



# Medial Turn in Education: Philosophy of Understanding Words and Images

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The research presented in the article aimed to diagnose the profound changes that have taken place in education as a result of the expansion of screen technologies and the introduction of distance interaction in pedagogy. The live-sounding speech of a teacher is the true historical form of paideia as such and the technique of maieutics in particular. Any intermediary, even a writing process, let alone the screen, reduces the effect of pedagogical dialog and produces significant and radical changes in the understanding of meaning. The article deals with the problems of understanding in the pressing context of two turns of educational philosophy: linguistic and medial. The empirical background of these turns is represented, on the one hand, by the increasing extent of the visualized (“printed,” “screened”) word in educational procedures vs. the sounding word, and by the irreversible introduction of screen technologies, digitalization, and distance learning, on the other hand. The consideration is made through the prism of the comprehension-based approach focusing on the values and meanings of professional-pedagogical activity, namely, the systemic approach, the principles of language sign ambivalence, the method of stylistic decoding, the method of analysis of vocabulary definitions, and intertextuality.

**Keywords:** philosophy of education, mediatization of education, comprehension, linguistic turn, screen technologies, screen culture

## INTRODUCTION

Education is a synthesis of the word and the act of demonstration in its genesis: single-time and permanent. The Greek notion of “paideia” includes the connotations of impact and formation in its meaning; the Latin word “lectio” affirms the heart of education—the speech of the teacher, the tutor. In these terms, the education-characteristic locator picked up any shifts that are in the center of interest of the culture and society at every turn in the history of culture as such and of philosophical thought in particular; however, the word and the action-demonstration have universally remained the visual core of the educational procedure.

Ousmanova (2017, p. 7), correlating social reality, cognitive procedures, and the process of education at the moment of the next turn, rightly states: “Epistemological turns, as a rule, have ontological grounds: theoretical optics and a new conceptual language fix the changes that occur in the reality around us. With regard to the digital environment, this statement is doubly true.”

V.V. Nalimov and Zh.A. Drogalina repeatedly emphasized the following idea in their monographic work devoted to the study of the reality of the unreal (or, as we would say today, the virtual), with reference to L. Wittgenstein who once remarked that “philosophy is not theory,

but Deed”: “philosophy is <...> Doing above all” (Nalimov and Drogalina, 1995, p. 75), for “By their fruit you will recognize them” (7:16). From this point of view, the philosophy of education appears as a mindset toward mental activity realized through teaching and education or, stated differently, as an activity process based on the Deed Conceptualization. Moreover, in this context, the fact that secularized experience and the experience revealed principally using the Holy Scripture converge in the same space seems quite justified for one simple reason. Talking of the origins of the European civilization, there were originally only two ways of acquiring knowledge: Aristotle’s way that conditioned the scientific-positivist approach to the world and the Gnostic-Christian way. It is the latter that gave knowledge as experience.

Surprisingly, even today, knowledge as experience is in demand in terms of the method of comprehension (“understanding is experience.”) (Afanasyevsky, 2007, p. 155), which differs from the method of explanation in that the subject of education operates with the sense in the first case and with the meaning in the second case. Although modern communicology ignores the essential difference between these two notions, declaring them synonymous (Matyash et al., 2011), it is within the philosophy of education that this question becomes fundamentally important. Why? To find the answer, let us turn to language as a system marked by dual nature, which, in turn, determines the dual character of the actual subject of education.

## Problem Statement

The students of the 2020s belong to the borderline generation between Z and Alpha, they are “information jungle natives”; they learned to operate gadgets before they could read, some of them—before they could speak. Their classroom teachers are “digital jungle immigrants” (Kalimullina et al., 2021). The meeting of these generations at the university is a collision of two radically different cognitive and conceptualization manners: visual and verbal, holistic and fragmented, and narrative and clipping. Undoubtedly, this collision provokes the formation of a renewed dialog and the mutual influence of the word and the image as translators of knowledge. “The classical education model built on the principle of rigid hierarchy “teacher–student” becomes inefficient in the conditions of the networked informational society. The teacher in the information environment is no longer the only source of information and, consequently, not a sole bearer of knowledge. In the information society, it is not the teacher who is the knowledge holder, but the student—in the capacity of key component of educational environment” (Shcheglova et al., 2017, p. 73).

## Research Questions

The research underlying the article addresses the following questions. How do linguistic and visual types of thinking interact in the modern educational process? How is the cognitive procedure transformed under the influence of visualization and screening?

## Purpose of the Study

- (1) The purpose was to describe the strategy of “lifelong learning” as well as the rapid development of information technologies, which make situations, such as “the elder learning from the young,” a common practice.
- (2) The authors intend to prove that photography and video will take on purely a phatic role; the word will once again become the basis of the educational process.
- (3) Here it is important to note that success in mastering such tacit knowledge does not typically depend on the educational discipline.

## Hypothesis

Education, being always an intergenerational dialog, will change its vector of edification and orientation of knowledge flow from the adult to the young. The screen techniques introduced into the learning process will counterbalance the nature of the content. The authors wish to demonstrate that education, turning into a permanent accompaniment or a kind of methodological shell of a profession, leisure, everyday practices, and aesthetic experience, will inevitably be translated from portable screens. The authors, referring respectfully to Polani (1985), are convinced that tacit knowledge, so important for the formation of a student’s personality, can be transferred either through teaching, that is, in interaction with a teacher-tutor who takes the role of a spiritual master—or through one’s personal experience.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The research methodology is based on the systemic approach, the principles of linguistic sign ambivalence, the method of stylistic decoding, the method of analysis of dictionary definitions, as well as intertextuality. At the same time, the reference point for handling the posed questions was as follows:

- Wilhelm Dilthey’s comprehension psychology which aims to uncover the correlation between the individual’s inner world and the historical, social, and cultural values that constitute the context of one’s existence;
- Gadamer’s (1988) hermeneutic methodology, with its focus on orientation toward the Other, the ongoing dialog: “...in the course of conversation, the interlocutor and his opinions become clear to us after we have clarified his point of view and horizon, and we no longer need to understand ourselves through his prism.”

The fact that understanding is something for which people enter into a relationship—since it actualizes the situation of a dialog—was advocated earlier by F. Schleiermacher. Further on, the dialogical concept of humanitarian knowledge became the center of Bakhtin’s (1995) methodology. The latter defined cognition as decoding of texts (everything represents a complex of texts, even the Other is a text). Therefore, pedagogical interaction constitutes questioning, a Socratic dialog. No less significant in this context was the reliance on the modern complex conclusions made by the researchers of comprehension pedagogy, Senko and Frolovskaya (2007).

## FINDINGS

Acknowledging the truth of the provision that human birth is determined by the presence of a biopsychic structure of the personality whose properties initiate the physiological features of the brain (Platonov, 1986), the authors offer the following consideration. Similar to any biological organism, any newborn human being—Petrovsky (2007) calls it an individual as opposed to the personality—is a bearer of a self-organizing natural system (a mechanism) designed to facilitate one's maximum adaptation to the environment. We are talking about the individual informational system consisting of:

- (1) the elements located within the system, that are formed through processing and storage of information coming from outside (Erbilgin and Şahin, 2021; Pogosyan, 2021);
- (2) the elements through which the information contained within the individual system is transmitted to the outside (Volkova, 2017; Bada and Jita, 2021).

The central task of such a mechanism is the realization of the natural programme that is invariable for all living organisms—to survive and thereby to ensure natural diversity. Notably, the diversity of organisms engenders a variety of ways to transmit information—from squeaking, mooing, croaking, howling, emitting specific smell, and so on, to the act of speaking. At the same time, the communicative interaction of any organism with another one takes place based on a language that acts at the level of a reflex. As far as the individual is concerned, Humboldt (1984) regarded the said linguistic reflex as an abstract, bare articulatory sense. Therefore, the act of speaking cannot be regarded as a criterion of impassable border between the world of animals and the world of people for the reason that, operating with language signs reflexively, the individual, like any other organism, subordinates to the natural programme. Accordingly, any meaning used by an individual serves only one purpose: to satisfy its biological needs (Volkova P. et al., 2020; Volkova P. S. et al., 2020; Demichev, 2021).

Moreover, while pursuing a purely selfish interest, an individual may be motivated to do things that, on the face of it, are seen as definitely positive by those around him—for instance, mastering two foreign languages, doing well at school or in sports, or volunteering. But in reality, the knowledge assimilated in the process of education becomes free from mercantilism only when it contributes to “enriching the personality,” being analogous to Love which inevitably destroys any ego (Nalimov and Drogalina, 1995, p. 165). As Levin (1994, p. 268) writes, “the personality is a property or an ability of a person to set himself aside” (to retire to the background), to take interest in things that do not concern him.”

It is no coincidence that placing the emphasis not so much on the form of knowledge as on the learning process, scholars arrive at the idea: “We can know more than we can tell” (Polani, 1985, p. 62). Stated differently, the tacit knowledge, so important for learner's identity formation, can be transmitted either through learning, that is, in interaction with a pedagogue-tutor who acts as a spiritual teacher or through personal experience. Success in

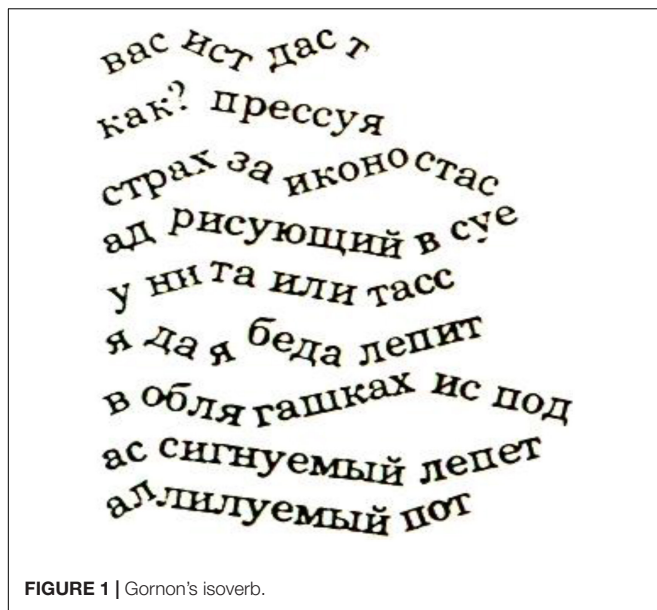
mastering such implicit knowledge must not typically depend on the educational discipline. Referring to Polani (1985), it should be noted that, being a scientist-chemist, he insisted that, as to mastering a foreign language, the transfer of tacit knowledge can be efficient only on one condition: the study of grammar must be subordinated to verbal experience.

Possibly, the access to the sought (implicit) knowledge which awakens the truly human nature is connected with the individual conceptual (semantic) system which represents a process of transformation of the natural structure (a mechanism) effected by the subject of education (Balganova, 2021). It is the organization of a self-organizing natural mechanism that acquires the status of mental activity within which language is recognized at the level of reflexion. The authors believe that actualization of reflexive experience takes place, on the one hand, through the decoding of a language sign functioning within the framework of an individual information system at the level of meaning, and on the other hand—through subsequent encoding of experience obtained as a result of decoding.

As far as the decoding procedure correlates with the method of vocabulary definition analysis, it is clear that, by making the field of perception increasingly vague, the subject of education inevitably exposes himself to the influence of emotions, thus actualizing non-verbal experience (Reikovskiy, 1979). As a result, a precedent is set for a return to the starting formation point of the individual information system, this time not on the unconscious (reflexive) level, but following the conscious intention to find personal meaning within a range of “indifferent meanings” (Leontiev and Sokolova, 2010; Garcia, 2021). As to the subsequent operation of encoding the experience gained as a result of decoding a linguistic sign, its need is conditioned by the fact that the sought meaning, being initially non-verbalized (Vilyunasa and Gippenreiter, 1984), requires embodiment, thus acquiring the status of “meaning for myself,” which simultaneously turns out to be available to others (Leontiev and Sokolova, 2010).

It should be pointed out that any personal sense as a subjective phenomenon, no matter what form it takes—verbalized or non-verbalized (as in the case of music representation art or choreography)—is inherently intersubjective. To confirm the presented position, we should dwell on several points. In particular, whereas the individual information system is a functioning substance, that is, is apparent, the individual conceptual (semantic) system is virtual. At the same time, its realization is impossible outside the individual information system within which it was engendered. Stated differently, the individual conceptual (semantic) system, unlike the individual information system existing *a priori*, is a kind of assignment (Cantu et al., 2021; Isaikina et al., 2021).

It should be emphasized that the situation in which what is given and what is formed owing to this givenness as an assignment entirely corresponds to the situation referred to by Bakhtin (1994) in his work “The problem of content, material, and form of a literary art work” as co-existence of the given and the created, where the given is synonymous with the text or a cognitive moment thereof, while the created is synonymous with the context as an ethical aspect. Stated differently, co-existence



is an ongoing process of reconciling the neutral, text-subjectified knowledge and its “here and now”—revealed value which is acquired through the deobjectification procedure. Devoid of any mercantilism, the sought value appears in its universality as an indispensable good for everybody.

To exemplify the co-existence of the initially opposed given and created, text and context, and cognitive and ethical, A. Gornon’s isoverb is demonstrated (**Figure 1**).

The given, or the cognitive point of Gornon’s text, can be represented as follows:

- broken discrete lines;
- signs of a macaronic poem where different languages (in Gornon’s case, German and Russian) are combined in the same space;
- clearly spelled out meanings—“what is it,” “how,” “I,” “fear,” “iconostasis,” “hell,” “trouble,” “vainly,” “tass,” “babble,” “sweat”—which in total constitute sheer nonsense.

Having handled the language signs relevant for the individual information system, we proceed to the organization of the conceptual (semantic) system, focusing on the co-existence of the given and the created, the cognitive and the ethical.

*The double questioning, in both German and Russian languages, taking place at the moment when any meaning is lost in the surging waves of the scattered words, creates a situation of panic and instability. The loss of the core of one’s identity (compare with the Cartesian “cogito ergo sum”), along with the vain attempt to hold on in the stream of incomprehension, give rise to a sense of fear and self-doubt. At the same time, the disrupted spelling of a number of words striving to transcend their limits in order to experience the act of rebirth, overcoming their alienation from the speech representator, harbor a hope for regaining the former integrity of a Self created in the image and semblance of the Creator. How is this possible?—To work without letup with realization of vitiosity of idle talk not supported by concrete work, for it is only the child’s babble*

*instinct with purity and delight before the world that is the real value not requiring justification. Everything else is not important, for the humble prayer is salvation from all fears and misfortunes.*

It seems that in general the ethical point of Gornon’s text sounds in unison with the position of Martin Buber (“not to seek God, but reveal Him in each of one’s actions”) or Martin Heidegger (“God is revealed within His creation”). In our view, another interpretation of the being-considered isoverb, similar in terms of the above ethical aspect, can be found:

The author’s broken lines and ruptures initiating total instability point to tense soul searching, at times painful, reflection on one’s place in life, which requires rejection of conventional truths, cultural hackneyed patterns, and art stereotypes. The panic terror and fear of the unknown force the consciousness to “cling” to the information known to the majority (let us remind that the acronym TASS refers to a major Russian news agency, which provides the illusion of stability by the permanence of its periodicals).

*“In the end, the hustle and bustle of daily life turn into hell, since the increasingly accumulating fear of not being on time, not getting things done, not fitting in, not calculating properly eventually proves to be an impossible burden making us seek protection from heaven in hope of shifting our burdens to it. It is then, in the privacy of own mind, that we begin to realize that in reality “the king is naked!” (“in underwear”). Stated differently, the so-called attributes of success turn into a screen hiding nothing behind it, for the attempt to find the meaning in one’s life leads to a rambling “I do what the others do.” In this context, the phrase “assigned prattle” suggests that our idea of happiness is often a result of mindless acceptance of an attitude replicated by advertising and other media, Yandex and similar search engines at our own expense: we pay for not straining to think, by doing as the majority advises.*

*The phrase “hallelujah sweat” helps to achieve conscious acceptance of truth according to which finding one’s Self has nothing to do with a mob mentality since it requires courage, will and character from each of us, so that we could take personal responsibility for everything that happens to us—as this labor is the only justification for our existence” (Volkova et al., 2018).*




Let us agree that in both cases the ethical moment, as an analog of personal meaning imbued with a value-based attitude to life, appears to be of a markedly universal character due to the following circumstance. Etymologically, the lexeme “meaning” means a message, a missive that came to us from the depths of the centuries (Chechulin, 2011). It seems it is this message that is the basis for the continuity of generations, uniting the human race into a kind of community. Here the sense acts as an equivalent of the language which was associated by Humboldt (1984) with the spirit of a nation. Being marked by continuity precluding realization of any natural need conditioned by a current moment, this language proves to be a part of the individual conceptual system.

Returning to the fundamental mismatch of the sense and the meaning, which rules out the possibility of treating them as synonymous, let us summarize the most important points (**Table 1**).

**TABLE 1** | Comparative characteristics of meaning and sense.

The meaning	The sense
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• discrete;</li> <li>• utilitarian;</li> <li>• flawed by virtue of its one-dimensionality;</li> <li>• marked by automaticity of use;</li> <li>• manifests the language reflex experience;</li> <li>• initiates disagreement (“everyone has his/her own truth”);</li> <li>• subjective in nature;</li> <li>• is always given;</li> <li>• is realistically pertinent.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• continual;</li> <li>• useless from the point of view of a natural organism;</li> <li>• holistic through the coexistence of knowledge and value;</li> <li>• eliminates the automaticity of use;</li> <li>• manifests the experience of reflection;</li> <li>• initiates agreement (“all truth is one”);</li> <li>• inter-subjective nature;</li> <li>• is always an assignment;</li> <li>• is realistically virtual.</li> </ul>

**TABLE 2** | Fragment of practical work.

Using your knowledge of the history of Modern philosophy and using philosophical terminology, determine which philosophical illustration or metaphor is encoded in the drawing? Name the author who used it, reveal its philosophical meaning	
Image for the student (The drawings are made by the authors of this article)	The teacher's commentary-response (not included in the assignment)
	Eros and Thanatos are Z. Freud's categories.
	Friedrich Nietzsche's Apollo-Dionysus model.
	The religious type of existence described by S. Kierkegaard through the example of the Old Testament parable about the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham.

Although the education—deprived of the integrity of teaching and upbringing (as a guarantee of harmonious formation of a personality), ignoring the need of teaching reflection and rejecting the universal values—seems not only absurd, but also destructive for young learners, it is this kind of education, dominated by digitalization and, consequently, formalization, that has become the hallmark of our time (Evans-Amalu and Claravall, 2021; Kapustina, 2021; Movchan et al., 2021).

The problem of synthesizing the verbal and the visual in the teaching process today is not a formal aspect, but a condition for posing new epistemological questions: “The culture of the interface, the spread of visual representation technologies, the increasing density of visual translation produced in various fields of human activity—all this forces humanitarians not only to reflect on the development of a new research scene but also to

make changes to the usual methods of knowledge production” (Shevelev, 2017, p. 138). The transfer of meanings is supported by the visualization of the text—accompanying the verbal component of the text with visual fragments. The fragmentary perception of information and the desire to assimilate more information per unit of time leads to the fact that an image takes the place of the text in its usual verbal form.

A modern feature of the visualization of educational content is the creation of a multimodal educational text (i.e., involving several modes of translation of meanings simultaneously: textual, auditory, and visual). At the same time, the visual component of the multimodal text is dominant. As an example of such a training task, we present a fragment of practical work included in the online course of one of the authors of this article (Table 2).

Being aware that those who are aware of the catastrophic situation for future generations are not in the position to change the existing state of affairs, the authors outlined some suggestions that allow for an optimistic prognosis.

As the authors believe, the conditions for rewarding cognitive work of the pedagog and the student in the context of education that is being intensively shifted to the distance learning format are represented by a number of dissimilar procedures. (1) Education, being factually an intergenerational dialog, will change the vector of edification and orientation of the knowledge flow from the adult to the young. The strategy of “lifelong learning,” as well as the rapid development of information technologies, tends to make situations, such as “the elder learning from the young,” a common practice. (2) The screen techniques introduced into the learning process will counterbalance the nature of the content. The photography and video will take on purely a phatic role; the word will once again become the basis of the educational process. (3) The education, turning into a permanent accompaniment or a kind of methodological shell of a profession, leisure, everyday practices, and aesthetic experience, will inevitably be translated from portable screens. This will inevitably and rapidly give rise to a new ethic and a new screen-specific academic etiquette.

Consequently, the work toward restoring comprehension or the creation of new conditions for understanding lies in the formation of the axiological sphere as a way of transforming digital technology into a toolkit for the pedagogy

of understanding. From this point of view, the actualization of the axiological context in the process of learning new knowledge can be considered as the sole possibility to preserve the integrity of an individual in a harmonizing dialog. Securing the trinity of feeling, mind, and will in each of the communication participants, the sought dialog exceeds the framework of local communication and acquires the status of global methodology permeating the entire educational space. Otherwise, the value of information as such will inevitably absorb the value of the individual himself, following which education, which implicitly aims at mindset formation, degenerates to the level of exchange of information evaluated by its quantity instead of quality.

## CONCLUSION

The authors suggest that the dual nature of the text, recognizable through its discrete (informational) capacity and in its continuous (i.e., semantic) guise, makes V.V. Nalimov's idea about the isomorphism of the individual and the text true (Nalimov and Drogalina, 1995). From this point of view, the philosophy of education as an experience of mental activity is unattainable without recourse to cultural texts represented by verbal and non-verbal patterns. With regard to the total reduction of humanities at higher educational establishments, every effort should be made to retain the following disciplines university-wide: Russian Language and Culture of Speech, Foreign Language, Culture Studies, and Philosophy. In the process of teaching, it is necessary to eliminate the need to work with ready-made forms, relying on the information freely available on the Internet.

It seems it will be more important to make an accent on educational actors' conceptualization of verbal, non-verbal, and

polycode discourses to maintain the balance between the sense and meaning, the verbal and non-verbal, discrete and continual, rational and emotional, cognitive and ethical, and finite and infinite, necessary for full-value work of their consciousness. Then the Deed based on the Image can be viewed from the position of maintaining the trinity of the given, the created and their coexistence by a spiritually awake educational actor, where the sought trinity is a correlate of the rhetorical canon. Within the framework of the latter, the ethical moment of the text is akin to ethos, the cognitive aspect—to logos, and their co-existence—to pathos. It is in this case that philosophy of education is manifested solely through rhetoricisation of the latter, owing to which the school of word specific of the present time can be transformed into a school of thought, constituting “a greatest act of cultural development” (Shcherba, 1957, p. 55).

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

PV and SG were engaged in the formation of the concept. NS and VK selected the empirical material. The analysis of practical observations of the correlation of verbal and visual in the process of digitalization of education was carried out by the method of brain-storming. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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