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**NON-OPPRESSIVE PEDAGOGICS FOR REFORMATION OF  
EDUCATION**

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***Abstract***

Revision of objectivist image of production and transfer of knowledge in favour of recognition of its active, personal nature allows to re-think traditional (patriarchal) pedagogy, characterised by high level of stress, standardisation, lack of creativity, rating system, unhealthy rivalry between students, and general insensibility to student's personality which ultimately makes education lose its sense and meaning. No wonder, it creates breeding grounds for MOOC which challenge traditional cultural role of universities though often lack proper level of consistency and theoretisation. These conditions of traditional pedagogy are terminal and cannot be cured because they embody most characteristic features of patriarchal society with its masculinism, instrumentalism, and egotism. We are in need of designing a new educational milieu, proliferation of variety of pedagogics, that, while using different methods and communicative approaches share the idea of implementing non-oppressive teaching and educational strategies. These presuppose inclusion of personal experience of a learner into the core of educational practices. Renouncing the teacher's privileged position of an expert and an authority figure is a necessary condition of converting classroom into a safe and inclusive place where knowledge is not passively absorbed but produced and experienced in joint efforts of the learning individuals. These pedagogics are (non)essentially egalitarian, cooperative and non-oppressive.

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## 1. Introduction

Appeals to humanise education, which took roots in the national educational system during the so-called perestroika, left unchanged the ideology of teaching – transfer of supposedly “objective truth” about the world, society, human being from “scientists” (producers of knowledge) to “students” (consumers of knowledge) through “intermediaries” (teachers).

Such trajectory of knowledge ignores realities of its production and functioning. Knowledge is always conceptually loaded, and its creation and assimilation implies an array of implicit, tacit knowledge, since it always has a carrier — perceiving individual or (scientific) community.

As follows from the same concept of personal knowledge, “students” are far from being passive “perceivers” of information. In fact, this point of view complies with activity concepts of perception and education adopted in Russian psychology and pedagogy. The process of cognition is always personally coloured and, in this respect, is also individual, subjective and unique; possibility of its algorithmisation exists only “post factum”, and by no means in the form of universally applicable scenarios. Ideas that we criticise lead to alienation of an individual from sociocultural environment, to perception of any information — scientific knowledge, social practices, artistic experience — as if it exists separately from a perceiving individual, from personality herself and her aspirations. Such a view reduces importance of personal experience, background knowledge and the life-world of a perceiving individual to nothing. In this context psychologist Csikszentmihalyi (2014) wonders if “being a human” makes any sense to our education system at all (p.3).

As for “intermediaries” in this “producer-consumer” line, teachers and professors are assigned to the role of a “wholesale base”, requiring unambiguous, consistent and objective theories represented in the form of laws and rules from producers, and mastering of standard models, schemes and templates, that can be easily “tested” and evaluated — from consumers. It is obvious, that only quantitative (amount of information), but not qualitative (value of information) side of learning is available to this kind of assessment. Knowledge obtained in this system is devoid of personal meaning for students and, therefore, can hardly become the basis of creative thinking and personal growth.

## 2. Problem Statement

Such an approach, considering elements of a system as fundamentally independent from one another, ignores communicative nature of knowledge and human consciousness, as well as living and active contribution of a perceiving individual to the process of cognition and learning.

According to the UN and UNESCO documents, the paradigm of understanding knowledge and education consists in its orientation towards personality, her own goals and objectives (Education 2030, 2016). Philosophy of education inherent to Russian documents is essentially different: the goal of education is mostly seen as production of a person who complies with goals and objectives of society. Even professional activity of a person is treated as means for implementation of social needs and interests, while interests and peculiarities of a person, who receives education, are being neglected.

Understanding of protracted educational crisis is characteristic of both national and foreign researchers (Coombs, 1968). Thus, customary management and HR-recruiting methods in the sphere of

human capital formation and employment (the term, holding questionable humanitarian potential (Gunkel, 2011), but uncritically accepted by the Russian market “majors” in economic, political and social spheres) (Camillus, Bidanda, & Mohan, 2017) are being put in doubt by the latest achievements in neuroscience, psychology, and educational philosophy.

Traditionally, human brain was seen as a rigid structure with social environment, upbringing, education, personal experience, and other data being imposed upon it. Consequently, a grown-up person does not only create personal boundaries, but is being defined by them, as long as s/he wants to be considered an independent and consistent individual. These boundaries are almost literally perceived as physical boundaries, as a “fence”, which we build around an imaginary “me” in order not to let anyone else in, and not to allow other people influence us (Banks & Hirschman, 2016).

Nevertheless, human brain in itself is flexible and communicative; therefore, building and maintenance of harmonious relations with other people (so called “emotional”, “social” intelligence) is the ability not least important than pure calculative abilities, which are still considered to be the main goal of education (Goleman, 2015). This means, there is no reasonable basis for previous ideology of rivalry, personal separateness and social segregation. This is not about subordination or domination over the world (and its any fragment from economic and political to gender and personal domination), but about communication with it and with each other, thus, participating in creating new ecological social environment.

### **3. Research Questions**

The object of our research, therefore, is not a discussion of reforming the process of obtaining and functioning of the knowledge component of education, but pedagogy itself as a specific paradigm underlying existing education system (Borawska-Kalbarczyk, Tołwińska, & Korzeniecka-Bondar, 2019). This system is characterized by a number of problems, among which we will highlight as a subject of the study and a prospect for its further optimisation the following ones:

standardisation – from (supposedly) absolutely necessary standards of vocational education to tests and competitions, which have now turned into the most widespread form of student assessment; results of these competitions are used now as the guiding principle to evaluate effectiveness educational institution;

connected with it and misrepresented as conservation of traditions fundamental lack of creativity: generation after generation students learn one and the same poem or analyse one and the same picture;

point-rating system, (1) supports and stimulates already excessive unsound adolescent competition among students; (2) excludes understanding of qualitative dimension of knowledge from educational institutions: good, excellent, satisfactory, turning education into a pursuit of points;

comparing students to one other was and remains one of the main pedagogical problems of our society: children are being assessed and compared to each other in a family (“Look at your sister!”) and at school (“Jane wrote her work worse, than Peter”). A child is put in an atmosphere of constant devaluation of his/her activity and personality, as domestic teachers, to put it mildly, lack tact to separate the quality of work from the personality qualities of a student. This also fortifies the habit of seeing in peers not friends and co-workers in educational process, but competitors. Perceived from an early age, it leads to isolation, alienation, and disunity in society;

disinterest in student's personality. "Individual learning trajectory", unless we are talking about students with disabilities, continues to exist only on paper, while children's personal interests and inclinations are taken into account only in the form of extracurricular activities;

highly stressful learning process. In most works on this issue, stress is interpreted as an external phenomenon in relation to school environment and learning process, and not as a phenomenon inherent in functional and normative dimensions of educational system.

Nevertheless, social and psychological researches show that "educational difficulties (academic failure, complexity of material, student workload, preparation for exams and tests)" (Molodtsova, 2017, p.118) are the main stress factor. "Suppressive style of interaction" with teachers goes next, and then follows violence and bullying by peers. Conducting trainings and psychological work aimed at greater resilience to stress factors deal with consequences, but do not eliminate causes. In this regard, physicians are more specific than psychologists and teachers: "introduction of unified state exam and enrolment to higher education institutions based on its results increases level of exam stress among schoolchildren... however, studies of senior students' opinions about exam stress and its factors were not revealed in the contemporary literature" (Bobrishcheva-Pushkina, Kuznetsova, Popova, & Silayev, 2015, p.67). In other words, no one seems to be interested in opinions of young people, unless it is a matter of sociological study.

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

Having determined the state of affairs in the field of ideological foundations of traditional pedagogy, we believe it is fair to give a generalizing characteristic of this approach as an essentially repressive pedagogy. All the points mentioned above are connected by an overwhelming, repressive way and style of behaviour, and organisation of interaction, built on powerful, administrative, coercive, and unifying basis.

This is likely to be associated with problems, which, according to teachers, students face: difficulties with reading, concentration problems, lack of motivation to study, limited perception, and, finally, widespread individualism in the form of egotism, which impedes both moral and cognitive growing-up of an individual. In an attempt to draw education closer to realities of a modern society, the slogan of "practice-oriented education" appeared in Russia, while in Europe, washed by the waters of neoliberalism, they acquired the motto of "student-centred education" (Levenskoe kommjunike, 2009). The first one equipped students with arguments against any theoretical component of programs of academic disciplines in general, the second one – against any discipline of mind, reasoning, and criticism of one's views (Plakhotnik, 2014).

In our opinion, changes proposed in both cases (as well as most reforms) are peculiar ad hoc corrections, which do not change the way of functioning and the whole philosophy of education. However, such decisive actions are required if traditional, both public and private educational institutions, want to preserve their place and role amidst actively growing MOOCs.

In this regard we propose to address alternative pedagogical models, which sometimes are united under the common name of "radical pedagogics" (Plakhotnik, 2014). In other cases, they use term "pedagogy of opportunities" (Manicom & Walters, 2012), thus emphasizing connection of new

pedagogical ideas with feminist philosophy and activism, making efforts to ensure real equality of opportunities for people, including educational opportunities, regardless of their gender.

Understanding that the word “radical” originates simply from the Latin “radix” (“root”), we, however, are not inclined to use the proposed term as an “umbrella” one. Any radicalism is fraught with transformation into struggle for the sake of struggle, which does not contribute to calm and balanced consideration and problem solving.

Experience of the Finnish education system shows that spectacular results can be achieved to a greater extent without any radicalism, through consistently and clearly implemented programmes, rather than radical reforms. This is especially true when it comes to important role new approaches to education, in particular, lifelong education, play in overcoming social exclusion and poverty (Raditloaneng & Chawawa, 2015; Milana, Webb, Holford, Waller, & Jarvis, 2018).

## 5. Research Methods

Analysis of domestic and global education tendencies, compilation of opinions and statements of educational process participants, analysis and synthesis of non-repressive (non-oppressive) pedagogical concepts set forth in the modern literature in their connection with global social processes.

## 6. Findings

Main differences between traditional or, as some authors call them, patriarchal (Plakhotnik, 2014) and non-oppressive (Freire, 2005; Hooks, 1994; Matusov & Brobst, 2013) pedagogics are presented in the form of a table (Table 01). Using plural form (t/n: of the word “pedagogics” in Russian), we strive to emphasise pluralism of possible pedagogical approaches, which may include developments of the past few years – the so-called smart pedagogy, – and not less non-traditional, but already well-established Waldorf pedagogy.

**Table 01.** Differences between traditional and non-oppressive pedagogy

	<b>Traditional pedagogy</b>	<b>Non-oppressive pedagogy</b>
Teachers	experts, knowledge holders	people, working together to produce knowledge
Students	Passive	active
Social stratification model	elitism	egalitarianism
Type of action	dominant, authoritative	interaction in communities
Teaching format	lectures and seminars, «objective knowledge»	workshops, discussions, interaction
Classroom	place of discipline, fear, sanctions, control	environment of accepting, safety, cultural inclusiveness, comfort, implementation and demonstration of personal expertise of each student

Within traditional pedagogics information, not knowledge, is the core of the educative activity. It is absorbed from the environment thus making an individual to adapt to it, to digest it, and to make use of

it in typically instrumental, masculine fashion. But in non-oppressive pedagogics knowledge is not absorbed but produced by the agents of education – both teachers and students. The accent here is not so much on acquiring a non-contradictory, final system of thought about the world; rather, it's about feeding ever curious attention to the world and each individual in it. It takes respectful attention to subjective experiences and understanding of a student. Curricula and syllabi of subjects studied at school must be reconsidered and re-oriented towards the life-world of an individual, while in traditional pedagogics it's more of a study of a science itself for its own sake. Renouncing the teacher's privileged position of an expert and an authority figure is a necessary condition of converting a classroom into a safe and inclusive place where knowledge is not passively absorbed but produced and experienced in joint efforts of the learning individuals.

In such a model of education, or, let's look through a broader lens, in such pedagogical model the leading role belongs not just to personal activity of a cognizing individual, but to her conscious (mindful) activity (Berila, 2016). This cognitive attitude also helps to foster a truly entrepreneurial attitude to one's life, because "creativity takes activity, not abstinence" (Brazul-Bruszkowski, 2017, p.10). Non-oppressive pedagogics assume orientation of teaching in all its forms at interests, concerns, and needs of a personality. Thus, from focusing on impersonal standards and rules education tends to move towards visualisation of personality as a centre and meaning of education. It seems obvious that "commissioning of the social services" must give way to the focus of education on the needs of an individual and her well-being – psychological, emotional, intellectual and, last but not least, physical.

## 7. Conclusion

Both the situation of postmodernity and the fourth industrial revolution together with the evolution of human values permits to distinguish at least three major groups of competencies as a result of studying at the university level: "instrumental competences: cognitive, methodological, technological, and linguistic; interpersonal competences: individual social skills, interaction, and cooperation; systemic competences: relating to whole systems, combining understanding, sensibility, and knowledge" (Lorenzo & Gallon, 2019, p.42).

The role of educational institutions and universities in the first place, is changing. The concept of accountability (Accountability in Education: Meeting Our Commitments, 2017) in their activity assessment, as in case of primary and secondary education, gives way to the concept of professionalisation and prestige (Christensen, Gornitzka, & Ramirez, 2019). Achieving mental health and sustainable development of an individual is impossible without awareness of the self, of one's thoughts, feelings, desires, actions. The goal is "to gather my self", to understand, that consciousness is always a "networked", communicative process. As much as individual persons become more mature by building more complex relationships with one another without closeting into themselves, society as a whole becomes more mature by moving away from principles of competition and control to principles of interaction and development of human qualities. New educational strategies are not about producing (soft) skilled individuals for a market economy, but about developing person's desire and ability to realise herself, her inner motives for further education and personal growth. From our standpoint, development

and expansion of non-oppressive pedagogics in educational practices have the primary role in shaping free and responsible personalities of the society of information age.

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