

Conceptual Metaphors of Education: Grounds for Social Conflict in Modern-day Russia

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Abstract — In modern Russian society, it is possible to trace the division into citizens who support the reforms of the education system, carried out over the past 20 years, and their ideological opponents. The purpose of the article is to identify the grounds of this social conflict and the failure of the reforms at the level of public consciousness. The author argues that the discrepancy between conceptual education metaphors guiding the vector of education policy causes a different understanding of the essence, goals and objectives of education, which leads to social conflict and dysfunction of the system. The article seeks to identify the leading conceptual metaphors of education at the regulatory level and in the citizens' consciousness; to elucidate of the values constituting the core of each metaphor; to compare the found metaphors with the leading philosophical approaches to education; to detect other conceptual metaphors; and, finally, to suggest recommendations for resolving the conflict. The two found leading metaphors of education in modern Russia contradict at the axiological level, which leads to social conflict. The author sees a solution in adopting philosophic-anthropological approach and, according to the results of the survey, the corresponding conceptual metaphors of education as construction and educational journey.

Keywords — *conceptual metaphor of education; organic metaphor; market metaphor; socio-functional approach; pragmatic approach; philosophical-anthropological approach.*

I. INTRODUCTION

A year ago, on the 25th of October, 2018, at the round table discussion of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation members and the expert community, a thorough public expertise for the 20-year reforms of the Russian system of education was initiated. The issues discussed at the meeting included the destructive effect of the Unified State Exam on the secondary school education; discontinuity of the Russian educational space; threats to the teacher training at the pedagogical universities; the lowered social status of teachers and enormous bureaucracy at schools; losses for regional higher education institutions and, therefore, for regional economy; the collapse of vocational training system; greater rates of brain drain due to the reforms of tertiary education under Bologna agreement; devaluation of postgraduate research; administrative crisis, etc. The speakers came to conclusion that on the government level, there is still no single point of view on the major goal of education in our country. That is why the participants of the discussion formed the two parties: the minority of them supported the course of the

reforms and speculated in terms of internationalization of education, the profit it is to bring, i.e. followed the utilitarian logic; while the majority of the experts present were against the reforms and defended the high upbringing mission of education not limited to professional training or meeting the needs of a globalized world. These two parties spoke two different languages, as it seemed earlier.

The round table discussion presented on a micro scale the confrontation between the regulators of the system of Russian education supported by employers and the subjects of this system (representatives of teaching staff and students of all educational levels) supported by active parents which has been ongoing in our society for the last 20 years, being especially acute after the adoption of the Unified State Exam. This confrontation is manifested in different online and offline communities' debates and activities, initiatives such as *For the Revival of the Russian Education* on one of the social networks. The documentaries such as *Poslednij Zvonok (Last Call)*, URL: <https://lastcall.su/> try to provide wider coverage for the burning issues of modern-day comprehensive schools. A number of scientific papers criticizing the results of the reforms have been published. It must be noted that after the broadcasted dispute no evident steps were taken to improve the situation, or resolve the conflict.

I am convinced that the reason for this confrontation lies in the different and contradicting ways to approach what is education, its mission and its purpose made possible after the collapse of the Soviet ideology, in presence of contemporary so called ideological void in the post-Soviet Russia.

The change of the mental paradigms is clearly seen in language being used while debating on education. As first noted by the European and American scholars, such words as *competition, competitive ability, economic performance, economic value, costs*, etc. were more often used not only in educational policy discourse, but in philosophy of education discourse as well since the beginning of the 2000s [1; 2]. Russian scholar S.S. Sergeev calls this tendency a linguistic equalization of a higher education institution and a market-driven commercial organization [3], and A.O. Karpov believes that this leads to deontologization of education as a social phenomenon [4].

It is hard to argue with these philosophers because even the Russian President V.V. Putin stated in 2001 that education has become *the most precious and valuable item of goods*. In

educational discourse, there were the notions of educational service, consumers of educational services, profit and economical efficacy.

In the text of the Federal Law “On Education in the Russian Federation”, for example, the word *educational service* after revision by the public is left only with an attribute *paid-for*. As if the free of charge educational services still exist. Moreover, there is an interesting attempt to define education as a social value serving for the interests of a person receiving it, his/her family, whole society and the state at the same time. In general, the law orients education on meeting first individual and only afterwards collective needs.

However, there are numerous people, especially educators and parents who were raised by the Soviet system of education and totally refuse viewing education as something which can be sold and bought. Having examined the text of a *Conception of the spiritual and moral development and upbringing of a personality of a citizen of Russia* which is to frame the Federal State Education Standards, it becomes clear that the authors followed completely different logic and approach to education as an upbringing of a harmonious personality of a patriot, who puts the society and state interests and needs above all.

Thus, it may be concluded that the first party in their educational discourse and mostly in the reforms they design, implement and defend as well as in the regulatory documents see education as business, while the second party who do not have such authority, but daily participate in educational process, see education as a socializing institution responsible for creating consolidated society and bringing up a harmonious personality. This shows the way conceptual metaphors, i.e. complex mental projections between the two cognitive domains (education = business and education = social instrument), manifest themselves.

The purpose of study is to identify the conceptual metaphors governing the view of education, their essence, mission and aim for both parties of the social conflict in order to disclose their values and link them to the existing socio-philosophical approaches to education and propose the solution to put an end to the existing contradiction.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

Firstly, the theory of conceptual metaphor developed by American Linguists J. Lakoff and M. Johnson [5; 6], division of conceptual metaphors into cognitive and sociocultural-interpretative ones by Russian Philosopher G. S. Baranov [7] and the notion of ‘big’ metaphors of education by Russian sociologists D.L. Konstantinovskij, V.S. Vakhshajtjn and D.S. Kurakin [8] helped to shape the author’s understanding of conceptual metaphors of education.

Secondly, the content-analysis of the educational discourse in mass media, the government regulatory documents in the educational sphere, i.e. the Federal Law “On Education in the Russian Federation” № 273-FL dated 29.12.2012 and *Conception of the spiritual and moral development and upbringing of a personality of a citizen of Russia* which is the foundation of the Federal State Education Standards, was implemented.

Thirdly, to reconstruct the conceptual metaphors of education used by the discourse agents, including the authors of the listed regulatory documents, probably without realization, I relied on the metaphorical modeling.

Moreover, to disclose the connection of these conceptual metaphors to the socio-philosophical approaches to education, the axiological approach was of great use.

And finally, the survey among 186 respondents (university students, graduates and teaching staff) was conducted to establish the most popular conceptual metaphors of education in social consciousness.

III. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

With use of the method of metaphorical modeling two ‘big’ metaphors of education elaborated by the Russian sociologists D.L. Konstantinovskij, V.S. Vakhshajtjn and D.S. Kurakin [8], i.e. ‘organic’ metaphor and metaphor of ‘consumer demand’, found in the present-day sociological research and shaping the scholars’ approach to the object of study (education) were registered in the public educational discourse as well as in the government regulatory documents. That is why it can be concluded that such ‘big’ or, as J. Lakoff and M. Johnson called them, conceptual metaphors helping people perceive education in terms of the other spheres of life (cognitive domain) concepts [5] exist not only in researchers’ mind when they choose the preferable frame of reference in their study, but also function at other levels of social reality.

According to the Russian philosopher G.S. Baranov’s classification of conceptual metaphors in terms of their role in cognition and representation of social reality [7], these metaphors were classified as sociocultural-interpretative due to their high potential to shape social reality with their communicative, interpretative, typifying, ideological, emotive and evaluative, and suggestive functions. They can often be found in publicist texts in mass media as the so-called “explanatory matrix”. Such metaphors may be of descriptive and normative character and be able to inspire or demotivate the audience.

A. *Organic conceptual metaphor of education in connection to socio-functional approach to education*

The As D.L. Konstantinovskij, V.S. Vakhshajtjn and D.S. Kurakin put it, this conceptual metaphor first and foremost regards society as a living organism properly functioning only in case its cells (i.e. citizens) do their job for a common good [8]. It is worth mentioning that such conceptual metaphor of society can be traced back to Antiquity with Plato and Aristotle, who used it in their reasoning, followed by Thomas Aquinas in the Middle Age, who added an element of hierarchy to this metaphorical model, and later in the Modern Era – by Herbert Spencer. Education then serves as an organ of society generation and social selection. For example, P. Sorokin compared a system of education to an organ controlling blood circulatory system in a body [10]. The mission of education is to choose the healthy cells (children) able to contribute to society in the future and to give them specialization so that they become a part of a complex organism. The purpose of education, as viewed by this

metaphor, is to serve the society's interests and meet social demand.

The main values conveyed by education as an important social organic instrument are cultural appropriateness (for culture is what unites people in a national state), solidarity and responsibility to the society. The assessment of the results of such education is qualitative and rather complicated, not automated because the evaluation the degree to which the abovementioned values are shared by the school leavers or graduates is impossible to formalize.

The organic metaphor of education, as this paper argues, is closely connected to the socio-functional approach to education, classical in social philosophy, viewing education as a system of social institutions in charge of reproducing and structuring the society. It was fully developed in sociology by P. Sorokin, N. Luman, E. Durkheim, T. Parsons, P. Bourdieu, et al.

The organic conceptual metaphor of education used to be normative in the very beginning of the Soviet system of education construction, then it became descriptive for this was the way education worked in the Soviet Union, and these days its positions are wavering due to the rise of a new conceptual metaphor. However, it was inspiring and motivating people and sought for mass literacy. The government has a crucial role in forming educational policy and controlling the system of education as this conceptual metaphor and approach suggest.

As is was demonstrated, organic metaphor of education manifested in socio-cultural approach, which was implemented in many countries including the Soviet Union, has deep roots in Russian social consciousness making people feel nostalgic about this period in history.

B. Market conceptual metaphor of education in connection to pragmatic approach to education

D.L. Konstantinovskij, V.S. Vakhshajtjn and D.S. Kurakin argue that the current trends of commodification of education, attempts to make it economically effective are driven by market logic and originate from the so called metaphor of 'consumer demand' [8]. I propose to call it market metaphor of education.

Commodification of tertiary education was explained by D. Bok, a former Harvard University president, to be traced to:

- impact of a job market that dictates which professions are prestigious and well-paid and which are not;
- reign of corporate culture forcing universities to come up with their own brands and fish for the applicants;
- curriculum dependence on the students' career plans;
- intention to minimize costs and maximize profits;
- quantitative assessment of the educational institutions, especially taking into account financial indices [10].

This is in current trend of commodifying social life in general, as J. Tittenburn puts it [11]. So, it becomes clear that this conceptual metaphor regards education as a commodity.

The mission of market-driven education is to satisfy consumers' needs and meet their demand. Consumers can be different actors among a student and his parents who may pay for his education, or, on the other hand, the employer who hires the graduates. The purpose of education is then to sell educational services individually tailored to each of the target groups of consumers, or even each consumer and to bring up a qualified consumer for a market economy. However, S. I. Dudnik and N. A. Pruel argue that it is when consuming educational services a person can realize all spiritual potential as a developing personality as she cannot be a creator without consuming first [12].

The main values conveyed by education as a marketplace are globalism (for the market - is dominated by the transnational corporations), individualism on condition of learner's autonomy and freedom of choice, and capitalization of competences. The assessment of the results of such education is quantitative and rather standardized and unified because it is costly to assess qualitative results.

I argue that this conceptual metaphor of education in its turn is closely connected to the pragmatic approach developed by W. James, J. Dewey, C. Rogers, etc. that reduces education to professional training. However, the very roots of such approach could be found in Ancient Greece with its sophists ready charge fees for education that values knowledge only if it is of practical application and is demanded in society. The mission of education as viewed by this approach is to serve for a student's success in real life situations and preparing him for exact challenges. That is why such education is also called *real* or *utilitarian*. In case of preparing a person only for a successful career in a chosen sphere, it is inevitable that the consumer of educational goods will decide that the rest of the scientific basic knowledge of the world is excessive, and, therefore, unnecessary to waste money, time and effort on. Education consequently loses its fundamental and complex structure, while the worldview of a graduate becomes narrow and fragmented.

The market metaphor is descriptive in the USA, where the federal government has little power over the diverse educational institutions competing against each other to get more talented or financially reliable applicants, there is no state policy, and the quality of education is controlled by professional associations [13], but is slowly acquiring a normative status in the Russian Federation. It can be inspiring for individualistic westerners, but currently it proves to be demotivating and corrupting for the Russian society.

It is the instilment and implementation of a market metaphor that is the reason for a social conflict in modern-day Russia. This metaphor and pragmatic approach have a destructive potential as they can provide for disintegration of a Russian society and segregation of the people on the principle of their ability to pay for quality education for their children and themselves.

Moreover, the values underpinning this metaphor strongly contradict the Russian national pedagogical traditions and principles. That is why the educators form the majority of those who oppose the reforms and this instilment.

C. The road not taken: philosophical-anthropological approach to education

In the course of the content analysis, it became clear that none of the two leading conceptual metaphors of education addresses the third influential approach to the essence, mission and goals of education, i.e. *philosophical-anthropological approach*. According to it, education is first and foremost upbringing, formation and development of an individual aiming at his/her physical, intellectual and spiritual perfection. A German philosopher M. Scheler, an American social psychologist E. Fromm and an Indian philosopher D. Krishnamurti, and Russian thinkers V.V. Rozanov, S.I. Hessen, N.O. Losskij (to name just a few) adhered to this approach.

The purpose of education, as viewed by this approach, is to let the person discover him/herself and reach harmony and fulfillment on the chosen path of life. The main values are, therefore, *authenticity, self-knowledge, virtue, realization of all talents, balanced relationships with society and happiness*.

It may sometimes seem that market metaphor of education grants the necessary mindset to reach these purposes and values; however it turns out to be just a disguise for pragmatic approach seeks for successful results and, namely, profit. Whereas philosophical-anthropological approach does not use such fiscal logic and measures success differently, in terms of discovering and fulfilling the creative potential and authentic “self-care” of an individual. Such education may also be referred to as “formal” (focusing on formation and not on providing content), or “liberal” (i.e. freeing). Moreover, the proponents believe that teaching a person how to think independently and to bring up a strong personality is more important than formation of exact competences, or instilling a predetermined set of facts, principles, laws of nature, etc.

The quality of education in the frameworks of the philosophical-anthropological approach is defined by an “individual demand” rather than social or consumer (if by the consumers we mean businesses and state employers). From such point of view, there are no such unnecessary (read non-prestigious) professions like that of an expert in dead languages due to the fact that it is up to the student to decide which one fulfills exactly his potential. Some people would claim that in this case study becomes aim in itself, but only with this prerequisite it was possible once in Antiquity and then again in Renaissance to give rise to numerous polymaths who found almost no practical value in their endeavors, and to whom our science, art and morale owes so much. In Modern Era, philosophical-anthropological approach tried to implement in Prussia with Humboldtian reform of the system of higher education which was to integrate the liberal arts and sciences with research to provide for both comprehensive general learning and cultural knowledge.

Currently, in modern-day Russia, there is no conceptual metaphor of education accepted by both the government together with employers, on the one hand, and educators together with parents, on the other hand, that would be represented in philosophical-anthropological approach to education. However, I suggest that this very approach has potential to minimize social conflict between those who think

in frameworks of the conceptual organic metaphor of education and nostalgically demand for the restoration of the Soviet system of education and those who believe that they are on the cutting edge of modernization and are saving the system of education from stagnation using conceptual market metaphor as grounds for their reforms.

To my mind, organic metaphor of education won’t work under the conditions of globalizing world and market economy, and the policy makers in the sphere of education have to be realistic about that. On the contrary, market metaphor perfectly tailored to the abovementioned realia is destructive for the Russian educational process as it perverts educational relationships peculiar to Russian mentality. Therefore I argue that finding a conceptual metaphor that, firstly, on some level is already present in social consciousness (not to be designed artificially from scratch) and, secondly, would take into account challenges of the globalized world in combination with the recent advances in educational technologies, is essential to eradicate the social conflict and resolve the issues of the Russian education system under the reforms.

Philosophical-anthropological approach should be manifested in the chosen conceptual metaphor of education because it is the only approach that is truly person-oriented and is aimed at preserving and refining what is the most human in us, i.e. our body, our mind and our spirit. In addition, properly implemented, it fully supports the ideal of lifelong learning – a trend in the XXI century, - and, as I already mentioned, it can bring up polymaths so needed for the sustainable progress of humanity [14].

D. Conceptual metaphors of education representing philosophical-anthropological approach

Having analyzed the educational discourse in modern-day Russia, a cognitive linguist I.I. Chironova identified the metaphorical models used by the laymen when thinking of education. Among them, the leading conceptual metaphors she registered present education in terms of manufacture (18%), a journey (16%), business (12%), investments (8%), cure (5%) and nourishment (4%) [15]. Then the researcher identified the metaphorical models used by the educators and, in turn, found out that they considered education as a journey (19.4%), construction (12%), gardening (10%), manufacture (9.8%), war (9%), cure (4%), nourishment (1.7%) [15]. It is curious that the laymen used mostly the logic of pragmatic approach in general and the elements of market metaphor, i.e. business, investment; while the educators refuse to think in such terms at all and prefer philosophical-anthropological approach manifesting itself in the three top metaphors.

In the end of 2018, I conducted an anonymous online survey among 186 university students, graduates and teaching staff from Novosibirsk, Russia. The respondents first were asked to choose what they associate modern ideal education with from the given variants (manufacture, craftsman workshop, gardening, business, supermarket, construction, a journey, a hospital, and a battlefield), or to add their own association. After that I asked to explain what they mean by

such comparison. The age range of the respondents is from 18 y.o. to 64 y.o. The majority of the respondents were undergraduates (34.9%) or faculty members (25.3%); however, Bachelors, graduate students, Masters, postgraduate students, and specialists also took part in the online survey. As for their majors, most of the surveyed are into humanities (73.7%), while the rest are engineers (16.7%) and economists (5.9%) with few artists, medics, and lawyers.

The results of the survey demonstrate that the most popular conceptual metaphor of education for the respondents was that of a journey (28.5%). This fact supports the results of the research by I.I. Chironova. The second popular was craftsman workshop (19.9%), followed by business (13.4%) and gardening (11.3%). The conceptual metaphor of construction closes the top-5 list (9.7%) with other variants having less than 9%. It is evident that what the respondents valued while making their choice was individual approach to each student, flexibility, openness to the new, and, nevertheless, profit.

Some of the explanations given by those who opted for education as a journey:

"Discovering the knowledge fields, a student discovers new lands. Moreover, I imagine knowledge united according to a geographical principle."

"I have chosen a journey because a person, travelling to this or that country (selecting a major) studies what interests him most communicating to other people, getting to know foreign culture and language. The dwellers of this country treat him with patience as a guest who might not know or understand something."

"A journey is a process of a gradual discovery of something unknown in the world, what can help understand oneself and one's own abilities, to compare, to draw conclusions, to see advantages and drawbacks..."

"A journey is as if a path between the stations of theory and practice, and these stations interchange and interact with each other."

The respondents who likened education to a craftsman workshop see it differently:

"To gem-cut each diamond – a student – for a future occupation."

"The purpose of education is to "carve out" of a block a Human, finding an individual approach to each."

"Education provides for creation of an individual possessing knowledge and an ability to develop this knowledge independently of others."

"At a craftsman workshop, something unique is created, a masterpiece. The process itself is fascinating. Knowledge transferred from a master to his apprentices has practical application."

There also were a number of respondents who already view education as a market-driven activity:

"Constant competition, constant development."

"As in business, in education, there should be a target. To reach this target, a lot of tasks should be solved. The result will bring an owner profit, i.e. comfort existence in the society."

"If we speak of ideal education, it is like business. Like a successful start-up in the Silicon Valley. The state and the teachers should be interested in investing knowledge in students. Later, the students who became successful in this or that sphere of life will provide a feedback."

"The goal is to earn as much money as possible."

"One should approach education in terms of a business, i.e. one should have an opportunity to choose only necessary and useful for one's future subjects."

"Bearing in mind that education now is necessary to earn money, and not to be educated person, I believe that business metaphor is the closest one."

And, finally, I will quote those who believe that construction process is closer to education:

"Brick by brick building (adding knowledge) a rising building (a pupil / student). As you put a brick, so will a building be like."

"Education provides for a foundation for the further "construction" of a worldview, personality and Enlightenment; the step-by-step, precise and systematic rise of the walls, roof and all the other elements of a building can be compared to acquisition and systematizing of knowledge the student receives. In the end of construction, architecture (i.e. ordering and accepting the knowledge gained, formation of one's own opinion and a worldview) is taken into consideration."

Summarizing the arguments presented by the respondents, education should be responsible for the development of an individual personality. This view is within the trend for personification. However, I suppose that only one of the respondents' metaphors can fully support philosophical-anthropological approach. This is the conceptual metaphor of education as a journey, i.e. journey metaphor. It is this metaphor that pays tribute to self-discovery, openness to new, values cultural differences and focuses on learner's active position. Craftsman workshop and construction metaphors give him a passive role of a one who is being gem-cut or built brick by brick.

IV. CONCLUSION

Thus the paper identified the two conceptual metaphors governing the view of education in modern-day Russia: organic and market metaphors. Their co-existence is the reason for a social conflict. The author proved that the essence, mission and aim underlying these conceptual metaphors contradict each other. The link between these conceptual metaphors and the existing socio-philosophical approaches to education (socio-functional and pragmatic) was established. The author also proposed the solution to put an end to the existing contradiction in choosing the third conceptual metaphor of education to replace the existing ones

in an educational discourse. The conceptual metaphor of a journey was selected based on the results of the research in cognitive linguistics as well as the results of a survey conducted by the author.

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