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# The impact of the USA pedagogical innovations on the Russian post-revolution educational system in the XX century

#### La influencia de las innovaciónes pedagógicos en los EE.UU en el sistema de enseñanza ruso posterior a la revolución en los principios del siglo XX

Tamara YOVANOVICH 1; Natalya PROM 2; Olga TOPORKOVA 3

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#### ABSTRACT:

The article presents the reformatory pedagogical development in the Soviet Russia in close connection with historical events in the post-revolution period of the XX century. The diversity of the upbringing and teaching forms and the stages of the reformatory pedagogy are described. Based on the experience of the American reforming teachers and enthusiasm of Russian educators and teachers, new experimental schools were established in Russia. In the post-revolutionary period of XX century, progressive Western innovations enabled to increase the level of school education in the Soviet Russia. The learning process was combined with the labor work and socially useful activities. Due to the advanced pedagogical experience, the methodical work was brought up to an adequate level. However, this growth occurred in the conditions of confrontation between the two tendencies-democracy and strict state control. Under the influence of the pedagogically

#### **RESUMEN:**

En el articulo se ha presentado el movimiento pedagógico reformador en la URSS en estrecha relación con acontecimientos históricos en el siglo XX después de la revolución. Los autores se señalaron las formas de crianza y de enseñanza diferetes y, tambien, las etapas educativas de pedagógica. Sobre la base de la experiencia de unos profesores americanos y entusiasmo de unos profesores y maestros rusos, en Rusia unos escuelas experimentales se han establecido. Después de la revolución innovaciones occidentales permitieron elevar el nivel de la escolarización en la URSS. Un proceso de aprendizaje fue con la labor y la actividad socialmente útil. Gracias a las mejores prácticas pedagógicas, la metodología se ha mejorado. Sin embargo, este crecimiento pasaba relativamente lento en condiciones de dos tendencias - una democracia y un control estricto por parte del estado. Bajo la influencia de unos profesores educativos y unas

educated teachers and democratically-minded politicians, who were familiar with the best pedagogical world experience, in 1920s the Russian education system for the first time got the maximum freedom in its history.

**Keywords:** Reformatory pedagogy, innovations of American pragmatic education, progressive Western innovations, experimental station, labor education

políticas democráticas, quienes estaban familiarizados con uno legado mejor de la pedagogía, el sistema de educación ruso recibió por primera vez la mayor movilidad posible.

**Palabras clave:** pedagogía reformador, innovaciónes de la educación pragmática americana, innovaciónes occidentales, escuelas experimentales, formación laboral

# **1. Introduction**

In every historical period, the effectiveness of the secondary school is an important indicator of the development level and the degree of economic and socio-technical capacity and international credibility of a country. In the crisis periods, society needs to search for new ways of development. The deeper the crisis phenomena are, the less is the opportunity to preserve the old traditions. New ways of development should be either established or taken from the experience of other countries.

The modern school system in Russia is vigorously discussed. Problems are revealed, new ways of development are offered. The authors of the article suggest considering the experience of the Soviet school at the stage of its formation. We analyzed the work of Russian and American educators in the early XX century, as well as historical documents showing the progress of the educational system of that time. Particular attention was paid to how the experience of North American innovative pedagogy was adopted.

The purpose of this study is to reveal the positive and negative consequences of the pedagogical and organizational-pedagogical work carried out.

In order to assess the effectiveness of the educational system of that time, the following tasks are to be accomplished:

- study literature that examines the historical situation in the post-revolutionary Russia at the beginning of the XX century;

- study documents that provide a reliable educational picture of that historical period;
- identify the stages of reformatory pedagogy in Russia of that period;
- identify aspects of American innovative pedagogy, perceived by the new Soviet education system;

- identify the advantages and disadvantages of this educational system, important from the point of view of the modern education system.

#### 1.1. Historical background

In the Russian Empire, a similar situation was at the beginning of the last century. The school system, which strived to plant certain dogma in minds of students, P. Blonskiy defined as insufficient. This way of upbringing through enforcement created a person, who was able only to repeat someone's will and thoughts. The methods of the old school were also subjected to criticism, because leaning included memorization of isolated facts, so it did not go further than passive presentation of perceptions of a student. Besides, the school told the children the truth, which was not available to their conscious (Blonskiy, 1979). P. Blonskiy was censorious of the content of education, for example, the language taught was detached from reality, grammar was important, but of little use and mathematics as an individual subject was difficult and did not reach the goal.

The October Revolution 1917 marked the beginning of groundbreaking changes in all spheres of the country's life, including education that experienced a drastic change period. Despite the departure of many famous scientists from the science, it was the time to develop new theories and concepts, promote new ideas and approaches and search for new content, forms and

methods of upbringing and teaching.

The Soviet government set the task of eliminating illiteracy and educating a new type of a person. Having destroyed the old school system, the new government and scientific-pedagogical community turned to the foreign experience of the advanced schools and reforming teachers. One of the most promising ways was to study the US reform of the secondary school, because various educational projects aimed at the comprehensive personal development of the younger generation were created and tested in the United States in the period of the late XIX-early XX centuries. It was the most intense and important stage of the American education system, when the American nation-building completed and the education as an integral part of the US culture began its rapid growth (Shershneva, 2003). The reform addressed the most important pedagogical challenges: a new structure of the secondary school and its collaboration with industrial production had been established resulting in differentiation of teaching and searching for optimal ways to identify abilities of students, so the compulsory education met the social requirements.

## 1.2. Ideas that inspired the new Russian pedagogy

The content of the school education in Russia fundamentally changed after the revolution 1917 that opened the way for the reformatory pedagogy, and the influence of foreign pedagogical ideas dramatically increased (Shore, 2007). At that time, there was a great interest in the reformatory pedagogy. The works by foreign reforming teachers were translated, published and properly studied by the Soviet educators. In the period of the "pedagogy of revolution" (1917-1920), the Soviet educators focused on the German pedagogy, primarily the works by G. Kerschensteiner, K. Lai and P. Natorp.

Since 1922, the pedagogical orientations changed: the American pedagogical innovations were in favor. Many researchers emphasized the enormous influence of the J. Dewey's works on the Soviet pedagogy (Johnson, 1969; Hans, 1964). S. Shatskiy was inspired by J. Dewey's assaults against the dogmatism, formalism, authoritarianism of schools and their completed detachment from the demands of real life and called him "the best philosopher of the modern school." Some of his books were translated into Russian and published; S. Shatskiy wrote forewords to J. Dewey's books "How we think" (Dewey, 2008) and "Reconstruction in philosophy" (Dewey, 1920), where he pointed at many advantages of the J. Dewey's labour system.

It should be noted that the attitude of the Russian public to the J. Dewey conception was not explicit and consistent. Some supporters of free education in Russia, such as A. U. Zelenko, believed that pragmatism in pedagogy might get only a limited field of application because it contradicted the Russian philosophical and pedagogical traditions, impoverished the spiritual world of a man and deprived him of significant public baselines and perspectives.

Almost all more or less known phenomena of the Western reformatory pedagogy were implemented to the Soviet school. It would be no exaggeration to say that the names of John Dewey, Helen Parkhurst, Adolf Ferrier and Ovide Decroly were in Russia at least no less popular than at home. So, the development of the Soviet pedagogy was based on the overseas achievements of progressive education. Therefore, the American reformatory pedagogy directly affected the Soviet education system (Hans, 1964).

The reformatory pedagogy in the Soviet Russia appeared due to the politicians, heads of education and reputable teachers: N. Krupskaya, A. Lunacharsky, P. Blonskiy and S. Shatskiy. The state support for the educational reforms allowed for a large-scale implementation of pedagogical innovations that were under trial experiments in Western countries, such as the Dalton plan, the project method and comprehensive programs. A. Pinkevich considered the Dalton plan and the project method, introduced in Russia in 1920's as the team-laboratory methods at schools, workers' faculties and even universities, fully appropriate for the Soviet pedagogy.

# 2. Methodology

To assess the effectiveness of the educational system in the beginning at the XX century, we studied literature and historical documents that give the educational picture in post-revolutionary Russia. Analysis, generalization of experience and methods used at the theoretical level: comparison, analysis and synthesis, highlighted those aspects of American innovative pedagogy that had been perceived by the new Soviet education system, as well as draw conclusions about the advantages and disadvantages of this educational system, important from the standpoint of modern education system.

# 3. Results and discussion

## 3.1. Stages of reformatory pedagogy in Russia

From 1923 to 1928, the attitude to the reformatory pedagogy, both domestic and foreign, was gradually changing and the incidence of its various concepts and movements varied.

At the first stage of Military Communism (1917-1921) and the pedagogy of revolution, the ideas of the free education movement and a comprehensive labor school dominated. Many concepts of the reformatory pedagogy were implemented with respect to the "students-teachers" interaction, the abolition of punishments, tests, exams and assessments. Therefore, the reformatory pedagogy inspired the Soviet pedagogy of the 1920s and was its part throughout this period.

Furthermore, efficiency of the early Soviet pedagogy and school system was determined by the activity of famous educators. All of them created their own systems and definitely aimed at dramatic restructuring of the educational process in Russian schools. Essentially, those were innovative projects, where new forms and methods of education and training were successfully implemented and pedagogical theory was closely connected with practice.

In the New Economic Policy (NEP) period (1921–1927), the utopian way of the first postrevolutionary years was frozen and the drastic pedagogical experiments were hindered. This period was determined not by ambitious experiments, but covering the urgent needs of the mass education. At this time, ideas and methods of the reformatory pedagogy were still widely used in practice, but they came under intense ideological criticism. From 1923, one noticed the decay of the free education as an independent movement. However, the idea of free education influenced the minds of Soviet educators for further ten years. In the labour school, the emphasis was on a comprehensive system of education. The project method and the Dalton plan were used in combination (Holmes, 2007).

In the first five-year plan 1927–1931, a widespread implementation of pedagogical concepts of domestic educators began. The school curricula were first considered as a public document with minimal deviations and had been developed by 1927; the schooling was essentially resumed. So, the school system in Russia returned to centralization (Johnson, 1969: 140-146). At that time, the J. Dewey's ideas were considered the most popular in the school education and pedagogy with the project method to be declared essential.

# 3.2. Scientific and political role of N. K. Krupskaya in education

Due to her political status, N. Krupskaya (a spouse and later a widow of V. I. Lenin, the leader in the October revolution and the head of government of the Soviet Union from 1922 to 1924) took a particular place among pedagogical advocates of schooling combined with productive labor. N. Krupskaya performed an in-depth activity analysis of the world innovative schools, especially in the European countries in the early XX century (Zeppler, 1979: 89-93). Living in exile, she had had opportunity to know the Labor schools in Western Europe, including the best schools, and was disappointed. One of the best public schools in Switzerland had made a painful impression on her because of old methods of teaching, which suppressed the personality and activity of students.

Analyzing the experience of leading labor schools, N. Krupskaya attached importance to the total preparation for the labor, which enabled not to be tied to one narrow specialty, and, if necessary, to change occupation or profession. She also appreciated the connection of physical and mental works applied in the American school (Fitzpatrick, 1979). N. Krupskaya evaluated the American educational system quite positively and noted "the true democracy of the Americans" (Zeppler, 1979). The free school model seemed to be the only true, with the decentralization of education management and the population actively involved in the schools' affairs. Since 1922, N. Krupskaya actively promoted the American experience in her performances, reviews and articles.

In her pedagogical work, N. Krupskaya paid much attention to the issues of experimental pedagogy and psychology. She considered the experimental pedagogy as a science like chemistry, physics, biology, etc., because this direction of pedagogy and psychology opened bright prospects and gave the opportunity to explore the influence of certain conditions on the development of children's mental abilities. In this regard, N. Krupskaya also held up the American school as a model and cited of the first American psychologist and educator John Dewey, who gave scientific rationale to the principals in the basis of the American school. Western researchers (Anweiler, 1968; Holmes, 2007) emphasized the N. Krupskaya's positive relation to the pragmatic pedagogy and its brightest representative J. Dewey. Her pedagogical lexicon with proper application of the terms such as "the child's identity, strength and reflexes," "internal interest," "impulses," etc. was a convincing proof of her thorough familiarity with the J. Dewey's works.

The respect to the interests of students in learning by stimulating the children's initiatives and the democratization of education when all children from rich and poor families study together were related to the advantages of the American school. Examining the individuality of the child and his/her interests made it possible for the teacher to develop his/her interests and to transform them. Ignoring the individuality of the child could lead only to split attention, fatigue, decrease activity of the organism and weakening of the will.

## 3.3. Blonskiy's pedagogical conception of a united school

A prominent Soviet educator and psychologist P. Blonskiy (1884–1941), whose work (Blonskiy, 1979: 86-164) was evaluated as the first worthwhile experience of the Soviet pedagogy, urged to return to the ancient understanding of the school as a school of life. This reminded J. Dewey's idea of school that does not prepare for life–it is life itself (Dewey, 1929: 24). Therefore, the school must be the place of children's life and create a well-targeted organization of their life (Blonskiy, 1926).

The united school was based on the ideology of democracy, which brought a new content to the main principles of liberalism—freedom, equality and brotherhood, and was to ensure the right to receive education that meets the abilities and needs of an individual. To be educated, a person has the right to get help from the community, which, relying on the solidarity principle, is obliged to organize this assistance. That is, the society must provide every child not with a minimum, as it traditionally used to be, but rather a maximum of education, according to his/her abilities and diligence.

His original approach to the organization of school education was of great interest. It was proposed in the book "The Challenges and Methods of the New People's School" (1916-1917) and represented a democratic neo-liberal pedagogical paradigm. In contrast to the classical school, the new one must teach human experience and aesthetics and should not be restricted to the nature study and hand-labour. The question-and-answer form of training should be

replaced by the story-telling.

Though P. Blonskiy strongly criticized the adherents of free education (J. J. Rousseau and L. N. Tolstoy) and the "Labour teachers", who considered the labor education as the most important development tool for children (G. Kershensteiner and S. Shatskiy), labour also took a considerable place in his conception. P. Blonskiy supposed leaning and labour to be equivalent. Labor training concentrated only on the manual work, according to P. Blonskiy, makes the purpose of the new people's school too narrow. Therefore, based on the fact that man is a social being and his activity is social, he introduced a broader concept "social labor" that determined one more task for the new people's school to prepare a good and skillful worker, valuable for the society. At the same time, social labor was considered as an organization form of children's activities at school, in the family, city and village. The following forms were proposed: 1) participation in the public work of the school: school self-government and "the collective responsibility education"; 2) rapprochement of school and family, participation of children in domestic work and its discussion in the classroom; 3) development of the ability to be resourceful in difficult life circumstances, by analogy with the children's scout organization; 4) participation of children in cultural and labor life of a village or a city (cultural enlightenment and feasible labor assistance); and 5) manual labor, work on experimental beds, carpentry, excursions, visits to workshops and factories, etc. (Dneprova, 2009: 65).

The final stage of this program was the study of the course "Homeland Science," associated with civic education (the idea by G. Kershensteiner). This is the essence of the new P. Blonskiy's social labor conception, which was to be one of the important components of the new people's school, where a child learns scientific knowledge (in accordance with the age), cognitive skills, work skills and social practices. In the Soviet period, this equilibrium was violated first in favor of the labor training and industrial labor, and later in favor of the socio-political practice.

P. Blonskiy did much for the scientific definition of the basic pedagogical categories (upbringing, education, training and development). So, in his first textbook "Pedagogy" he believed that upbringing is a deliberate, organized and longtime impact on the development of an organism, and the object of such impact could be any living creature—human, animal or plant. Later, collaborating with N. Krupskaya, P. Blonskiy come to understanding of the upbringing as a phenomenon of social life and described education as a two-sided process, in which teachers actively interact with students, as the organization of life and activities of students and accumulation of personal social experience.

Blonskiy considered the education as a process that requires an active attitude, and it is better not to "get" but to "build," to "make the education themselves" (Blonskiy, 1979). In this regard, his ideas of encouraging activity and independence of students on the basis of interest to learning and the organization of independent cognitive activity developing the children's abilities sound quite relevant. Thus, the contribution of P. Blonskiy, who was a supporter of the active methods of teaching, providing a high quality of knowledge and overall development of children and teenagers, to the development of pedagogy in Russia of 1920s was substantial.

## 3.4. Shatskiy's experimental schools

The most striking follower of J. Dewey in Russia 1920s was considered Stanislav Shatskiy (1878–1934), a famous Soviet teacher. Pedagogical activity of S. Shatskiy started in 1905, among children and teenagers from working-class suburbs of Moscow. In his book "Children are workers of the future," he wrote about his dream to create a children's Kingdom. Hard years of learning in the middle and high schools gave him serious mental wounds and caused a protest. In the spirit of the early Soviet pedagogy, he did not accept the "school of study" and introduced a variety of children's activities as the basis for organizing their life experience, which was associated with the knowledge and fixed in the exercises that was explained by his rejection of subject learning, at least in elementary school, and his project-based teaching.

In 1906, S. Shatskiy organized the Settlement society, which had the task of upbringing and

education among the workers' children. The Settlement was considered an innovative school. In this club, children were engaged in singing, dancing, crafts, drawing and reading books. Elementary experiments in physics and chemistry were conducted; on holidays children went to theaters and museums. The tasks of the public educational institution Settlement S. Shatskiy defined as a fight against conservative teachers, society and families for development of a free creative personality (Shershneva, 2003: 105-118).

The authorities did not support the progressive-democratic activities of S. Shatskiy and his staff, and after the defeat of the revolution in 1905-1907, the Settlement society was closed for political reasons. In 1915 on the territory of the Kaluga province, a hundred kilometers from Moscow, S. Shatskiy organized a children's labor colony "Cheerful life," which, according to his plan, was to enable children to fully develop their strength due to a reasonable, serious work. In 1915, S. Shatskiy together with his wife V. Shatskaya published a book "Cheerful life," which describes the pedagogical experience of the colony. The main authors' conclusion after three years work in the colony was that the most important thing in education was the organization of children's life on the basis of continuous interaction between physical labor, play, art, mental and social development of children and teenagers (Shatskiy, 1914).

Bad experience in the implementation of the project method into the mass schools practice did not only make him abandon this innovative method, but moreover strengthened S. Shatskiy in the need of the "methodological revolution." Education should be released from the abstract, "dead, motionless and idealistic thinking" and "old" books (Shatskiy, 1922: 8). Instead of that, practice and activity of students in mastering nature and society were essential.

In 1919, S. Shatskiy created the first experimental station for public education, including 4 kindergartens, 13 schools of the first stage, two schools of the second stage, two boarding schools and a number of cultural institutions. Center for scientific and methodical work was the former summer colony "Cheerful life" with the first and second stages school, 5 and 4 years of study respectively.

Great attention was given to the research work, especially studies of upbringing in certain socio-economic conditions. The main feature of this station was not isolated pedagogical experiment, but a comprehensive study of the process of training and upbringing in a changing rural environment of the station. In the spirit of the J. Dewey's ideas, a new method of school work was worked out that comprised the organized children's experiments (laboratory), the accumulated experience of humanity and the exercises giving skills to the child. These ideas could be implemented only by the mass organization in the real environment, and the students took part in development of the social school programs. Thus, there was close link realized between the school and the environment so that the children could participate in social life, in the family, community and public organizations.

Labor played a leading role in the Shatskiy's teaching concept. The main role of labor he saw in the "organizing social force" that influenced both the individual and all children's community as a whole. Therefore, S. Shatskiy created a principally new model of a school as an upbringing center in the microenvironment and a coordinator of educational impact. Based on a common goal—the comprehensive development of a personality of a new man—S. Shatskiy put forward the main immediate goal of the school of the transition period to organize the children's life now, at any given moment.

Pedagogy of S. Shatskiy connected with names of outstanding teachers, who had received worldwide recognition as reformers, L. N. Tolstoy and J. Dewey. Being invited to the Soviet Union, J. Dewey came to the Soviet Union in 1928. He visited the First experimental station for public education and met its leader S. Shatskiy, who made the most favorable impression (Dewey, 1929).

Summing up the experience of innovative schools in other countries, S. Shatskiy formulated the following tasks of the Soviet school at late 1920s of XX century. First of all, it was necessary to organize a diverse developmental and educational activities (training, labour, plays, exercise,

arts, work in the student self-government societies, participation in public and political life of the country). Teachers must be prepared not only as a transmitter of knowledge, but also as an efficient organizer of children's activity, and collaborative work of school, families and the public. The new upbringing and education system needs a new organization, providing for joint activities of the research center, of permanent teachers' courses, which organize pedagogical skill training at schools.

So, S. Shatskiy was considered as the leading Soviet educators of the period 1920s (Cornetov, 2005; Krypton, 2008). He believed practice and constant pedagogical search to be the main teaching activity. This may be the reason why he left not many pedagogical works. However, his books are of exceptional interest as a generalization of pedagogical experience of reformatory innovation pedagogy.

# 4. Conclusions

Vast experience of the US general education schools, democratic traditions of American pedagogy and strong time-tested scientific ties between the US and Russia determined the great interest of Russian teachers in the American school. As positive aspects of the innovative education system in Russia, we attribute the following features:

1) In the late XIX–early XX centuries, the American system of general education objectively played the role of a kind of laboratory, an experimental field, where various, often unique, pedagogical experiments were carried out. Therefore, the accumulated experience of the school education in the USA was studied and its results were implemented to practice in the first years of the new Soviet state.

2) In the post-revolutionary period of XX century, the progressive Western innovations enabled to increase the level of school education in the Soviet Russia and expand the social autonomy of students.

3) The learning process was combined with the labor work and socially useful activity.

4) Due to the advanced pedagogical experience, the methodical work was brought up to an adequate level.

The negative aspects of this system we believe the following features:

1) The excessive emphasis of the education system at that time on technical education. This is explained by the need of a new state in engineering workers. This trend reduced the value and relevance of the humanitarian direction in education.

2) Freedom and lack of control in the educational system adversely affected the discipline of students and, consequently, the social adaptation of children and teenagers.

3) Excessive ideological control by the state.

So, the growth occurred in the conditions of confrontation between the two tendencies democracy and strict state control. The school was in the force field between the two poles authoritarian and free education. Under the influence of the pedagogically educated teachers and democratically-minded politicians, who were familiar with the best pedagogical world experience, in 1920s Russia for the first time got the maximum freedom in its history that unfortunately was destroyed in 1930s.

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1. Volgograd State Technical University, Russia, 400005, Volgograd, Lenin avenue, 28. Contact e-mail: srdjan@live.ru

2. Volgograd State Technical University, Russia, 400005, Volgograd, Lenin avenue, 28

3. Volgograd State Technical University, Russia, 400005, Volgograd, Lenin avenue, 28

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