

LATIP 2021

International conference «Language and Technology in an Interdisciplinary Paradigm»

EDUCATION OF THE NEAR FUTURE: TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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v-goncharova@yandex.ru**Abstract**

The current situation in education, being highly unstable, is indicative of the transformation process. Mass digitalization in education during the pandemic revealed the alienation of education from the bulk of its traditional meanings, values and activities. The article highlights the present-day changes taking place in the system of global education, unravels counteracting trends in its development from the total digitalization of education, the use of templates and standards in building knowledge, skills and attitudes to the opportunities for lifelong learning, learner intellectual autonomy, maximum creativity and design of the future. As a key point, the author highlights the rationale that controversies in education may be potential to bring certain opportunities for it to develop and prosper. On these grounds, the author formulates some opportunities for the upcoming transformation of education. Such opportunities include the priority of education over professional (vocational) training, the renewal of interest in human ontology as the core of the anthropocentric educational paradigm, individualization and interdisciplinary basis of education, a focus on unsupported thinking and the development of subjectivity of participants in the educational process. As a result, the article substantiates the thesis about the need and possibility for the present-day education to consider alternatives to move on.

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Keywords: Digitalization of education, individualization, unsupported thinking, professional training

1. Introduction

The total restrictions associated with the spread of coronavirus infection have already been interpreted as the “pandemic era” that we are experiencing. The transition to a remote form of activity, the alienation from traditionally collectivist social processes, the so called (obviously wrongly) “social distancing” (however, accurately expressing the long-term effect of maintaining physical distance) led, in many respects, to the breakdown of the usual mechanisms for the transmission of social experience. The total digitalization of modern education reflects the complex nature of social transformations caused by changes in the nature of social interaction, communication, praxeological, gnostic, axiological aspects of the development of society, etc. Moreover, the forced transition to the digital format of education emphasized largely contradictory trends in the development of education related to its goals and implemented meanings.

In the educational, social and cultural contexts, digital future of education in general has recently been under thorough scrutiny whilst digital technologies as educational tools have been studied for decades. The way to integrate and analyze digital format of learning and education within its traditional goal-setting is one of the priority problems of modern socio-humanitarian and pedagogical research (Ignatyev & Arkhangelskaya, 2020; Levintov, 2021; 2020; Smolyakov, 2020; Zlotnikov, 2020). In particular, the changes taking place in the field of education are crucial for determining its future development, being criticized as a factor of devaluation of traditional educational values (Levintov, 2020), and, on the contrary, receiving support as ways of innovative transformation of an outdated system (Ignatyev & Arkhangelskaya, 2020).

The study of digital modernity of education however presents a powerful medium for cross-disciplinary search for potential trends and opportunities for the educational system to follow in its near future. The models of education and types of educational environments, the call for individualization and learner autonomy development, interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary frameworks of educational studies, anthropopractices in education and learner educational trajectories have so far been the focus of private attention (Kovaleva & Yakubovskaya, 2017; Okolelov, 2018; Radevskaya, 2017) notwithstanding their evident power to redraw the boundaries of the future potential of education, if taken as a system.

2. Problem Statement

The digitalization of modern education is mainly not about a simple change in the form (format) of the implementation of activities, but about restructuring and even completely updating its meanings and values. The current situation in education is thus very flexible and resourceful in terms of multifaceted problems and hence opportunities for its potential development.

3. Research Questions

The research questions which are put at the basis of this paper may thus be formulated as such: 1) What are the contradictory trends in the development of modern education (we may conventionally refer to them as “negative” and “positive”) which have the potential for transformation? 2) Can these

contradictory trends give impetus to the development of global education in the near future and what opportunities are thus associated with this development?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to summarize the changes taking place in modern education, to identify counteracting trends in its development and, on this basis, to fix some opportunities for the transformation of education in the area of its immediate future. At the same time, fixing on any specific national or level framework of education is not expected, taking into account, in particular, the global and generalized nature of the changes under consideration.

5. Research Methods

In this paper, the methods of generalization and context analysis are used since it is possible to analytically define the cornerstone opportunities for education of the near future through the generalization of the current trends. To determine the trends in education of the near future, it is necessary to generalize the current situation in global education and identify the main trends of its development which may conditionally be referred to as “negative” and “positive”.

5.1. The “negative” trends in the present-day system of education

The “negative” trends thus include the following.

- Teaching activities (various types) within the framework of the competence approach determines the priority of practical and applied character of the educational results. Thus, academic tone in goal-setting of education gives way to practice-oriented, “target-based” learning.
- At the same time, the goals and objectives of such education are averaged, taking into account its mass nature and accessibility, triggered by the system of standardized testing. As a result, the elite segment of education is lost.
- The standards in education imply in a way the “codification” of skills and abilities, as well as (more than that!) attitudes and learner personal qualities, account for the templating of educational programs.
- The toolkit of means and techniques of education is being updated accordingly. The proliferation of remote forms of education, its widespread virtualization and computer-mediated learning logically reduce the interpersonal basis of education as an experience of understanding. The educator and the learner become mere intermediaries in the educational process, the need for the educator getting moreover questionable.
- The priority of cognition and related creative activity is replaced by communication with digital reality. As a result, it becomes possible to technologize the creative process. Moreover, digitalization simplifies the process of building algorithms for cognition and activities, promoting ready-made models of behavior and understanding. In other words, education is obviously devalued to training.

- At the same time, the objectivity of knowledge (or at large the social experience which is transmitted from generation to generation) is called into question. Due to the possibility of using a distance learning format to manipulate consciousness, there is a risk of losing the independence of thinking and subjectivity of the learner.

5.2. The “positive” trends in the present-day system of education

Of course, “negative” trends are not total and are balanced by the opportunities that arise as a kind of side effect of these problems (conditionally “positive” trends). These processes include the following.

- Networking and distancing of education enables integration into the global educational space and, in general, promotes intercultural socialization of the learner.
- At the same time, cross-cultural socialization often acts as a platform for constructing a new content of education. This is manifested, first of all, in goal-setting: the transmitting of knowledge, previously aimed at reconstructing activities, is shifting towards the design of these activities, the creation of new meanings and fundamentally new knowledge (about man and the world).
- Existential, ontological, and epistemological instability become the norm and even a condition for the development and education of the individual, which leads to the development of fundamentally new ways and models of gaining experience.
- The usual linearity of educational tasks disappears. The array of “21st century skills” defines the priority of meta-subject thinking as well as meta-disciplinarity of cognition and activity.
- This is due to the intensive development of the anthropocentric paradigm of education, its universal humanitarization. There is a request for an updated understanding of the person in the world – for a new ontology.
- A person becomes significant and self-valuable for building an individual educational trajectory, and a trajectory of a lifetime at that (lifelong learning). Mass education is justified by the possibilities of self-education.

Thus, the trends in the development of education were identified, which are largely oppositional and multidirectional. The first group of the trends suggests, to some extent, the devaluation of the content of education, which is losing its creative potential, while the second group, on the contrary, indicates the enlargement of its meanings to existential ones. The main “innovation” in the development of education is the chance to design one’s own life in society, which implies such skills as work (foresight, design and implementation) with the future (with what is not yet there), adaptability to the situation, multiprofessionality (the ability to combine different types of activities), intellectual skills (critical and creative thinking, solving complex problems (multitasking), cooperation and communication).

6. Findings

The above stated menu of trends in education is its resource space, the potential opportunities for its transformation towards its ideal future. On this basis, some of these opportunities have been elicited and formulated.

6.1. The priority of education over professional training

The main opportunity for the development of education is to establish the priority of education over (vocational) training. Education in the current situation is largely replaced by training and instruction for activities. In higher education, education is normatively focused on professional training, but it is education that forms any competence. However, education is much broader – it is a systematic worldview, which *manifests itself* by the example of professional training. In the current situation, unfortunately, the goal is not education itself, but what it gives: skills, abilities, activities and, accordingly, status, position, social role.

We agree that “education as a process is the overcoming of the fluidity of life, its temporality, and is the formation of an image of oneself through the ascent to the image of the Eternal and Absolute” (Kovaleva & Yakubovskaya, 2017, p. 88). According to Vladimir Nikitin (2019):

Education is always the education of oneself and through oneself with the help of Teachers and Masters, education grows out of and through socialization and cultivation, manifested in the forms of education, preparation and training, and ends with the possibility of abandoning one’s ego, a breakthrough to the self and the appearance of one’s essence... (p. 29)

At the same time, as a concept, education is not associated with the institution in which it is currently organized. The formation of an ideal self-image (in the understanding that the ideal is eternally unattainable) is possible only on a scale that is correlated with the objective, that is, throughout the entire life path of the individual. The idea of lifelong learning, which is so fashionable today, contains the right opportunity. The principle of individualization of education and the ways to promote individualized learning are especially noticeable in this sense.

From the point of view of revealing the essence of education, the concepts of creative and hermeneutical education, identified by Alexander Levintov (2021; 2020), are of almost futurological interest. In general, both creative and hermeneutical types of education make one “education of development”, which aims at a constant appeal to the internal resources of an individual, from which they draw the goal, and the content, and the method, and the assessment of the achievement of their education.

6.2. Focus on humanity

Modern education has the potential to unravel the human consciousness, to acquire humanity as a comprehensive category of the content of education. Being meaningfully variable, individually manifested, modern education is therefore transferable across all the domains of one’s life manifestation: social, personal and spiritual, along the way of building one’s life activity and gaining true subjectivity (Elkonin, 2016).

Highlighting the rationale that at present a new understanding of man is being formed in connection with the danger of human virtualization and the loss of human subjectivity, Igor Zlotnikov emphasizes the need for a different goal – the education of the human Soul. Since the soul (consciousness) and spirituality appears most clearly against the background of digitalization, the content

of human-oriented education is connected with the disclosure and awareness of the soul. Despite, in a sense, the taboo nature of the topic of the soul and spirituality in the system of secular education, it is precisely these categories that form the basis of the so called existential competencies as the ability to expand one's (life) activity to its meanings, to hear and listen to the voice of the soul.

6.3. Individualization of education

Individualization of modern education, inspired by above mentioned focus on humanity, is largely based on the general availability and variability of existing educational tools and environments. Thus, quoting Natalya Radevskaya (2017), "education is based on the human need for constant transformation, development, and evolution that it has nurtured" (p. 29). The development of learner intellectual, educational and creative autonomy alongside with the development and realization of the learner subjectivity has long been one of the priority topics of modern professional and scientific educational discourse. The variability of educational models (pedagogical, androgogic, transformational, open digital education, etc.), goals (general, professional, additional, life long education, androgogic, life activity, etc.), educational technologies and methods (building individual educational trajectories and programs) makes education an open and adaptive system. At the same time, the conditions of such an open educational system imply a situation in which "the student is forced to perform the procedures inherent in self-education technologies: to design their own learning model, to form the content of learning, to organize their own cognitive activity" (Okolelov, 2018, p. 57).

In this sense, it is significant to introduce a new activity position in education, that of the tutor, who makes individualization work through the design of individual educational trajectories and programs of students (subjects of education) (Kovaleva, 2011).

6.4. Interdisciplinarity of education

The fragmentary nature of modern education, the lack of the dialogue between its multiple contexts coexists alongside with interdisciplinarity of education as a basis for setting its long-term goals and designing the future. According to Alexey Smolyakov (2020):

Today ... educational attempts based on cultural anthropology are needed. They should be based on the technique of including the student in the subjects studied, as an integral part of the system of organizing the activities of the entire society in order to understand the meanings of different types of cultural practices of this society. (p. 77)

In this regard, for building a culture (and the possibility) of educational communication, contextual and environmental approaches to the organization of education can be important, providing interaction within and between variable educational models and systems, creating conditions for their cooperation.

6.5. Unsupported thinking

For the education of the near future (starting from the present), it becomes important to be able to think non-linearly, abandoning the patterns and algorithms of activity. In other words, education is aimed at becoming a free person with an open mind, able to “create and understand the whole and the other” (Nikitin, 2019, p. 27). Such open-minded, or unsupported thinking, implies the ability and willingness of a person to generate new ideas which are not conditioned by the platform of experience and accumulated knowledge. It is this unsupported thinking that underlies the ability to design the future: from the creation of new models of life and existence to the development of individual educational routes.

7. Conclusion

One can't but agree with the fact that “the linearity and one-way line of the development of education are disappearing today. There is a multi-variant development ...” (Smolyakov, 2020, p. 77). It is also possible to understand this thesis in such a way that the current moment in the development of education is historical, when the need is manifested not in the variability of formats and methods of activity, but in their alternatives. The strengthening of the role of digital distance technologies and the partial transition to digital educational platforms, of course, expands the opportunities for the diversification of education. But the acquisition of such opportunities for education through digital technologies leads to its fragmentation rather than development. Mass digitalization in education during the pandemic revealed the alienation of education from the ambiguity of meanings and results of educational activities, building a new phenomenon – education without thinking. If grasping social challenges outwardly, the digital format of education still does not give the latter the main thing – a meaningful alternative.

However, any problem is a hidden possibility. The outlined possibilities for the education of the near future (expansion of the target framework, individualization, interdisciplinary basis for the integration of knowledge and research, unsupported thinking, etc.), which arise as a reaction to the stated problematic trends, can become a source of development in its present.

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