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**HISTORICAL-PEDAGOGICAL METHODOLOGY: SQUEEZED  
BETWEEN HISTORY AND  
EDUCATION?**

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***Abstract***

The history of pedagogy observes the process of education theories and practices evolution and, revealing “the most important”, which survives through the times, could bridge the gap between the phenomena of the present and the past. The present research is intended to reveal high didactic and gnostic value of the history of pedagogy, which is often underestimated by both historical and educational sciences. Generally, the given theoretical investigation will be set within the frame of conceptual modelling of historical and pedagogical thought, both drawing on specific historical and pedagogical scientific methods. Specifically, it is largely confined to the interpretive process, routed in the critical approach and the hermeneutics methodology. As the result, we can state that the historical-pedagogical approach in education enhances deeper comprehension of the current educational theory and practice, allowing: to systematize pedagogical phenomena, to formulate and solve educational problems today, to identify the reference models, the norms of theoretical and practical pedagogic activity.

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**Keywords:** The history of pedagogy, the scope of the history of pedagogy, the historical-pedagogical methodology, the history of education.



## 1. Introduction

The history of education traces the process of human pedagogy evolution and its consciousness development, thus, might be perceived as a way of its “being”. Education, in the course of its historical development, reveals its nature, as only “the most important” survives through the times. In this sense, this is the main cognitive function of the history of education. It highlights pedagogical problems and offers various ways to solve them. Indeed, all current educational problems stem from the past, so we should seek for the ideas which could be helpful today (Astafieva, 2018a, p. 56). The history of education is the history of how people used to set and solve pedagogical problems, the history of educational success and failures over generations, the history of human approaches to education and fostering. Thus, it can be perceived not only as an introduction to the current educational theory and practice, but also as an essential part of the modern education effective functioning and evolution. This “historical gaze” offers insights on the common ways in posing and resolving educational problems, both in pedagogical theory and practice. The history of education allows grasping the origins, determinants, nature and specific features of educational historical trends. And it also traces interrelationship between innovations and traditions in education, which is a matter of a paramount importance at any times.

## 2. Problem Statement

The history of education is the science about the changes within educational present reality, which is a part of human educational actions. Thus, it involves changes of all the dimensions of social sphere. The main tasks of the history of education are: to reconstruct, to describe, to interpret, to explain, to organize, to grasp, to reflect education reality today through the prism of its changes and historical evolution, as they “the present” always originates from “the past” (Kornetov, 2018a). The main purpose of the history of education is to rationally organize the endless diversity of ever evolving pedagogical past. However, the process of the educational past rationalization is very complex and multilayered, as it is framed by the researchers perspectives on: 1) what is educational past, the history of education and historical-educational knowledge, 2) the extent of the past cognoscibility, 3) the ways how to gain, to interpret, to conceptualize historical-educational knowledge, 4) what is historical-educational source, which methods could be used to approach it, 5) what are the aims of reconsidering educational past (Astafieva, 2018b, p. 36). Moreover, interpreting educational past is largely confined by the actual pedagogical cognition of the researcher, the dominating educational culture and, by the current social-political and cultural contexts (Kornetov, 2017, p. 76). On top of everything, the researcher always looks through the prism of his personal worldview and methodological position (Dalakoura, 2016).

Consequently, the process of historical-pedagogical reconstruction involves many layers of methodological filters and respective problems (Howlett, 2019), which are to be logically organised according to the purposes of the research.

## 3. Research Questions

The history of education observes the origins, essence, directions and interconnections of historical educational trends. The main task of the history of education is not only to reveal, reconstruct, interpret

and reassess the past (which is believed to be its traditional aim), but also to implement this past into the present, and to find in this past certain incentives for the future development (Theobald, 2009). In this regard, the given investigation seeks to answer the following research questions: What theoretical and practical benefits does pedagogical past scrutiny bring to the modern pedagogical science and practice? What major theoretical and methodological problems and limitations are acute in the discipline today?

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

Considering the strong interrelation between the history of pedagogy and pedagogy itself, the general purpose of the study is to provide a deeper understanding of the scope and basic methodological problems of the discipline. Given that the history of education and education itself turn out to be closely intertwined, forming a convergent unity, we advocate that pedagogical past both comprises “what is gone” (studied by the history) and “what is left” today, as a part of educational heritage. Though this legacy is sometimes unconsciously perceived as something trivial, neglecting the fact that this is rooted in the past, it still has a strong direct impact on the contemporary education. Thus, the main aim of the research is to demonstrate that the historical-educational approach boosts deeper comprehension of the current educational theory and practice.

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

The present research, drawing on historical scientific methods, is largely confined to interpretive process and is based on critical approach and hermeneutics methodology. The given theoretical investigation will be set within the frame of conceptual modelling of historical and pedagogical thought. Today historical-pedagogical research encounters a range of theoretical limitations. Such fundamental gnostic issues as construction and validation of cognition, subjectivity of historical narrative and evidence were inherited from historical science and remain unresolved. From pedagogical perspective, the most common research problems are: identifying the object and the scope of the research itself, in terms of what should be included in the process of “education”, “upbringing” etc.

Generally, the authors’ approach is based on the perspective that the past, the future and the present of the educational theory and practice are intertwined. This scientific historical approach allows: 1) to make a clear distinction between insignificant pedagogical events and actions and something abruptly changing the course and nature of educational theory and practice, 2) to explain why certain momentous educational events occur in a certain place at a certain time, 3) to establish causal relationship between pedagogical events.

#### **6. Findings**

The scope of the history of education, at a first glance, could be perceived as a dynamic educational reality of the past, which is the part of ever evolving human society, including its spiritual and practical aspects. In other words, the history of education is exploring pedagogical past at different levels, from specific mental and practical educational actions and events to very broad and vague concepts,

models, schemes, trends and traditions of the global historical and educational process (Jeroen, Dekker, & Simon, 2014).

That is why, when defining the scope of the history of education, it is vital to include the modern educational reality and to take into account the trends aimed at the future. Interestingly, pedagogical activity is creating certain pedagogical reality, both ideal and material, centered around: 1) a changing human nature, 2) pedagogical conditions of these changes, 3) a broad pedagogical context of these conditions, 4) aims, ways, means and methods of these changes, 5) ways of these changes comprehension and conceptualization, analysis, interpretation, assessment and projecting. Meanwhile, pedagogical actions, inducing these changes, could be both direct and purposeful, and implicit, being indirectly generated by certain conditions, resources, place and spatial environment.

Pedagogical activity consists of pedagogical actions; one-way actions and two-way interactions. Pedagogical action and pedagogical reality, generated by this action, are always inextricably linked to the historical context of the time. This context is determined by a set of preconditions, external and internal. Internal determinants are pedagogical by their nature. For instance, various educational ideas, concepts, theories, systems, technologies and methods are formulated as a result of a reflection over practical pedagogical experience. Also, educational practice could set certain pedagogical problems, provoking further theoretical debate. Pedagogical concepts, in their turn, could have a major impact on practical aspects of education.

External preconditions, in their turn, in spite of close interconnections with education, are not directly pedagogical, though still affecting education. These preconditions could be found in every dimension of social life. For instance, economics regards education as a means of creating a subject of economic activity, and supplies financial resources for creating educational dimension. Social structure determines various aspects of education, from ideological to theoretical reasoning. Politics impacts education, depending on interests and aims of various social-political groups, and makes the decision of interference or non-interference in the course of education. Culture of the society is the main meaningful source of education, as every person through education, inevitably absorbs a certain cultural background. Philosophy, religion, ideology and anthropology have an effect on educational values, ideals and aims (Sköld & Vehkalahti, 2016). Moreover, they determine the view on human nature and approaches to education (Hartas, 2015).

Pedagogical reality with its historical development is densely weaved together with social life. What is more, this social life and the whole sociocultural reality are the products of educational reality to a certain degree, as it reproduces a human as a future subject, medium and actor of social life. Meanwhile, educational activity, which is conceptualizing, planning and implementing educational activity, might be only adequately perceived through the prism of all aspects affecting human life.

This way, the scope of the history of education is not only limited to emerging and evolving through times practical and theoretical educational reality, but it is focused on ever evolving educational reality against the background of social, financial, economic, political and cultural contexts. At the same time, the pedagogical activity and reality itself is the result and the way of resolving controversies between the needs of society, institutions, groups and individuals.

Given that the history of education is mostly educational science, we acknowledge that a historical-pedagogical “gaze” is mostly a pedagogical “gaze”, which is determined by the present values and methodological frames, but it is backward-looking. Consequently, it is vital to interpret educational events of the past within the framework of the historical époque and the culture they corresponds to (Lange, 2013).

The history of education overviews the endless panorama of the human history, revealing in it everything concerning how humans digest culture, how they adopt certain ways of behavior, how they learn language and writing systems, how they integrate into the systems of social interactions, how they adopt social roles, how they develop their potential and how they change throughout their lives. All these processes are imbued with educational actions, and, thus, could be regarded from the perspective of educational reasoning.

Turning to the issues posed by the history of education, they should try to give answers to the following questions: 1) what happened? 2) how and why it happened? 3) what consequences it brought? These questions should be at the forefront of every historical research, regardless the theme. The answers to these questions would allow to reconstruct the events from the past, interpreting preconditions and causalities. Without them any reliable interpretations of historical-pedagogical events would be impossible.

In this regard, there is a set of basic methodological problems, which pose a huge challenge, while trying to answer the questions raised by the history of education.

The first methodological problem is related to general epistemological problems of historical cognition, namely, pedagogical historical cognition. It raises the question, whether this cognition is possible, while working with something gone. What reliability such historical knowledge will eventually have? What are the limits of credibility of historical evidence and sources? What techniques and guidelines should be applied to researching various historical sources? What information could these sources reflect? How much does the source’s author position and worldview is reflected in the source, and how to separate the biased from the unbiased (McCulloch, 2004)? Finally, how much is the researcher’s subjective perspective reflected in the final scientific result? In general, the basic concern of this bulk of methodological problems is that, it is still unclear whether the historian of education, as well as any other historian, is capable of reconstructing the actual pedagogical past, not just create his own reflection on that past.

The second methodological problem is linked with defining the scope of historical-pedagogical research. It is noteworthy that since XIX century, there have been coexisting two leading approaches in the Russian history of pedagogy. Namely, the first is focused on the history of educational institutions and pedagogical thought, which engenders the theoretical conceptualization of educational ideas and practices. Meanwhile, the second, being much broader, regards all purposeful pedagogic actions and incentives, which are affecting human beings. This way, it includes education within special educational institutions and all types of everyday human purposeful socialization. The second approach has been on the rise in Russia since 1960-s, and has a future potential for further development.

The third methodological problem involves the specific disciplinary problems of defining what historical-pedagogical interpretation of the past is. This has two aspects. The first is that the history of

education deals with education, which has an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary character. Education might be the object of different disciplines, such as, sociology, cultural studies, ethnology, political sciences, economics, psychology etc. Due to this reason, historical-pedagogical research scope might become too vague, without thorough consideration of what is being studied, why it is being studied, and which methods should be applied accordingly. Another aspect is related with the resources used. It involves the problems of reconstructing pedagogical ideas of the texts without direct pedagogical position of the writer. Moreover, there are numerous constraints while interpreting non-written sources, such as, rituals, oral histories, buildings, space, clothes, toys, teaching tools, realia etc.

The fourth methodological problem is related to prioritizing what is more important in the history of education, finding some typical, sustainable and repetitive trends in historical-pedagogical process, or revealing the unique cases in the historical retrospective.

Scientific cognition, as a part of scientism, tends to accentuate general trends and patterns, while humanitarian cognition is centered on individuals. Thus, the history of education both works in the logic of macro and micro histories, with an apparent interest to the latter. Generalization and typology, in their turn, are realized through creating global histories in the logics of civilizational approach, Marxist historical materialism, for instance (Kornetov, 2018b, p. 45).

While dealing with historical-educational past, given all the mentioned above methodological underpins, a researcher is preoccupied with the tasks of: 1) interpreting and clarifying contemporary educational problems, 2) learning from the past events, 3) predicting pedagogical science and practice development (Kornetov, 2018a, p. 14). All these tasks logically engender another set of methodological problems.

The first problem is linked with the historicism principle. While applying historicist perspective, the core interest of the research is to reveal patterns and trends of education development, especially those accounting for the continuity of historical-pedagogical process. Historicism allows to approach the present as something arising from the past but acknowledges that the past could have various trajectories of the development. So, the history of education could not only uncover the reasons for the existing history evolution, but also reconsider unreal, alternative histories, to understand why we went exactly this way.

The second problem is about the fact that the main concern of the history of education should not be pure cognition of the past, but a tool in solving contemporary problems. This approach does not deny the necessity of reconstructing, explaining, interpreting the past in its various displays, but it highlights theoretical and practical application of historical-pedagogical knowledge today.

The third problem is related to the conceptualization of the history of education heuristic and gnostic potentials. Though obviously not being its main tasks, they answer the questions what can we derive from the past, apart from the knowledge about this past.

Therefore, there are two trajectories of historical-pedagogical research: grasping pedagogical past and implementation of this knowledge today. The second approach allows broadened and deepened understanding of the contemporary educational problems. This shift from the past events, with the main focus on reasoning, enables the researcher to make analogies, derive lessons, find valid role-models and rethink success and failures of certain educational trends.

While scrutinizing the historical-pedagogical past, a researcher inevitably encounters the issues of the evaluation and identification of the researched phenomena. This important aspect is always directly or indirectly included in every research, which also brings another wave of methodological problems:

First of all, it is important to develop viable criteria for the identification of historical-pedagogical phenomena. It involves formal and conceptual distinctions between those related to educational thought, educational practice, educational methods, educational concepts, educational technologies etc. Furthermore, it is vital to attribute pedagogical phenomenon to the corresponding social-cultural frames, i.e. trace its relation to a certain civilization, formation, social class, ethnicity, ideology, religion, philosophy, methodology etc. (Fitzgerald, 2015). Meanwhile, anthropological dimension should also be included, as the way the researcher perceives the human nature, the role of education in human development might significantly change the whole process of investigation.

Secondly, it is required to develop criteria and mechanisms to evaluate educational phenomena of the past according to their: innovativeness, progressive or regressive nature, success in resolving educational problems, effectiveness in socialization process, role and position in boosting social development. For instance, it could be important to assess the effectiveness of certain educational approaches as a part of creating human capital, forming civil society members and developing religious way of thinking.

Thirdly, it is necessary to elaborate adequate criteria to correlate educational past events and present. In order to establish succession links between educational ideas from the past with current pedagogical traditions and systems, it is important to link it to the corresponding ideology, religion, philosophy, psychological tradition, not to forget historical époque and culture (Coloma, 2018). Such identification could be implemented via finding the similarity between the researched problems of the present and the past and between different cultures (Fuchs & Vera, 2019) via revealing the coinciding elements in pedagogical positions, via establishing the same types of pedagogical aims, ways, methods, tools of the past and the present.

The methodological perspective, which regards pedagogical phenomena of the present through the prism of phenomena of the past and vice versa, brings meaning to the forefront, as opposed to the time and space anchoring. This view allows:

- To classify, systematize pedagogical phenomena from different times and spaces, taking a definite research position in their regard, and utilize them in solving various educational problems.
- To ensure historical-pedagogical knowledge equal positions with theoretical pedagogical knowledge, and, thus, to use their cumulative cognitive, heuristic, prognostic potential in both formulating educational problems and solving them.
- To select the most representative pedagogical ideas and practices as a part of dominating discourse, and to present them as reference models of their times.
  - To identify the norms of theoretical and practical pedagogic activity throughout times.

## 7. Conclusion

The outlined above scope of theoretical and methodological problems is not full. However, it could boost the development of historical-pedagogical research cognitive potential, enhancing the

diversity of scientific results. Many of the already mentioned problems are being successfully solved by scholars; others still require significant scientific effort and attention (Germanovich & Yakovleva, 2018). Consequently, there is an apparent demand for collating international educational experience through times and spaces in order to use effectively accumulated humankind knowledge in the history of education.

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