высшей школе. Отмечено, что в ходе этой подготовки студенты сталкиваются с коммуникативными моделями, направленными на прагматику письменной и устной коммуникации, что обеспечивает формирование у них навыков эффективного общения, которые входят в состав коммуникативного компонента гуманитарной культуры студентов и одновременно выступают интенсивным инструментарием ее формирования. Указано на приоритет коммуникации в американской высшей школе как универсальной реальности общественной жизни, где коммуникативные навыки пронизывают все аспекты личностного развития студентов, выступая основой для приобретения академического и социокультурного опыта. Определены особенности дискурса как средства воспитания, которое способствует интериоризации ценностей, морально-этических норм, правил поведения, а также эмоционально-эстетического опыта в жизненный мир личности. Рассмотрена специфика дискурса относительно унормирования процесса и выработки социокультурных смыслов жизнедеятельности каждого студента в ходе общеобразовательной подготовки в высшей школе США.

Ключевые слова: высшая школа США; гуманитарная культура студентов; дискурс; общеобразовательная подготовка студентов бакалавриата в США; коммуникативные навыки.