

**PEHPP 2019****Pedagogical Education: History, Present Time, Perspectives****CRISIS OF LIBERAL MEANINGS OF CONTEMPORARY  
EDUCATION**

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*Abstract*

The article presents the issue of impact of neoliberal ideas on the contemporary Russian educational theory and practice. The Russian system of education fully demonstrates the processes of transformation of education from a field of spiritual culture into the socio-cultural system aimed at the investing into the human capital. The authors see the roots in the contradictory methodological orientation of the construct of the Russian social modernization after the collapse of the USSR. It is underlined that the influence is caused by the absence of clear ideology in the post-Soviet Russia, destruction of the previous value system, neglecting the cultural and historic traditions, uncritical assimilating the Western pedagogical experience. The paper examines the realization of the neoliberal narratives (freedom, self, educational services, competition, technologization) in the contemporary Russian education. The authors show the emergence of the criticism ‘points’ of neoliberal education in the Western pedagogical community as well. First of all, unacceptability of education capitalization, introduction of competition, dehumanization of a person as an educational services consumer is realized. One can see that in the USA and the Western Europe there appear the objective tendencies of rejection of the neoliberal globalism values and the development of the traditionalist paradigms of education. The paper stresses the necessity of the scientific analysis and professional pedagogical reflection on the significant contradictions, which show the crisis of neoliberal developments in the Russian education.

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## 1. Introduction

One of the features of modern social development is that before our eyes, the field of education is actively transforming from the spiritual, cultural and social system of society into the socio-economic one, and is now considered as an investment in human capital. Russian education fully demonstrates these processes, the origins of which lie, among other things, in the uncritical assimilation of Western liberal ideology and the choice in favor of a Western, primarily American, educational culture.

Neoliberalism began to take shape in the late 70s of the twentieth century as a response to state intervention in a market economy and an attack on the social rights of citizens. This was, first of all, the Anglo-Saxon economic doctrine, but soon the ideas of neoliberalism began to be widely applied in education, healthcare, sports, and even in religious activities.

Harvey (2007) considers that the process of neoliberalization provoked “creative destruction” at the level of state and government institutions. Profound changes were also in the division of labor, social relations, social security, technological development, lifestyle and even human reproductive activity, institutions of citizenship and household habits.

The fundamental values of neoliberalism proclaimed the individual freedom of man, his right to use his abilities in a competitive market and bear responsibility for it. Life in all its manifestations was proposed to be accepted as a global market.

These processes in Western ideology coincided with the last years of the existence of the Soviet Union and its collapse. The need for a change in the political vector and economic course in post-Soviet Russia was so great that the doctrine of neoliberalism turned out to be very helpful. In education, the "creative destruction" of the entire Soviet and Russian classical heritage was justified by innovative creation, and what we took for the democratization of education, in fact, turned out to be the assimilation of the values of neoliberalism.

## 2. Problem Statement

The authors set themselves the task of analytically substantiating and identifying a number of trends characterizing the value-semantic, organizational, substantive, technological signs of the crisis of modern Russian education, modernized on the basis of neoliberalism. In order to become sure in the objectivity of the revealed trends, the authors made an attempt to compare how these aspects of the "construction" of education are perceived in Western studies.

## 3. Research Questions

The study of the indicated problem required a theoretical understanding of several issues:

- When and why were neoliberal ideas formed in pedagogy of Russia?
- What are the main characteristics of neoliberal trends in modern Russian education?
- How does the Western pedagogical community assess the manifestations of neoliberalism in education?

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this work is to reveal the manifestations of the meanings of neoliberalism in modern Russian education, to show their crisis state and to point out the importance of serious scientific and social reflection on this phenomenon.

#### **5. Research Methods**

The following research methods were used: retrospective analysis of the concepts of “new pedagogical thinking” and “personality-oriented education”, during which the basic directions of attributing Western liberal meanings of education were identified; source study method; comparative description; comparative method for identifying the “points” of the crisis of liberal characteristics in Russian and Anglo-Saxon pedagogical theory and practice; linguistic analysis for the correct interpretation of terms; analysis of communication experience with teachers and students, personal observations of the authors who are practicing university professors. The theoretical premises of the analysis were the statements and concepts:

- of anthropological mission of Russian education;
- of cultural historical theory;
- of social constructing.

As a leading methodological guideline, the provision on education as an integral and purposeful process of the formation and development of all the essential forces and abilities of a person has been adopted.

#### **6. Findings**

It is impossible to understand the crisis problem of modern Russian education without a retrospective analysis of innovative processes in pedagogical theory and practice of the last years of the USSR. In the period from 1986 to 1991, a powerful social and pedagogical movement took shape in the Soviet Union: the Union of Teachers was created, clubs of creative pedagogy were organized throughout the country under the supervision of the Teacher’s Newspaper, and competitions among authors’ schools were held. After the All-Union Congress of Education Workers (December 1988) where the concept of the development of education was adopted, the main guidelines of the theory of communist education went away from teaching: comprehensive and harmonious development of the personality of the builder of communism, collective education, the upbringing of patriotism and proletarian internationalism, the combination of polytechnic education and professional learning with productive labor. Their place was taken by the ideas of the democratization of education, the focus of public education on eternal, universal values, and the individualization of the educational process.

The euphoria of radical renewal so captured the pedagogical community that the understanding of the main guideline of these innovative processes - the goal - has disappeared from sight. The leaders of perestroika in education saw it in democratization, humanization, ideological transformations in the spirit

of “strengthening the Leninist principles of the socialist school”, strengthening the developmental principles of education, and updating the administrative system of education.

The collapse of the USSR devalued these educational goals and generated an active interest in Western models of education. In post-Soviet Russia, numerous non-state educational centers are opening: Montessori schools, Waldorf schools, American free and home schools. At the same time, a new pedagogical doctrine of personality-oriented education is being formed.

The theory of personality-oriented education openly distances itself from any ideology, but the axiological imperatives of education declared by it (freedom; the absolute subjectivity of the child in the educational process; exaggerating the value of socialization to the detriment of upbringing) show a clear inclination toward the philosophical values of American pragmatic pedagogy and humanistic psychology. Personally oriented education methodologically enriched the traditional classroom lesson form and subject content with new ideas:

- focus on the development of the personality and individuality of the student;
- centering on the personality experience of the child as a component of the educational process;
- freedom of choice of activity, educational programs, technologies;
- motivation to comprehend activities and relationships, to reflect, to manifest efforts for self-development and self-fulfillment;
- subject-subject relations of participants in the educational process.

The implementation of a personality-oriented education as an alternative model aroused high hopes for overcoming the “atavisms” of Soviet education (Serikov, 2004).

A sincere desire to find a “third way” that combines the achievements of Soviet education with democratic transformations and does not oblige to profess any ideology, has led Russian pedagogy in the field of neoliberalism. There is nothing accidental: neoliberalism has already actively developed in the West as an ideology of globalization and has declared the values of the world order system, and economic, political and cultural integration, under the guidance of the United States (Harvey, 2007; Hill & Kumar, 2009).

Having adopted the philosophy and ethics of neoliberalism, its social concept, Russian pedagogy opened up for a penetration of a market interpretation of the very nature of the educational process. Let's pay attention to the narratives of neoliberalism and their implementation in Russian education.

1. *Freedom* from collective demands, discipline, authority pressure, state strategies and programs, any influence at all. The possibility to evaluate economic effect of investments in upbringing area as a purposeful educational activity is doubted, so upbringing must leave the modern educational agenda and give place to positive socialization.

Analysing the problem in the context of the Russian pedagogical tradition Sidorkin (2014) writes:

As soon as we cease considering the complex of practices and theories through the single prism of semi-mythical notion of “upbringing”, a veil will fall from our eyes. Immediately we will discover lots of treasures neighboring the mountains of garbage accumulated. The next step will be to

recomprehend the potential of the past upbringing from the point of view of tasks of economic and social development of the country (p. 291).

2. “*Self*”. Neoliberalism considers every person as a free entrepreneur that builds *self-dependently* his (her) life like a business. Under the conditions of “knowledge economy”, a person should self-invest in accumulation of his (her) “human capital”, i.e. a person should develop economically significant qualities of his (her) personality (purposefulness, perseverance, performance), take care of his (her) health, motivate himself (herself) to acquire new competencies demanded in the job market (Sturges, 2015). Distorted idea of subjectivity as a necessity of permanent self-evaluation of one’s own economic value is cultivated. The statement is formed: the more one develops one’s qualities, the more successful one becomes, the higher one’s life quality is, the higher one’s salary is (Lissovoy, 2013).

3. Market interpretation of education generated the idea of it as an *educational service*. This market mechanism creates axiological contradictions in education (Slobodchikov, 2009). It is supposed to isolate an utility result in one’s pedagogical activity (which has been historically considered as a mission in our culture), this result is supposed to be paid, while a spiritual and moral meaning is ignored (Juignet, 2018).

4. *Competition* which actively determines relations between students and teachers, making these relations submarket ones. In the conditions of liberalization of educational relations in the family and school, there is a distrust of each other, the confidence of students in the authority of the teacher. In fact, the “equality of opportunity” theology turns out to be an economic and social segregation in education.

5. Hypertrophic *technologization* in education which is considered as a set of management techniques based on market logics. Competition in the market of educational services forces new technologies constantly and in a short time, the technologic component of educational process becomes less and less manageable, causes instability, and destroys personal interaction between participants of educational process (Jones, 2019).

If one thinks about it, it becomes obvious that under the slogan of effective modernization of domestic education we have its undisguised neoliberalization.

It worth noting that in the last time the ideas of neoliberalization underwent re-estimation, and they are being criticized in West social and humanitarian areas. What aspects are defined as “targets” for critics?

Neoliberalism fills with market meanings all areas of education, all its essential characteristics.

Van der Walt (2017) stresses in this context that:

A person becomes rational, making a choice as a consumer of services and goods which include education as well. Herewith, people are more and more captured by the idea that life, including education, must be built like a business, in order to make it efficient. Neoliberalism acts gradually and furtively, colonizing and even closing the mind of a person, his (her) consciousness (p. 6).

Discourse of human capital inspires excessive and false hopes to people, especially young. Often, pursuit for “self-capitalization” turns out to be ineffective: it can’t become a social lift and increase the wellbeing.

Increase in economic pressure of state on schools, demands to raise the parameters of academic performance, to enhance the competition, to lower expenses, and to get a profit.

Gobby and Walker (2017) come to the conclusion that neoliberalism resulted in excessive cultivation of the ideas of efficiency, actuality, individual freedom, and individual choice, getting a profit, entrepreneurship, competition, achievement, estimation/measurement, rating, and ranging, flourishing, and democratization, self-dependence, materialism, and growing inequality and injustice among social groups and people. All this happens in the educational context.

Neoliberals regard education as a tool of sorting and ranging students. Education, achievements and opportunities are regarded through the prism of competition, this distracting attention from the true goals of (Van der Walt, 2017).

Ideas of “trans-human education”, when the emptiness in knowledge, relations, values is easily compensated with modern IT-technologies.

Portelli and Konecny (2013) underline the instrumentalization of education due to the influence of neoliberalism:

School system, organized in accordance with the logics of neoliberalism, and relying up on results, instrumentalizes teachers, dehumanizes students, and transforms the classroom into the space of performance and efficiency parameters. In such a way the educational experience is denied, as well a social and cultural aspects of education, not even speaking that solving social problems, discussing political problems, and criticizing culture are not permitted. Neoliberal ethos of modern school not only hinders democratic processes, but promotes its own agenda by means of sanctions and punishments for the sake of reporting, and recognizing achievements (p. 89).

## 7. Conclusion

One may distract from differences in interpretations of characteristics of neoliberalism and its impact on education in works of Russian and Western authors. However, it is impossible to miss the enough obvious coincidence in criticism of meanings of neoliberalism and rejection of the market status of education. This puts into question the exaggerated trend to pseudo-reference models of Western, especially North-American, education.

It becomes obvious that the society which ignores the ethical modality of ideology in education, and drives upbringing out of educational process can hardly remain the human society. Their search allowed us to notice that many negative processes in modern Russian education are related to alterations in its meanings for the sake of neoliberal ideology.

The under taken theoretical analysis allows formulating a number of contradictions which reflect the crisis of neoliberal meanings in the situation of modern Russian education, the society being aware of them.

1. Contradiction between the declarations of state policy on the inadmissibility of discrimination in the field of education and the organization of educational institutions as an open competitive environment.

2. Contradiction between the aspirations to prepare a “successful person” (entrepreneurial, socially mobile, competitive, tolerant) and the loss of orientation towards the upbringing of the personality, which

ensures the development of genuine subjectivity (the ability to realize one's personal potential, giving oneself to people, have beliefs, resist relativization of values).

3. Contradiction between the declarations of freedom as the most important marker of neoliberal education and the departure of educational practice from common moral guidelines, boundaries of permissiveness, the provision of students with the freedom to choose good and evil, situational moral assessment of their actions, the expanding practice of bullying in the educational environment.

4. Contradiction between the desire of educational institutions for efficiency and the assessment of these efforts on economic indicators and on formal achievements in the form of USE (Unified State Exam) results, the number of subject Olympiad diplomas and graduates entering universities.

The analysis of the problem we have chosen confirms that the situation in Russian education is not catastrophic, but serious scientific reflection is needed that would allow realizing the axiological potential of pedagogical science and practice. As it is known, it is in the human nature to search for the meaning of his (her) activity, and the meaning is directly related to the goal. The time has come to responsibly comprehend the goals of modern education in Russia.

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