

## LEV NIKOLAYEVICH TOLSTOY - THE PEDAGOGY OF FREEDOM

**Aura HAPENCIUC**

“Ștefan cel Mare” University of Suceava, Romania  
aurahapenciuc@yahoo.com

### **Abstract**

*The paper highlights a different side of the concerns of the writer Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy (1828-1910), his contribution at the level of pedagogy. One of the world's leading novelists, playwright and essayist, L.N. Tolstoy is also an important reformer of education, with a revolutionary pedagogical theoretical and practical work at the level of the '60s and '70s.*

***The epistemological maturation** of the Russian pedagogy occurs through the pedagogical activity and works of the authors K.D. Ushinsky and L.N Tolstoy. The two important Russian pedagogues, with universal impact, mark the moment of transition from the pre-modern pedagogy to the modern pedagogy. K. D. Ushinsky bequeathed the idea of the organic synthesis in pedagogy, and L.N. Tolstoy launched the pedagogical and social theme of freedom, in education and through education.*

*In summary, the epistemological construction of the pedagogy of freedom can be demonstrated by the object of study, normativity and research methodology. The specific study object of L.N. Tolstoy's pedagogy is the free education / instruction as a model of formation through higher culture (Bildung), but it also involves other concepts that define: education (forced through instruction / teaching), general purpose, education contents and free school.*

*The pedagogy of freedom anticipates the current New education (affirmed in Europe during the late nineteenth century – the second half of the twentieth century). The normativity specific to Tolstoy's pedagogy refers to the principle of complete freedom in education / instruction, the principle of organizing education / instruction in free schools, the principle of optimizing the relationship between the “two active factors of instruction: the educator and the educated”.*

*The historical and comparative research highlights the difference between education (constraining through training / teaching) and instruction (free education through higher culture – Bildung).*

**Keywords:** *freedom pedagogy; new education; object of study; normativity; research methodology.*

## 1. Introduction

V.V. Zenkovski (1881–1962), a philosopher of religions, theologian, culturologist and pedagogue, representative of the Russian exile, considers K.D. Ushinsky and L.N. Tolstoy the most important pedagogues of the 19th century in Russia, with a considerable nationwide and worldwide impact, on the evolution of modern pedagogy in the twentieth century.

From a historical perspective, V.V. Zenkovski highlights the existence of three main directions of development of the Russian pedagogy, affirmed at the border between *pre-modernity* and *modernity*: 1) *the pedagogical naturalism* 2) *the pedagogical idealism*, 3) *the pedagogical-religious movement*. (Зеньковский, 171) The author emphasizes the importance of *the pedagogical naturalism*, related to the philosophical thinking accumulated during the previous decades, which includes two models of approach to education: *a scientific* model (P.F. Lesgaft, A.F. Lazurski, A.P. Neceaev, A.F. Muzychenko, etc.) and *a romantic* model, associated with the idea of “free education” (L.N.Tolstoy and his followers). (Зеньковский, 4)

In the philosophical-pedagogical conception of L.N. Tolstoy, a significant place is occupied by the problem of freedom in the education and training of children. *The free education* is the process of creating an environment conducive to the maturation of the child and the development of his or her natural instincts. Freedom cannot be conferred by anyone, but is an attribute of every person. *The freedom in education*, states the Russian writer and pedagogue, is linked to the religious and moral values. The teacher's mission is *to promote the free development of the pupil*, which ensures his and her preparation for the future.

From this viewpoint, L.N. Tolstoy is a forerunner of the *New Education* movement, based upon capitalizing on the resources of each individual. *The free education* involves the creation of an enabling environment that leads to the maturation of the child and the development of his or her natural instincts. If the philosopher I. Kant spoke of the “radical evil” of the human nature, denounced by Rousseau, the “Tolstoyan Rousseauism” emphasizes *the radical goodness of the human nature*. It is one of the motifs for the L.N. Tolstoy’s early pedagogy. His pedagogy, cultivated in the last years of his life, promotes *the principle of serving the good and the self-fulfillment* in and *through free, natural education*.

The ideas were put into practice in the *Iasnaia Poliana School* (1849-1862), organized by L. N. Tolstoy based upon the principles of “community pedagogy”: the focus on involving pupils in community life, the free development, stimulating their interest in school and the extracurricular activities. These principles will later be applied by the followers of *the New Education* at the “*Hamburg School*” (1918-1925) in a community context specific to a rising industrialized society.

*The Iasnaia Poliana* school was created by the writer for the children of peasants, in order to apply the principles of community pedagogy in the context of an agrarian society. Tolstoy tried to give a theoretical foundation to the “free education”, the only one able to develop in the child *an authentic*, active and happy man, full of initiative. At the heart of this school's activity was the idea that education should observe and develop the “pure and harmonious new being of the child”. (Толстой, 545)

*The organization of the Iasnaia Poliana School* was achieved by Lev Tolstoy based upon the information provided by the most important pedagogues in Europe, whom he met in his travels undertaken for the purpose of *pedagogical documentation*. His system of *free education* was based upon *the method of free conversation* with the schoolchildren. *The learning* was based upon respect

for the ability, interests and age characteristics of each child. The four teachers who taught within the school carried out *the curricula* and adapted it to the pupils' requirements. *The classes* were from 8 o'clock to 12 o'clock and from 15 o'clock to 18 o'clock. The pupils aged 7 and 15 and there were also a few adults, divided into 2 classes of two groups, depending on their age and level of education.

The lessons were often given in nature, and ethical discussions took place during the walks. In the evening there were readings and story-telling classes. The students collected folklore music and tales from their home villages and wrote stories that were published in the "Iasnaia Poliana" magazine, together with the teachers' works about Tolstoy's pedagogical principles. The magazine's contributors were teachers from nearby schools. The school attaches importance to the physical education and to practical disciplines (locksmithing, etc.), which were also practiced through play, to be more appealing.

Between 1861-1862, at the initiative of L.N. Tolstoy, several rural schools were opened around Iasnaia Poliana. The students who taught in them spread the ideas about the free education. L.N. Tolstoy had methodical contributions through papers, lectures, articles: *On popular education*, *Letter to Kovalevsky*, *Memorandum to Bulgakov*. He wrote *the New Alphabet* (1872) and *Four Reading Books*.

## 2. Content development

The introductory study, *L.N. Tolstoy as a pedagogue*, signed by V.Veikšan (in L.N. Tolstoy, *Pedagogical Texts*, 1960), highlights Tolstoy's vision of education, which is the product of visits made by the author to schools in Germany, Belgium, Italy, France and the U.K. (Tolstoy, 1960, XXX – LI) Tolstoy's *pedagogy* is built upon *the principle of freedom*, associated more with the education than with the instruction, which affects freedom. This does not mean that the instruction, as an object of study of *the didactics*, is not as important as education (object of study of pedagogy). (Tolstoy, 1960, XLIII) For the free education, different from the non-free instruction, constrained by several social causes (family, religion, state, society), Tolstoy proposes the concept of *instruction*, close to the concept of *Bildung* (formation through culture), taken over from the German *philosophy* and *pedagogy*.

The study *Education and instruction sets the epistemological foundations of Tolstoy's pedagogy*, created and sustained by defining and analyzing the concepts of *education*; *instruction*; *public education* and *free school*.

**The concept of education** is delimited by the concept of *instruction*, according to the model promoted in Germany, at the level of *the pedagogical theory*. But at the level of *practice*, "education and instruction merge." (Tolstoy, 1960, 212)

In the model of German pedagogy, adopted by Tolstoy, there is a difference between *Erziehung* (Education) and *Unterricht* (Teaching). *The education* includes *teaching* (which initiates *the instruction*), which "also contains an educational element" (according to the theory of educational teaching integrated by Herbart in the general pedagogy, launched in the early twentieth century). The conceptual integration of *education* and *teaching / instruction* is possible at the level of the "notion of instruction", culturally based (*Bildung*), which is confused with the "free education", with the general function of permanent positive formation of *the educated*. (Tolstoy, 1960, 213)

“The most general definition of *education* – taken from German pedagogy – refers to “*the formation of people* as valuable as possible, corresponding to the ideals created by a particular era”. *The teaching* (which initiates the instruction) “remains one of the main means of achieving education” along with “the discipline and the coercion.” (Tolstoi, 1960, 213)

The concept of *education*, associated with the concept of “instruction”, is reproduced in the German pedagogy by the term “*Die Bildung*”, which has a broad *cultural* meaning.

*The pedagogy*, as a *science of education*, has as its *object of specific study* “only the education which considers the human being in training as a being wholly subordinate to the educator.” (Tolstoi, 1960, 214)

“The education is the action exerted by one individual on another individual under three aspects: the moral influence – *the instruction* and *the teaching* – *directing the influences* of life on the pupil”. “*The instruction* in the general sense” – which includes *the instruction* and *the teaching* – is close to the education, which “differs from the instruction only in the element of coercion”. Thus, “the education is a forced instruction”, while “the instruction itself is free” (having the broad meaning of free education). (Tolstoi, 1960, 214-215)

Through comparative *pedagogy studies*, Tolstoy finds the similarity between *the theory of education* in Russia and Germany, different from Europe (France and the UK). Thus, in “Europe the education is believed to be the broader notion”, while “in Russia and Germany the broader notion is *the education* and *the instruction*”, rendered by the German concept of *Bildung*, which has a broad cultural openness and a superior spiritual depth. (Tolstoi, 1960, 217)

*The pedagogy* is *the science specialized in the study of education* that *integrates the instruction* and *the teaching*, but not anyway, but at the level of *free education* or *instruction* or *training*. (Tolstoi, 1960, 217-219)

*The causes that prevent the realization of free education* are of a social nature: a) *the family* – where “the father and the mother want to make the children similar to themselves”; b) *the religion* – which “nurtures the desire to forcefully convert any child into the spirit of its teaching”; c) *the state* – which “has an interest in educating people capable of fulfilling certain goals that it pursues”; d) *the society* – where “the social classes need help, members, collaborators”.

The elimination of these causes can be achieved by *reconstructing pedagogy* based upon *principles that order the relationships between the notions of education and instruction*: 1) “The instruction and education are two distinct notions”, although complementary; 2) “The instruction is free and therefore legitimate and well-founded”; 3) “The education *that is performed in a forced way*”, through the constraints of the family, religion, status, society “cannot be justified by reason and, as such, cannot form the object of pedagogy”; 4) *The instruction* as *free education* must eliminate “the educational element imposed by force, which consists in the exclusive choice of a certain scientific sphere and in the fear of punishment”, permanently fulfilling its function of *forming* the personality of the educated. (Tolstoi, 1960, 240-241)

**The concept of instruction** is defined by Tolstoy in the study *Progress and the Definition of Instruction* (Russkii vestnik, no. 5, 1872). (Tolstoi, 1960, 266-292) **The instruction** “is the human activity which has at its foundation the human tendency towards equality and the law of movement before culture”. Its general **function** that supports **the free education** is **the formation of the personality of the educated (Bildung), the object of specific study of pedagogy**.

*The structure of instruction* includes “two active factors: *the instructor* and *the instructed, the educator* and the pupil” (the educated). In order to improve it, one must “discover the cause that

determined the fusion of these two activities – of the teacher and the pupil – within a single phenomenon called *instruction* or *education*” which is *free* in cultural terms, without any intellectual and moral constraints. “*The pupil's activity* consists in *assimilating* the way of thinking, in mastering the content” [67, p. 288]. *The teacher's activity* involves “the desire to prepare people who will be useful to us.” It is stimulated not by “the temptation of material advantage,” but by the “vanity which urges man to instruct in order to display his culture,” and by “the desire to make others co-partners in our interests, to pass on to them our beliefs and knowledge.” (Tolstoi, 1960, 290-291)

**The aims of the instruction / free education / instruction** activity aim at: a) “preparing useful people for new situations”; b) “acquiring several material advantages in exchange for *the instruction*”; c) “the desire to display culture”; d) “the desire for self-instruction”, which tends to lead to “the equalization of the pupil's knowledge with that of the teacher.” (Tolstoi, 1960, 290-291)

**The public education.** This concept is defined and analyzed by Tolstoy in his study *Of public instruction*. (Tolstoi, 1960, 15-37) “*The public education*” has the following problem to solve – “the people want to learn and each individual unconsciously tends to learn”, but at the same time, “each individual constantly opposes the efforts that society or the government makes for his training”. (Tolstoi, 1960, 15) The solution proposed by Tolstoy is to choose the model of training that is not only “in favor of the government and the society that shares the benefits of culture”, but “to be a benefit for a certain people and in a certain historical era”. (Tolstoi, 1960, 217)

In *The analysis of public instruction*, Tolstoy uses *the historical method of researching education*, which he considers useful in the process of reconstructing the public instruction. He recalls a negative example, “the dogmatic school of the Middle Ages, when the pupil is forcibly brought in and parents are forced to send their children to school.” The *general purpose of the public instruction* must be “to free the school from the historical chains that press upon it”. Such a goal, based upon religious, psychological, ethical, pedagogical, social “grounds”, allows for: a) the choice of the most appropriate contents and methods of education, instruction and teaching; b) the elimination of any method based upon coercion; c) cultivating *the free education*, by observing the “fundamental development laws specific to each people”. (Tolstoi, 1960, 18- 27)

**The quality public education** promotes “the instruction which is essentially a historical process,” which, “in the broadest sense, includes the creation – that activity of man which is founded on the tendency to equality and the eternal law of the forward movement of culture” applied in and through *teaching* and *instruction*, at the level of *training* achieved through *free education*. (Tolstoi, 1960, 36)

The issue of *the education*, in general, of *the public education*, in particular, is studied by *the general didactics*, which defines and analyzes *the most significant teaching / instruction / education methods*, not according to “passing modes”, but according to *theoretically validated pedagogical criteria, practically capable*: a) “to develop *the intellectual faculties* of the child”; b) “to introduce in the instruction process *the personal interest* of the child”; c) to support “an *independent learning process*”; d) “to be based upon the participation of hearing [...], which is sense that serves to perceive language”; e) “to be a mixture of *analysis* and *synthesis*”; f) to start from known objects, not from non-existent ideas in the pupil's consciousness.” (Tolstoi, 1960, 329, 330)

**The education through the free school** is the notion considered by Tolstoy to be “the most important” from a *practical* pedagogical perspective. It defines *the formative activity* carried out

almost as “an unconscious influence”, supported by *the example* of the educator and *the environment* created especially within the school institution. *Its analysis* involves highlighting its function or mission (social and individual), *the general purpose* employed by designers, *the pedagogically imposed content* of the general purpose at the level of *the instruction / free education / training* of the personality of the educated.

*The general function* performed by *the education through the free school* is to organize the activity at a level that makes it possible “for the life of the educated to be correct in all aspects”.

*The general goal* pursued is “the longing for perfection in the love of man.” (Tolstoi, 1960, 394)

*The content*, imposed pedagogically by *the general purpose* pursued, is outlined at the level of “*instruction*”, a *training* activity that supports *the free education* at a higher cultural level (*Bildung*), expressed in “three different ways: a) *philosophy – religion* (that studies the meaning of life); b) *natural sciences* (mechanics, physics, chemistry, physiology), based upon the “experimental study”; c) *the mathematical sciences* based upon “conclusions from their own reasoning”. *The theological, legal, historical, socio-human sciences* (anthropology, sociology, psychology, pedagogy), *philology* (Russian, French, etc.), in Tolstoy's opinion, “are not sciences themselves”. Their pedagogical valorization requires finding other *ways of instruction*. (Tolstoi, 1960, 395)

*The organization of instruction* in “free schools” implies *the flexibility* of the programs and methods of teaching / instruction / free education / training, normatively ordered by referring to the “principle of freedom” by virtue of which “the pupil can come on his own initiative to learn whenever he wishes to – the condition *sine qua non* of any fruitful instruction”. The risk of “pedagogical anarchy” is faced by Tolstoy with his firm conviction that “any deviation from the principle of freedom is detrimental to the instruction itself.” (Tolstoi, 1960, 396)

### 3. Conclusions and suggestions

Tolstoy's **general pedagogical conception** is marked by the following *strong ideas*, valid not only at the level of the transition from *the pre-modern* to *modern pedagogy*, but also as *landmarks* that anticipate the evolutions of *postmodern (contemporary) pedagogy*: 1) “The delimitation we made between *education* and *instruction* in my (previous) papers was artificial. *The education* and *the instruction* are inextricably linked. One cannot educate without transmitting certain knowledge and knowledge, in whatever field it may be, exerts an educational action”; 2. “*Freedom* is the indispensable condition of any true *instruction* for both pupils and teachers”; 3). “I believe that complete freedom alone, that is, only *the elimination of coercion* for both those who are being instructed and those who are carrying out *instruction*, would set mankind free from much of the evils now inflicted by education everywhere with its violence and interested character”. (Tolstoi, 1960, 398-399)

**L.N. Tolstoy's** ideas are continued by his **followers** (Gorbunov-Posadov, K.N. Ventțel, S.N. Durilin, S.T. Satski, A.I. Zelenka, L.K. Schleger, the spouses N.V. and M.V. Chekhov, A.F. Fortunatov). They create a “free education” group, which founds the “Mediator” publishing house especially to popularize pedagogical ideas in publications such as: *Free Education* or the *Messenger of Education*. They contribute to the establishment of the “*The Free Child House*”. *The general principles of “free education”* – freeing the child from any external influence, the renunciation of authority in the relationship between adults and children, the child's right to initiative – capitalizes

on J.J. Rousseau's theory of the “radical goodness” of the child's nature and the benefits of complete freedom in the natural flowering of the soul of the *educated* within the formative process.

## References

- Bujorean, E. (2017). *Violența simbolică în școală*. Editura Universității ”Al.I.Cuza”, Iași.
- Cristea, S. (2015). *Dicționar enciclopedic de pedagogie*. București: Editura Didactică Publishing House.
- Eși, M.C. (2010). *Didactica specialității între strategii discursive și performanțe argumentative*. Editura Universității ”Ștefan cel Mare”
- Eși, M.C. (2010). The didactic principles and their applications in the didactic activity. *Sino-US English Teaching* 7, 9, pp. 24 -34.
- Напenciuc, A. (2015). Key Concepts in Russian Pedagogy. *Educația în Societatea Contemporana. Aplicații*, 341-352.
- Толстой, Л. Н. (1989). *Педагогические сочинения*, М.: АПН СССР.
- Tolstoi, L.N. (1960). *Texte pedagogice*. traducere de Tamara Gane. București: Editura de Stat Didactică și Pedagogică.
109. Зеньковский, В. (1960). *Русская педагогика в XX веке*. Изд. Религиозно-педагогического кабинета при Православном Богословском институте в Париже. Париж.