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## THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF PEDAGOGY OF INFORMAL EDUCATION

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**Abstract.** The article presents the philosophical foundations of the Pedagogy of Informal Education, created by the author in 2020 as a new self-contained branch of pedagogy. The retrospective philosophical-pedagogical overview of the development of informal education from antiquity to the present day includes 40 authors from 16 chronological stages. As criteria for the selection of ideas and their authors, own definitions of self-development and the components of the educational triad of formal, non-formal and informal education are used. The presented philosophical and pedagogical ideas unequivocally show that historically the first type of pedagogy known to mankind is the Pedagogy of informal education as a means of influencing people of different ages in order to survive, preserve the basic values of the era and transfer the accumulated life experience. It also illustrates the possibility of each person taking on the role of an informal educator under different circumstances.

**Keywords:** educational triad; formal education, non-formal education, informal education; pedagogy of informal education; self-development; informal educator; Homo creabilis

### 1. Introduction

*Pedagogy of informal education* (PIE) as a new self-contained branch of pedagogy appeared in 2020 as a theoretical construct as a result of twelve years of research work by the author of this article on the essence of informal education. The basics of PIE are presented in the *Pedagogika-Pedagogy* journal in 2022 (Zhelyazkova-Teya 2022).

Informal education is a systematic part of the „educational triad“<sup>(1)</sup> of formal, non-formal and informal education and can be defined as the system-forming part of it, because it is not only historically the first type of educational activity, but is also the basis of the „educational pyramid“<sup>(2)</sup>, from which the remaining two types of educational activity arise in the process of their formalization to varying degrees. This circumstance, as well as the often erroneous translations in the English-language literature of the components of the educational triad, require us to offer

sufficiently comprehensive and general criteria definitions of the three components of the triad, which reveal the differentiation and integration between them.

*Formal education:* institutionalized, organized, systematized and limited in time and place education for the accumulation of knowledge, development of skills and the formation of competencies in a highly structured, programmed, planned and psycho-pedagogical process to achieve levels in the national qualifications framework of countries, which ends with a qualification document.

*Non-formal education:* institutionalized, organized, systematized and limited in time and place education for the additional accumulation of knowledge, development of skills and the formation of competencies in a structured, planned and teacher-guided process of supporting professional and personal development, which ends with a certificate of development of skills without qualification value.

*Informal education:* non-institutionalized, unorganized, unconstrained, unlimited, free, accessible, constant and widespread accumulation of knowledge, development of skills and the formation of competencies in the life path of people of different ages, supporting their personal self-development and self-creation. (Zhelyazkova-Teya 2022, 42).

It is important to emphasize that in the European context, informal education has been subject to rule-making since 1994 and became part of the pan-European educational framework with the Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (CR 2012), and in the Bulgarian regulatory framework it is present from 2015 in three laws as informal learning.

The current development does not aim to present the history of the philosophy of education, but to show in historical terms the philosophical foundations of PIE through a specific two-component lens: 1. Self-development as a category of philosophy and PIE. 2. The historical philosophical-pedagogical prerequisites of informal education as an object of PIE. I share the convictions expressed by P. Natorp that “theoretical foundation of pedagogy is the work of *philosophy*” (Natorp 2012, 738). As well as the position of the pragmatists in the theory of education, that “The purpose of education is the successful organization and reorganization of experience as an adaptation to life”, and knowledge is “*experimental research for the solution of various problems*, ... to learn rather *how*, and not so *what*” (Hunnex 1998, 36). That's why much of the widely distributed self-development literature begins with the word “how” in the title.

## **2. Methodology and methods of research**

The research task for the achievement of the set goal was to find those philosophers who touch the pedagogical essence of self-development, as well as those educators who explain the role of informal education for the self-development of the personality at the border of philosophy.

As a criterion for the selection of philosophical-pedagogical ideas and their

authors, an own definition of *self-development*, reached as a result of my research work, is used: a self-aware, continuous, multi-level process of self-creation of the personality in adulthood through meaningful orientations and own experience in using resources of informal lifelong learning.

The retrospective philosophical-pedagogical review of the development of informal education from antiquity to the present day proves its appearance long before formal and non-formal education. The historical review, which includes 40 authors from 16 chronological stages, unequivocally shows the anthropological, axiological, cultural, hermeneutic, humanistic and synergistic prerequisites of the future PIE, the purpose of which is the pedagogical support of the process of knowledge accumulation, skill development and formation of competencies in the lives of people of different ages<sup>3</sup>, supporting the process of their personal self-development and self-creation as *Homo creabilis*<sup>4</sup>.

The following philosophical, general scientific and specific scientific methods were used in revealing the subject of research (philosophical foundations of PIE): analysis of bibliographic sources (dictionaries, reference books, scientific publications), analysis and synthesis, analogy, abstraction, ascent from the abstract to the concrete, description, theoretical analysis, interpretation, classification, heuristic methods for generating new ideas.

### **3. Results**

The historical walk takes place through the lens of the characteristics of informal education and self-development mentioned above, and shows how adult self-development has taken place through informal education throughout life against the backdrop of human history.

In *Brahmanism*, the capacity for self-knowledge became the ideal, and the order of learning was determined by the example of family relationships (one of the main engines of informal learning). According to Buddhist teachings, the main task of a person is to get rid of worldly passions through self-knowledge and self-improvement.

*Confucius* (551 – 479 BC) attaches great importance to heredity: “*By nature, people are close to each other; but by their habits they are far from each other*”. He brings up the idea of a well-developed personality and asks the question, “*If you can't cultivate yourself, how can you cultivate other people?*” His followers advise: “Think of always being in the teaching.” (Dzhurinskii 2003, 30 – 31). It can be said that even in Confucianism, the idea of lifelong learning was born, which is a leading principle of informal education as a subject of PIE.

*Heraclitus* (535 – 470 BC) raises the pedagogical idea of education: “*It is given to all people to know themselves*” (Ibid, 39). *Democritus* (460 – 370 BC) pays great attention to education, which should take place everywhere and always: night and day, at home and abroad (the main feature of informal education, which takes place

almost always and everywhere). The main pedagogical idea of the *sophists* is the participation of the person himself in his upbringing (self-development), raising the principle “Man is the measure of all things” and the belief that “every person individually discovers knowledge of the world around him every time” (Ibid, 41).

In his reasoning, *Socrates* (470/469 – 399 BC) stimulates the acquisition of knowledge by comprehending experience and confirms the importance of human abilities in self-knowledge (an element of self-development): “He who knows himself knows what is useful for him, and clearly understands what he can and what he can't” (Ibid).

*Plato* (429/427 – 347 BC) attaches great importance to the self-knowledge of innate ideas. He “reflected on a virtually life-long upbringing that should ensure the ascent to the world of ideas” (Ibid, 45). *Aristotle* (384 – 322 BC) distinguishes between social and individual upbringing, when you choose yourself. Every citizen must prepare for the proper use of free time (the main resource for informal education), learn to enjoy life and, thus, become happy (Ibid, 47).

At the end of the Roman Empire, home schooling again became the leading one: “*All science comes from home*” (Roman writer of the 5th century) (Ibid, 51). Sixteen centuries later, homeschooling is once again in the arsenal of not only informal education, but also formal education. *Lucius Seneca* (4 BC – 65) also criticized the school's formalism: “*We learn not for life, but for the school*” (Ibid, 53).

According to the Christian tradition, learning is not only the acquisition of knowledge, but also the construction of oneself (self-development) in the image of God.

Medieval thinkers continued the line of self-development through informal education. *G. G. Pliton* (1355 – 1452) defines the path to excellence through personal efforts and self-education.

Thinkers in the Middle East regard knowledge as a medicine that a person uses throughout his life. *Al-Ghazali* (1056/59 – 1111) emphasizes the role of self-education, which begins with self-observation and self-knowledge. *Abdurrahman ibn Khaldun* (1332 – 1406) argues that the mind is formed as a result of observations, generalizations and experience – “*what time teaches*” (Ibid, 77). He strongly supports the ancient custom of gaining knowledge while traveling, when one communicates with many teachers (companions as informal educators).

In medieval India, education and upbringing were not the prerogative of the state, but the personal affair of the individual and the family. There were four types of Muslim educational institutions, one of which was “*Arab schools for adults*” (lifelong education), in which they read and interpreted the Qur'an and studied Persian literature (Ibid, 83 – 84). *Wang Shu En* (1472 – 1528) of China “viewed education and upbringing as cooperation (*ko-woo*) with the outside world” (Ibid, 88). This is the external world, which is the condition, environment and cause of informal education.

The Middle Ages in Western Europe were also marked by traditions of pre-Christian folk pedagogy with family and home schooling. There was a system of discipleship with the masters (today mentoring) and knightly education. *Charlemagne* (742 – 814) was in the dark until he was 30 years old, but in two years he mastered Latin literacy, the basics of astronomy, rhetoric and literature, and founded a palace school called the academy. *Pierre Abelard* (1079 – 1142) considers knowledge as the result of primarily independent work (one of the elements of informal education, which is not synonymous with self-contained learning).

The pedagogical ideas of the Renaissance put at the center of a new worldview a person (*homo*), who places his hopes on himself. In other words, it gives content to the new *Homo creabilis* as a self-created man<sup>4</sup>. *Michel de Montaigne* (1533 – 1592) defines mental education as a kind of personal appropriation of knowledge: “*We take into storage other people's thoughts and knowledge. However, we need to make them our own*” (Ibid, 113). The personification of knowledge is at the heart of both self-development and informal education. *Thomas More* (1478 – 1535) seeks to equip the human mind with knowledge as it guides it throughout life. The Reformation proclaims “the principle of individuality”, the “self” of a person who bears personal responsibility before God. It can be considered that as far back as the 16th century, the process of individualization of a person through self-responsibility to himself was set, which today is described by more than a hundred concepts from the “self-” group, for which it has been studied separately. The *Jesuits* raised the idea of renewing education and learning “by immersing students in their own educational world” (Ibid, 119).

The new time also brings a new paradigm of the purpose and content of education. The need for adult education is recognized. At the end of the 18th century, not only the child, but also the adult became the subject of study in pedagogy. “Great didactics” *Y. A. Comenius* (1592 – 1670) begins with the words: “Everything happens through self-development, violence is alien to the nature of things”. He substantiated the principle of naturalness (the natural in a person has an amateur and self-propelling power) and “depicted a person as a traveler passing through the labyrinth of life”. This labyrinth of life, which is a platform for informal education and a stimulus for human self-development. In his treatise “Development of natural gifts”, he writes: “He who is wise will be able to be useful everywhere and will be prepared for all fortuitousness” (Ibid, 165). Fortuitousness is a frequent companion of informal education.

*Johann Bernhard Basedow* (1724 – 1790) criticizes the separation of the school from life: “*Nature! School! Life! If friendship and harmony reign between the three of them, then a person becomes what he should be*” (Ibid, 170). *Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (1712 – 1778) did not receive a systematic education, but he had a passion for self-improvement and he became one of the most enlightened representatives of his time. “Experience precedes lessons” (Rousseau 1976, 290). The individual

grows naturally, effortlessly, and somewhat spontaneously. The individuality of a person creates his self-assessment and uniqueness.

*Immanuel Kant* (1724 – 1804) thought about the self-determination of the individual in order to correctly determine the value of his life. He believed that education should be given to anyone who aspires to it (regardless of age). The philosophical doctrine of *Johann Gottlieb Fichte* (1762 – 1814) about himself is especially important for pedagogy, since it emphasizes the activity of a person and his independence. In his “Philosophy of Spirit”, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel* (1770 – 1831) views development as a natural age process, at each stage of which important changes in life ideals occur: “*The process of development of the natural human individual breaks down into a series of processes, the difference of which ... justifies the difference between a child, a husband and an old man.*” “... A person becomes *out of himself*, i.e., he is formed by himself” (Dzhurinskii 2003, 217). The “authorship” of oneself (*Homo creabilis*) is one of the principles of PIE.

*Adolf Diesterweg* (1790 – 1866), who is confused for “a teacher on a teachers”, believes that the goal of education should be “amateurishness in the service of truth, beauty and goodness”, which should be implemented in accordance with three principles: nature conformity, cultural conformity and self-activity (Disterveg 1985). These principles, which maximally take into account the individual nature of the person and give freedom in his expression, are characteristic of informal education.

From a modern point of view, it can be said that the thought of *Robert Owen* (1771 – 1858) “All will be educated and upbringing from birth to adulthood in the best way known at the moment” (Owen 1980, 125) is the harbinger of a lifelong learning in a European context. It allows the three types of educational activity from the educational triad of formal, non-formal and informal education, taking into account the context of time.

*Herbert Spencer* (1820 – 1903) considers important knowledge the ability of a person to be guided by his actions, to know how to handle his body, how to work and raise his children, “*how to use our abilities to bring the greatest benefit to ourselves and other people; in short, how to live life to the fullest*” (Dzhurinskii 2003, 219). To a large extent, these abilities are built on the path of self-development and are supported through informal education. In his dissertation “Forms of Life”, the famous educator, philosopher and reformer *Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi* (1746 – 1827) argues that circumstances shape a person, but a person also shapes circumstances. *Friedrich Fröbel* (1782 – 1852) proposes a unified system of pedagogical institutions for all ages (a modern idea for lifelong learning). He emphasizes that person is inherently a creator. “Education is designed to identify and develop in a person the corresponding creative inclinations” (Ibidem), that is, the prerequisites for the self-creation of a person (*Homo creabilis*).

*Leo Tolstoy* (1828 – 1910) raised and practically applied the idea of free education, which is primarily self-development and aimed at maintaining the



harmony that a person has from birth. In the process of teaching, he often turned to the life experience (the result of informal education) of students.

*Social pedagogy* of the 20th century places the environment among the factors that determine human development. *Wilhelm Dilthey* (1833 – 1911) raises the concept of experience (informal education through experience). The socio-pedagogical ideas of *Paul Natorp* (1854 – 1924) are connected with the social development of a person and his ability to self-educate and self-learn. “In human education in general ... everything must develop from the inner sources of the mind and feeling of the person himself” (Natorp 2006, 168). When building his pedagogical system, he singled out three types of education: “*home education, school and free education of adults*, these types correspond to the natural course of development of each individual person – from sensuality through common sense to reason, they represent a consistent order that everyone normally goes through in this particular time period” (Natorp 2012, 732). From a modern point of view, free adult education is maximally expressed by informal education, and home education is one of its types.

*Edward Spranger* (1882 – 1963) reflects on the choice of a person for a place in the social ladder and on learning as a preparation for this place. Six variants of human typologies are proposed: economic, theoretical, aesthetic, social, political and religious, which are determined by the priority inclinations of the individual. *Jean-Paul Sartre* (1905 – 1980), as the leader of existentialist pedagogy, considers self-education to be the most effective: “Person is only what he makes of himself” (Dzhurinskii 2003, 292). *Emile-Auguste Chartier (Alain)* (1868 – 1951), spiritual teacher for Jean-Paul Sartre, considers education as a transition from a state of childhood to the position of “master of one's own destiny (*self-liberation*)”. He formulated “the idea of the dual function of education: preparation for life and participation in life itself” (Ibid, 293) – the connection between formal education and informal education. According to him, students must learn to manage their own cognitive activity (as the main mechanism for self-development). *Alfred North Whitehead* (1861 – 1947) speaks of the benefits of teaching “self-discovery”. The Informal Innovations Institute (<http://iii-bg.org/blog/>), a statutory foundation created by the author, is dedicated to stimulating this process.

*Reform pedagogy* (new education) encourages independence and activity, thanks to which elements of informal education are included in the formal education system. According to *Adolf Ferrier* (1879 – 1960), one of the founders of the movement for progressive education, not dry intellectuals should teach, but living people who successfully work in any social environment (informal educators). Pedagogy *Maria Montessori* (1870 – 1952) is based on the idea of spontaneous development of personality, which allows using informal educational tools as a resource for self-development not only of a child, but also of adults.

*Experimental pedagogy* raises the principle of personal self-development, which explains why this term cannot be found in old dictionaries. In pedagogical

pragmatism, *John Dewey* (1859 – 1952) enters into the practical direction of education and training, doing something (typical of informal education) and comprehended by cognition that is a gained experience. “Education should be seen as a continuous reconstruction of experience; the process and purpose of education – are one and the same” (Dewey 2005, 116).

It is impossible to ignore the phenomenon of *Waldorf pedagogy*, which is widespread today in more than 3500 kindergartens, schools and institutes in more than 60 countries of the world. Its creator was the anthroposophist *Rudolf Steiner* (1861 – 1925). From an anthroposophical point of view, “every new epoch in the development of mankind necessarily sets before it new tasks” (Steiner 1919, 10). Steiner develops the idea that “everything must obey the true idea of person” (Ibid, 93). “Our graduate may be better than us, but this is unlikely unless other people's experience is added to our efforts” (Ibid, 106-107). Experiential learning is a key feature of informal education that offers freedom in terms of place, time, and means of learning. The inclusion of these elements of the educational process in formal education provides the modern popularity of Waldorf pedagogy.

*Nikolai Aleksandrovich Berdyaev* (1874 – 1948) argues that “The being of the world is a procreated, created and creatively being. Every created being bears the stamp of a creative act... Only the recognition of a created being allows for an original creative act in being, creating something new and unprecedented. If everything in existence were uncreated, pre-eternally given, then the very idea of creativity could not have originated in the world” (Berdyaev 1916, 122). The very process of creativity constantly provokes informal education, without which it is impossible. Creativity is a constant search beyond the known (formal) and the way into the unknown (informal).

The line of creativity is continued by *Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin* (1895 – 1975). “The task is to make the *material* environment, which mechanically affects the personality, make you speak, that is, reveal the potential word and tone in it, turn it into a semantic context of the thinking, speaking and acting (including the creative) personality. In essence, every serious and profound self-report-confession, autobiography, pure lyricism, etc., does this” (Bakhtin 1979, 366). Here appears the concept of the group “self-“ - self-report. M.M. Bakhtin has merit in the development of the so-called philosophy of “selfhood”.

*Pavel Alexandrovich Florensky* (1882 – 1937) draws attention to knowledge as a natural need along with food. “Because we condemn greed in food. But why, then, is the unbridled satisfaction of another natural need – knowledge – not considered a vice? To curb greed in knowledge is as much a virtue as to put a limit on the lusts of the flesh” (Florensky 1909). The thirst for knowledge and its satisfaction in an adult who has long received formal education is naturally supported by informal education – constantly and continuously, throughout life, like food.



Long before the advent of the World Wide Web, *Vladimir Ivanovich Vernadsky* (1863 – 1945) substantiated the irreversibility of the evolution of the biosphere into the noosphere. One of the main prerequisites for this is the creation of a unified information system for mankind. And “man himself, in the closest and inseparable way” is connected with the noosphere (Vernadsky 1991, 118). This is the idea of the comprehensive development of both the whole of humanity and the self-development of the individual through the instruments of informal education subordinate to him.

*Functional pedagogy* uses play as an effective learning tool. This is evidenced by the new trend of teaching adults through “serious games” to acquire various personal and professional skills in the form of simulations, especially useful for risky professions. The goal of *liberal pedagogy* (USA) is “a person who is successful in life's competition – militant, proactive, inventive, possessing the basics of entrepreneurship” (Milkov 2013, 76). In fact, life competition is the main stimulator and engine of informal education as a mechanism for accumulating a unique life experience of an personality.

The mentioned philosophers and pedagogues-practitioners in a unique and original, innovative way have proved that life is a real pedagogical workshop. In various circumstances, any person can take on the role of an informal educator: a relative, a friend, a colleague, or even a person met by chance. These are the engines of PIE. And PIE, as a pedagogical science, should be generally accessible.

#### **4. Conclusion**

From a short review of the ideas underlying the future PIE, one can see how historically and gradually a general model of self-development, characteristic of adults, was formed, and its main tool is informal education. It is noteworthy that from an archaic culture, when learning was associated with the transfer from generation to generation of the experience of everyday life, to a post-industrial culture, where “the ways of transferring knowledge become a joint continuous productive cognitive activity of all generations” (Alisov, Padymova 2018, 5), the thread of information education not only guaranteed the historical course of the entire educational triad of formal, non-formal and informal education, but also led to the renaissance of informal education in innovative learning models in the 21st century.

The presented philosophical and pedagogical ideas unequivocally show that the historically first type of pedagogy known to mankind is the Pedagogy of informal education as a means of influencing people of different ages in order to survive, preserve the basic values of the era and transfer the accumulated life experience. Then first non-formal education appears, and then specialized institutions of formal education. But the history of informal education does not end with the appearance of key types of education in a developed society. It continues to accompany

them constantly as a mechanism for maintaining educational interest outside of educational institutions, especially for people who have already left them, that is, adults.

An independent search for new knowledge (informal education), the development of creative abilities and personal initiative lead to the freedom of self-development of a modern competent person. The goal is for each person to reach their individual peak in all spheres of life. His assistant, even when he doesn't feel it, is the PIE, whose motto is: "First in the past, modern today, leading tomorrow".

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### **NOTES**

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