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Anna Sajdak-Burska
Institute of Paedagogy

The Plurality of Academic Didactics Paradigms. On the Need for Complementarity of Approaches

KEYWORDS

academic didactics, teaching paradigms, teaching strategies, teaching effects

ABSTRACT

This paper concerns itself with the interdisciplinary nature of academic didactics as a field of social sciences that uses knowledge and results derived from educational sciences, psychology, philosophy, sociology and didactics specific to particular subjects. It was pointed out that considerations on teaching practices in all scientific disciplines constitute another source of knowledge for the field of academic didactics. The diversity of theoretical and methodological approaches is determined by science-specific and discipline-specific research methodology paradigms, diversified teaching cultures dependent on environmental conditions as well as diversified teaching class patters for students that are often specific to an educational profile. The issue addressed in this paper is whether a single didactic paradigm exists that would unify approaches so different in terms of theory and practice. The paper provides a map of academic didactics paradigms, a description of difficulties related to paradigmatic translations as well as the lack of consent to the multiparadigm approach and issues with interferences and shifts between paradigms. Despite the existing difficulties, the suggestion is made to promote the complementary attitude to various approaches. It is supported by the concept of relations between the assumed academic didactics effects and teaching strategies that lead thereto, which are constituted by different teaching and learning patterns.

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Introduction

An analysis of the publishing market of the last two decades, as well as studies of works concerning academic didactics reveal an enormous diversity of theoretical and practical approaches presented by the individual authors. This is certainly the case due to the fact that not the issue of considerations on the teaching process at higher education facilities is not only handled by educators, among them primarily specialists embedded in terms of subdisciplinary divisions in general and higher education, not only field-specific educators dealing with the individual educational area of a specific field of science, but psychologists, philosophers, political scientists, economists, management specialists, specialists in modern technologies, journalists, music therapy specialists… and everyone else that has any sort of contact with students at all. The works published that deal with academic didactics are a veritable melting pot of theoretical and practical entanglements. The promotion of so-called good practices seems at times to be suspended within theoretical vacuum, as if the author wanted to say: „it works, but I don't know why", and at times it is substantiated by inconsistent slogans, categories derived from different theoretical concepts. Some published works referring directly to higher education didactics not only seem highly controversial, but could also cause significant protest. Hence, there emerges a very varied image of academic reflection on education within university and higher school walls. Obviously, the question emerges as to whether such a variety (save for the clearly erroneous, weird theory-practice hybrids) is required and good, or should a single system be developed, to be promoted as the one based on the newest achievements in the field of education paedagogy (didactics) and psychology? Indeed, it is the question (or series of questions) as to whether academic didactics are an interdisciplinary field, and whether there is consent to its heterogeneity, its multi-paradigm image (Kuhn, 2001; Krause, 2010), its theoretical and practical variation.

On the interdisciplinarity of academic didactics

The vast majority of paedagogues, seeing relations with general didactics and higher school paedagogy, would respond that academic didactics is a subfield of paedagogy (Sajdak, 2016). The canonical, paedagogical disciplinary views describe higher school didactics blatantly as a part of general didactics that is gradually gaining the properties of an independent paedagogical subdiscipline. In view of W. Okoń (1993, p. 137), the subject of research in academic didactics are the issues

of objectives and tasks, the content of education and oversight, of care, of methods, resources and forms of organisation of the process of education at a higher school. The area of interests of higher school didactics also encompasses the organisation of higher education as well as education and science policy. T. Bauman (2006, p. 170-171) walks a similar path in searching for sources of academic didactics. This author writes that higher school didactics, due to historic development, became a transformed version of general didactics dealing with higher-level education. The subject of its research are thus issues related to the functioning of education at a higher level, meaning, the objectives, tasks and functions of higher schools, as well as issues related to the process of academic education, its course and evaluation. S. Palka (2004, p. 31-36) also finds space for academic didactics among other paedagogical sciences. This author is of the opinion that higher school didactics are most strongly tied to other paedagogical subdisciplines – higher school paedagogy and general didactics. These ties are delineated by the cognitive field of the subdiscipline. The research subject of academic didactics are hence the processes of teaching and intellectual education. The author writes that „academic didactics is thus a science concerned with teaching and intellectual education at academic institutes; its practice serves the development of theoretical knowledge in this regard and the development of practical work patterns at academic institutions" (Palka 2004, p. 32). The author also puts forward many important questions concerning the autonomy of academic didactics from other sciences co-existing with it, such as: philosophy, psychology, sociology, cultural science, political science, economy, medicine and others. It also indicates an important reply, as it notes the interdependencies that have the properties of bilateral cognitive and methodological relations. Should one assume that academic didactics are but a subfield of paedagogy, then immediately more puzzling questions emerge. Indeed, how should one now classify these particular areas of academic didactics that are immanently more strongly tied to their original fields, to the practice in which they apply, than to paedagogy? What of medicine didactics, for instance, practised successfully and with quite good results by persons without paedagogical backgrounds? Is medicine didactics thus not encompassed by academic didactics? But of course it is, even making up a solid core within it. Indeed, one could perceive academic didactics not only as a theoretical scientific field or subfield, but as the practice of education in all areas of education. Let us be reminded that according to the classification for higher education approved for the needs of the introduction of of the Polish National Qualification Frameworks, eight fields of education have been described: the field of study of humanities, the field of social studies, the field of study of exact sciences, the field of natural sciences, the field

of technical studies, the field of medical studies, the field of agricultural studies, forestry studies, veterinary studies, and the field of study devoted to art. Each of these may establish theoretical knowledge concerning the process of education of students. Indeed, one may not omit the value of reflections practised by teachers in all areas of education and within the individual fields of science concerned with own practice. The education of students in the individual fields of study, however, cannot be unified and uniparadigmatic due to the nature of the study fields themselves. Students of humanities are educated completely differently than students of mathematical sciences, than students of natural sciences and even more so than students of art-related studies are. These differences between the various didactic pathways can arise for at least four reasons:

- the methodological paradigm dominating the specific scientific field;
- the specific forms and methods of classes within the individual fields of study;
- the culture of education at a given university, in a given entity or faculty;
- the specifics of teaching of courses within a field (if the field has these).

The process of education of students was, since the times of W. von Humboldt, inseparably tied to the academic lecturer conducting scientific research, always on the basis of a specific methodology. The unity of science and education shone through among others in the duties of the academic lecturer as the one, who in conducting the research process had published, announced during lectures in university walls, the results of his work. Such a mode of perception of academic didactics is visible also in the works of S. Hessen, who in the beginning of the 20th century stressed that the university is not an institution of teaching, but a scientific higher school, where the teacher does not teach his course, but also publicly announces his scientific views and conducts, through his scientific research, unending teaching (Hessen, 1997, p. 377). It may hence not wonder that the biggest influence on the shape of the education process of students was exerted by current theories, concepts and the models of conducting research used within a particular field of science. This is the kind of path of the heritage of the Humboldtian university model we are dealing with until the present day. If a specific scientific field has its dominant methodological paradigm founded on experiments, measurements and laboratory work, then, naturally, this mode of research finds its reflection both in the preferred forms of work with students, as well as in the perception of man and the process of their education from the angle of the methodology of natural sciences (one could say that the methodology of natural sciences embosses its matrix on the approach to social processes). No wonder that education is quite different in fields, in which both research work as well as work with students is related

to analysis of texts and pondering on cultural contexts that are able to help one find the way to the original interpretations. Of significance is also the form of the relevant „teaching culture" at a given university, faculty or institute. It is here that in turn mechanisms of socialisation, the uptake by a young academic lecturer of the patterns encouraged by the Master and head of the institute (including didactic patterns as well) and the repetition of these as related to the specifics of teaching in a given environment are at work. The situation of diversity in academic didactics is additionally reinforced by field-specific didactics (or the lack thereof). Field-specific didactics experts, working at higher education facilities, dealing with teaching future educators in the area of didactics of a specific field, often transfer the teaching patterns preferred in lower-level education onto the level of higher education. Remaining under intense influence of the methodological matrix of a specific scientific field, they frequently fail to see the complexity of different concepts of education, they do not join discussions on the shape of didactics in different paradigms (Suska-Wróbel, 2009, p. 198-199). Considering the above arguments, the question as to whether academic didactics is to be treated just as a (sub)field of paedagogy or as a science transgressing discipline borders is of significant importance. In my view, delineating fields sharply at this point is highly problematic and burdened by grave risk. Many researchers indicate the necessity of a fluid approach to these. Interdisciplinarity brings with itself, however, many uncertainties and in most cases causes the loss of the relative feeling of safety of movement in known fields. The cooperation of researchers from many fields brings with itself the risk of e. g. the inability to communicate on the level of the utilised language and the theories brought in for the purpose of interpretation. However, it is a chance of life-giving impulses for new, broader perception of the subject of study, and, accordingly, the development of each of the fields.

Didactic paradigms on the space of academic education

The simultaneous paedagogical suitability and interdisciplinarity of academic didactics is without a doubt its advantage, but, at the same time, also a significant hurdle in the theoretical arrangement of the described practices. Over the space of many discussions concerning higher education and the provisions in many documents about it, the necessity of paradigmatic changes in terms of the approach to education is described, which is exemplified by the shift from the model focused on content, standards, the person of the teacher and direct teaching to the model focused on the person of the student, their process of studying and the effects of

studying. The beginnings of such arguments should be searched for in the works of G. Brown, M. Atkins (1988) and R. Barr and J. Tagg (2000, pp. 198-200). The latter in particular had contributed to the dissemination of the didactic revolution under the banned of „the shift from teaching to learning", describing the shift from the paradigm of directed teaching to the paradigm of learning. Polish paedagogy also saw the emergence of a range of papers in which authors develop paradigmatic maps corresponding directly to didactics. In the area of education of adults, M. Malewski (2010), even if referring to the works of R. S. Usher, had described four paradigms: the positivist, the hermeneutic, the critical and the postmodern paradigm, however, with respect to reflections on adult education, he described three types of didactics: technological didactics, humanist didactics and critical didactics. In my view, however, most useful for bringing theories and practices of education at universities and higher schools to order is the map of didactic paradigms proposed by D. Klus-Stańska (2002, 2009, 2010). This author stresses that she does not claim the right to establish the structure of didactics, but attempts to bring certain things to order and disclose certain affairs by reconstructing paradigms at the intersection of two criteria: the theoretical (epistemological and axiological) and the paradigmatic. D. Klus-Stańska believes that contemporary Polish didactics includes the following: the functionalist-behaviourist paradigm, the humanist-adaptive paradigm, the constructivist-psychological paradigm, the constructivist-social paradigm and the critical-emancipative paradigm. The creative adaptation of the suggestions of D. Klus-Stańska is the map of paradigms of student education and support for academic lecturer development presented in the paper by A. Sajdak (2013), which reduces the number of paradigms to four and describes them as follows: the behaviourist, the humanist, the constructivist and the critical-emancipative paradigm. Each paradigm is delineated by different anthropology, epistemology, axiology, its own psychological theory of the learning process, which directly translate to the paedagogical theories of teaching and learning, by different determination of the objectives of education, the determination of the content of teaching and learning, the methods of education, the types of control that is exercised or the modes of assessment, and finally the different type of co-operation relationship between the teacher and the person learning. Reconstruction of even the basic assumptions to the individual paradigms or the discussion focused around the differences in the presented attitudes would significantly transgress the scope of this article. In any case, it would be redundant, as the objective of the article is not the indication of any specific paradigm as being required or leading, but the thesis on the need for complementarity of approaches in the process of education of students, considered not from the standpoint of a spe-

cific paradigm or scientific field, but from the perspective of the collective whole of academic education processes. However, before arguments are provided speaking in favour of the complementarity of approaches, worth noting are the difficulties that may arise with regard to the specifics of functioning of paradigms in the area of human and social sciences. It needs to be kept in mind that the sources of descriptions of the structure of scientific revolutions by T. S. Kuhn rested in research and observations made in the field of natural sciences, in which one could describe the replacement of one structure by a new one by way of revolution. Soon after the category of the 'paradigm' was introduced into scientific usage, the Author themselves began to wonder whether their conclusions were correct with respect to human or social sciences, where various methodological views and thinking styles function in parallel, not infrequently being competitive. This could give rise to a range of difficulties that include primarily: the threat of fundamentalism, strong competition and the rejection of multi-paradigmaticity, difficulties in translating paradigms and paradigmatic interactions, shifts. These phenomena could be observed relatively easily in the space of many public discussions on the shape of the education process at higher schools and on its quality. During scientific debates, there emerge disputes based on the differences in standards, disagreements with respect to judgements, the incompatibility of opinions that stem directly from the adaptation by the individual authors of varied theoretical or methodological attitudes. These discussions belong to science and actually serve its development. However, at times, a sort of hostility emerges that leads to the abandonment of the basics of rational discourse. Participating in many meetings of diverse groups engaged in the assurance and improvement of university education quality, I am frequently a witness to just such fundamentalist disputes. Areas of tension are delineated by different responses to example questions:

- Should higher-level education be transmissive or selective, or may it be a space of searching by young people of own development and professional paths?
- Should education take the form of holding obligatory laboratory, workshop, exercise, lecture and practical classes foreseen by a rigid study curriculum, or should the education scheme be sufficiently flexible to remain in the area of freedom and autonomy of courses co-functioning as part of tutorials?
- Is it better to use tests and strive for the most objective measurement of the knowledge and abilities of students, or should oral exams and written exams, as not classically standardised, make a return?

Fanatic adherents to a particular attitude, considering their own field and area of education, not only do not understand opposing attitudes, but frequently dis-

credit them and deny them the right to equal coexistence. The disputes apply not only to representatives of various scientific fields, but are frequently conducted 'in the own yard'. B. Śliwerski aptly notes that „… fundamentalism in human sciences, in paedagogy in particular, is particularly dangerous, if it believes, preaching its beliefs and rights as being the sole truth or the only truth, being the best – often confrontational, against others – that there is no need to let other scientific schools speak, and that its theses are to apply to all, irrespective of their acceptance. It thus denies the right to own generalisations or theories, disallows new research perspectives, and, accordingly, limits the development of science" (Śliwerski, 2007, p. 448). A further important problem are paradigmatic shifts, translations, the mixing of paradigms and the formation of internally conflicting hybrids. Research of D. Klus-Stańska (2010) had shown that in the area of didactic theory and practice, we are dealing with a variety of different paradigmatic deformations, theoretical connections and derived practical applications. A category that became useful to describe didactic reality for the Author is „chaos" and the disease referred to as „St Vitus' dance". D. Klus-Stańska had conducted studies in school on the early school education and primary education levels. Would the execution of analogous studies at universities and higher schools have led to analogous conclusions? It is too early to say. However, certain indications arise that seem to confirm the mentioned analogy. Conducting active work towards the establishment and perfection of didactic competences of doctoral students and academic lecturers at the Jagiellonian University, I managed to collect in the years 2012-2015 248 essays written by participants of various courses improving their knowledge and capabilities in terms of academic didactics on the subject: „Evaluate the suitability of the selected strategy of motivating of students to learn according to their own didactic methodology". It is worth noting that the group was very varied and that essays were authored both by persons related to biotechnology, mathematics, medicine as well as philosophy, art history or philologies. In addition, I have 43 observations of classes with students (this time solely classes in paedagogy), which I have thoroughly analysed from the didactic standpoint and the recognition of signs of what D. Klus-Stańska refers to as „learning along a track". This is solely preliminary research exploring the study field, but the analysis of such a small research sample permits certain conclusions:

- The approach that would best be placed in the humanist paradigm is practically missing (or found in trace amounts) among doctoral students and academic lecturers. The analysis of the essays indicates that the majority of people perceives this paradigm as being utopian, unrealistic, opposed to university requirements. Even if they permit the existence of so-called 'good

practices' in the form of academic tutoring, but only in the form of scientific tutoring, and not in terms of development. Statements like the following are found: „it is not my role for the student to have it nice", „with such a volume of students, no individualisation is possible", „look for an atmosphere of security and trust in therapy, not in classes". The humanist paradigm seems to academic lecturers to be elegant yet pointless.

- The constructivist paradigm in the shape of various arguments concerning the teaching-learning process is present primarily in all notes and documents concerning the quality of education. The academic teachers themselves most frequently identify it with methods and forms of work, including primarily methods of activation and group work, however, during classes, they do not allow the students sufficient time to search for, establish a solution, and interfere in the course of work through their didactic intervention. They prefer products, ideas and work of students that align with their thought and the solution pathways they prefer. They also most frequently do not see any relationship between letting the students explore different paths of education and the mode of evaluation of their work. Assessment and control are usually a sort of settlement, and not diagnostic, not support and not motivation.
- Despite various types of training seminars promoting constructivist didactics, the most prevalent is currently the behavioural paradigm of typical learning along tracks. Worth noting are also the most frequently used student motivation tools that lecturers and doctoral students recommend. These are:
  - full control of the lecturer over all components of the education process, with the freedom of the student reduced almost to zero („I have to know what the student is doing, and when");
  - continuous supervision and accounting of the student's work, e. g. as attendance lists, registration of all activities and their lack and frequent tests – at the beginning or end of classes („indeed, I have to test the student");
  - awards in the form of further points improving the final score („this makes them read texts and participate in classes");
  - errors for false execution or lack of activity in the form of negative points reducing the score, or even reducing the final exam score („this motivates them even more strongly to learn");
  - introduction of competitive mechanisms, most frequently in the form of "winner (or the top three) take(s) all".

However, striving to promote e. g. constructivism, should we eliminate all forms of „behavioural control"? I my view – definitely not. The behaviourist approach is deeply reasonable, yet the reason depends on the kinds of education effects we want to achieve.

In defence of the complementarity of approaches

It is relatively easy to fall prey to the temptation to promote just one paradigm – the constructivist one – which as the most varied and spacious, is able to fit both neurobiological substantiations for human thinking as well as interpretation and socio-cultural traits (Sajdak, 2013, pp. 387 and following). In its broadest sense, constructivism takes the form related to the work of J. Piaget and J. S. Bruner. German- or English-language paedagogical literature clearly shows the domination of such an approach. As stressed by B. D. Gołębiak, one could even speak 'of a new educational fad or even religion' with respect to school didactics (Gołębniak, 2002, p. 20). Considering academic didactics, this paradigm is nothing like a religion, yet it is heavily promoted and visible in documents concerning the quality of the education process. In student teaching practice, this paradigm is useful primarily through the use of problem-based methods, methods of activation or diverse forms of group work. Irrespective of the issue whether the teaching of students actually utilises paths suggested by psychological or socio-cultural constructivism, or whether this constructivism remains largely on the level of wishes and declarations, almost all agree that it forms the core of demanded, modern academic didactics. It does not need any defence, hence. In my view, arguments should rather be provided in favour of pathways derived from the humanist and behaviourist paradigm.

I believe that an analysis of the effects of teaching provides arguments in favour of the reasonability and complementarity of various approaches to the education process derived from different paradigmatic approaches. Along with the introduction of the Polish National Qualification Frameworks, we have changed the description of objectives of academic teachings that from now on we will be describing using the language of effects of education, placing them in three categories: knowledge, skills (mental and/ or practical ones) and social competences. The relations between effects of education and the pathways available to achieve them, meaning, the strategies of education, are shown by the diagram below:

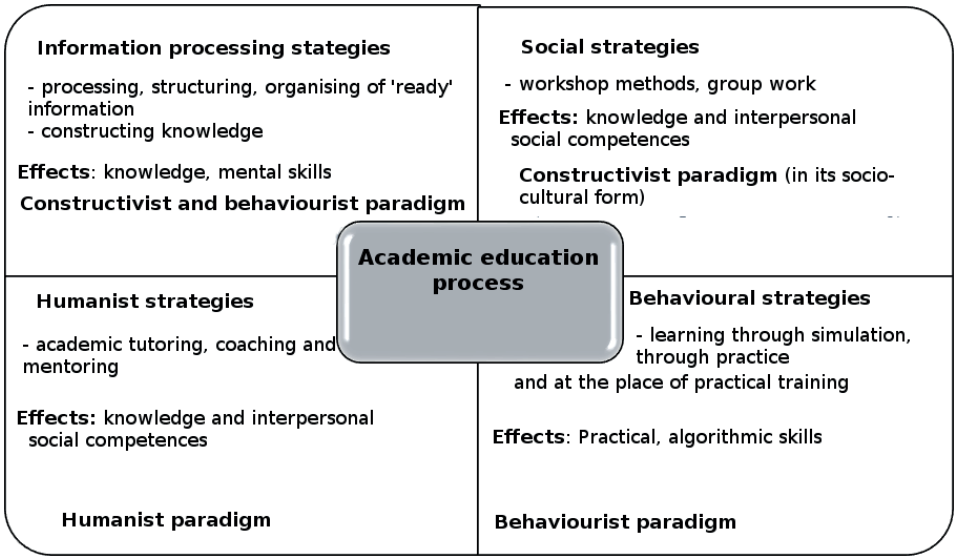

Diagram 1. Strategies of education and effects of education

Source: Own work

The typology of education strategies was taken indirectly from B. D. Gołębniak, who established the main criterion of choice to be the recognition within contemporary psychology of the following patterns of learning (Gołębniak, 2007, pp. 172-173): learning of specific behaviour patterns through external reinforcement, the received feedback (behaviourist strategies), learning by active acquisition, processing and production of information (information processing strategies), learning based on social learning patterns (social strategies) and holistic, personal learning (humanist strategies). The suggestion of B. D. Gołębniak relates directly to the work of B. Joyce, E. Calhoun and D. Hopkins (1999), who indicated four groups of learning models – the information processing models, social models, behavioural models and personality development models. The author, however, forgoes the usage of the „model" category as derived from the behavioural, traditional thinking of education. I believe that by not divulging in unnecessary disputes concerning the definition of the categories of the model, strategy, method or education technique, one could successfully assume the category of „strategy" as broad, encompassing entire sets of planned activities of the teacher and the person learning. In this regard, I would like to point out to the justification and necessity of utilisation of all learning strategies leading to various effects yet ones that are required by us. The process of studying, irrespective of the field, is

always based on the student acquiring knowledge in a given area and the development of a range of cognitive skills. For this reason, we suggest students should participate in lectures, exercises, conversation classes, reading sessions, laboratory classes, workshops and other classic forms of classes. The dispute concerning the education process may focus on the question: Should education be more transmissive in character, providing the student with knowledge ready to be consumed, or should studying be for the person learning a sort of „mental gym". It may be, but not necessarily. Alas, lower taxonomic levels of education effects precisely indicate the knowledge to be acquired by the student, which needs to be learnt almost „by heart". In every area of education, we could point to broad areas of knowledge that is fairly certain, canonical, the mastery in which is the basis for further studies and possible questions as to the solidity of this knowledge. Frequently, the acquisition of this knowledge is a real condition of further studying. In order to achieve the effects thus defined, the education process most frequently sees the usage of lectures and working with text, which help the student gather, process, structure and remember ready information. And this is where transmission and selection activities derived from the behaviourist paradigm may be useful. The achievement of education effects aligned with higher taxonomic levels (e. g. the cognitive taxonomy of B. Bloom) using lectures seems almost impossible to achieve. Hence, most frequently we utilise work justified by the constructivist paradigm and methods supporting the independent construction of knowledge by the student. The best known of these are: Problem-Based Learning (PBL), the project method, the accident method, methods of activation using techniques such as: didactic games, the fishbone system, SWOT analyses, decision trees, metaplans and others. The process of studying is supposed to guide the student not only to the achievement of the predetermined results described in the form of knowledge and abilities, but also support the development of social competences. In analysing entries of education programmes, one can distinguish between at least two categories of social competences tat apply to the interpersonal and the intrapersonal sphere. The first of these would include indications referring to skills related to interpersonal communication, („the student has the ability to discuss, participate in a debate, present results, knowledge, opinions, attitudes, is ready to share experiences") and to the ability to work in a group and with a group („the student is able to work individually and in a team, plan their own and the team's work, is ready to co-operate"). How to achieve the effects of education planned as such? For instance, through the use of paths suggested by social strategies in the form of group work workshops, Team-Based Learning, drama, value analysis models, Oxfordian debates, Socratic dialogue and others, aimed at the utilisation of social learning patterns

and developed in the area of the constructivist-social (socio-cultural) paradigm. The second type of formulation of effects in the category of social competences refers to intra-personal competences, and is expressed by descriptions of competences aimed at own development, at permanent learning, at the improvement of one's professional competences („the student is able to plan their own learning, professional growth, is ready to take over responsibility for their own professional preparation, is oriented towards professional development and permanent improvement of their qualifications"). How to achieve education effects described as such? In my view, by using humanist strategies or components of such strategies, supporting personal development of the learning person and their attitude in favour of professional development. In this regard, academic tutoring in its various forms and scopes is useful. Many fields of education assume also the acquisition by students of specific practical skills, including algorithmic ones. The ideal solution is the usage of methods of education based on learning by simulation, in the laboratory, through practice and at the place of practical learning. It is here, where the behaviourist paradigm in its modern form is needed. The foundations of the establishment of learning strategies encompass the assumption that man is a self-correcting system of communication. Thanks to the feedback received in course of execution of their task and concerned with the alignment with the pattern of the relevant activity as presented beforehand, they may correct their behaviour until they reach the approved standard. Hence, even the criticised traditional approach based on behavioural control, is in my view deeply reasonable, on the condition that we consider the entirety of the various paths of teaching-learning, and forgo the original Skinnerian understanding of behaviourism.

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