

INFORMAL EDUCATORS AS A SUBJECTS OF PEDAGOGICAL INTERACTION IN PEDAGOGY OF INFORMAL EDUCATION

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Abstract. The article presents the characteristics of informal educators as subjects of pedagogical interaction in Pedagogy of informal education, created by the author in 2020 as a new self-contained branch of pedagogy. Against the background of the new global and European goals until 2030, the prehistory of the PIE and the characteristics of informal education as a complex three-component category with integral meaning are presented. The features of informal educators as drivers of PIE are revealed. A relatively complete list of informal educators is compiled and their typology is shown according to two criteria. They are described through the six substantial questions of being. The personal qualities of the person who wishes to take on the role of an informal educator are specified: knowledge, skills and competences, psychological characteristics and attitudes. Examples are given of how each person can become an informal educator of himself or someone else, and how through informal education a hobby can become a profession.

Keywords: educational triad; educational pyramid; formal education; non-formal education; informal education; Pedagogy of Informal Education; informal educators; Homo creabilis.

1. Introduction

The world is moving towards the finale of the first quarter of the first century of the new millennium. All eyes are already on the goals for the 21st century's three decades - goals for sustainable development. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of United Nations is named "Transforming our World". She has 17 goals. In the specification of Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all sub-goal 4.7 is set: "4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles" (Transforming our World 2015).

At the same time it was accepted Incheon Declaration (19 – 22.05.2015) “Education 2030: Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all”, which indicates how the goals in the field of education will be achieved: “the provision of flexible learning pathways, as well as the recognition, validation and accreditation of the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through non-formal and informal education, is important” (Education 2015, point 10).

The new realities of the digitizing world were reflected in the European way for the Digital Decade (2020 – 2030): “Universal digital education and skills for people to take an active part in society and in democratic processes” (Digital Compass 2021, p. 13).

The European Commission has declared 2023 the European Year of Skills and immediately the document “Harnessing talent in Europe’s regions” appeared. “Promoting education and adult participation in life-long learning results in improving productivity and thus contributing to the competitiveness of these regions, particularly in relation to the green and digital transitions” (Harnessing talent 2023, p. 13).

The idea of lifelong learning is not an invention of the 21st or 20th century. The history of the philosophical and pedagogical foundations of Pedagogy of informal education unequivocally shows the desire of people to learn at any age throughout their lives as *Homo creabilis* (Zhelyazkova-Teya 2022b, pp. 387, 389, 390).

But the new person-centred goals in education focus the individual's efforts around lifestyle, flexible individual learning paths and the role of informal education in developing knowledge, skills and competences that can be recognised, validated or accredited for the purposes of vocational qualification and inclusion in the labor market. Informal education could shorten the duration of the formal learning process in a given specialty or profession and make it possible to obtain a qualification in only a part of a profession for which educational standards have been achieved.

For example, a doctor of theory of knowledge can validate his knowledge, skills and competences in gardening and, after passing a theoretical and practical exam in a vocational high school in agriculture, receive a Certificate of validation of professional qualification in part of the profession “Technician – landscaper” in “Floristry” specialty with recognition of professional knowledge, skills and competences in only two activities that are of interest to the individual. The presented case from real practice shows how a hobby can turn into a profession.

In the given example, the candidate himself has entered the role of an informal educator. The present article is dedicated to informal educators as subjects of pedagogical interaction in the Pedagogy of informal education.

2. Methodology and methods of research

The Pedagogy of informal education (PIE) as a new self-contained branch of pedagogy has its background. It began in 2010 with the justification of informal education as a significant element of the “educational triad” of formal, non-formal and informal education (Zhelyazkova (Teya) 2010a). In the same year, the place of informal education as the base of the “educational pyramid” was proved, from which and on top of which initially non-formal and then formal education are built (Zhelyazkova (Teya) 2010b).

In order to avoid the frequent misleading translations in the English-language literature of the constituent parts of the educational triad, it is necessary to introduce the general criteria and comprehensive definitions of its parts, which show the common and different 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 2022a, p. 42).

Research on informal education in subsequent years has detailed and analyzed it in various contexts. The accumulated research experience led to a serious rethinking of the own theoretical constructs for informal education, as a result of which in 2020 the PIE was born, the special subject of which is now self-contained, complex, three-component category informal education.

After twelve years of research on informal education and 22 publications about it, conducted own combined empirical research and exploration of the experience of other authors came to the conclusion that informal education is a complex category with an integral meaning. The typology of integral components of informal education is presented in the submitted article “Particularities of Informal Education as a Subject of Pedagogy of Informal Education” (Zhelyazkova-Teya 2023). The three components of informal education are presented in detail in the following table 1.

Table 1. Components of informal education

Implicitly informal education	Procedurally informal education	Meaning-to-life informal education
<i>Accidentally Unintentionally</i>	<i>Deliberately Intentionally</i>	<i>Essentially Substantially</i>

Each column contains 9, or a total of 27 types of informal education are presented in the table. The article presents the particularities of individual informal education, the characteristics of adults as subjects of informal education, types of informal education, the principles and functions of informal education (Zhelyazkova-Teya 2023).

Pedagogy of informal education as transpedagogy are presented in the magazine "Pedagogy" in 2022. PIE has its object, subject, general scientific definition, categorical apparatus, prerequisites, purpose, tasks, principles, laws, approaches, methods, learning models, components of the educational process, sections and as transpedagogy is part of a large pedagogical family (Zhelyazkova-Teya 2022a, pp. 44 – 48).

Each pedagogy needs its own engines, and in PIE these are informal educators. "Informal educators are people who do not have special, professional training and qualifications to teach others, but do so in the way of transferring their experience and knowledge gained through lifelong informal education" (Zhelyazkova-Teya 2019, p. 117). In other words: an informal educator can be any person who in some way teaches, educates and develops himself or others. Pedagogical interaction in PIE is a subject-subject relationship with informal educators in everyday life activity.

In revealing the subject of the research (Informal educators as a subjects of pedagogical interaction in Pedagogy of informal education) the following philosophical, general scientific and specific scientific methods are used: analysis of bibliographic sources (dictionaries, reference books, scientific publications,), analysis and synthesis, classification, description, interpretation, abstraction, analogy, heuristic methods for generating new ideas, ascent from the abstract to the concrete, theoretical analysis.

3. Results

The list of informal educators appeared in response to the question "*Who can teach you how to live?*" when testing multiple brainstorming to discover new knowledge. The list included the personalities of "teachers, lecturers, tutors, coaches, pedagogs, psychologists, pedagogical consultants, social educators, art therapists – people who are in one way or another connected with formal and non-formal education." The task of offering all possible options naturally added the personalities of "people who can be classified as *informal educators*: parting

guides, animators, coaches, family members, relatives, friends, random people” (Zhelyazkova-Teya 2019).

In accordance with the indicators of informal education and the conducted empirical research, a list of people who can enter the role of informal educators was compiled. The distribution is conditional and is carried out according to two criteria:

- 1) professionals – non-professionals – random people;
- 2) formal – non-formal - informal.

Professionals are people who have been specially trained to perform their respective roles. It is assumed that they work mainly in a formal environment, in which, however, there is an opportunity for informal influence.

Non-professionals either do not have the necessary training to fulfill the role, or, if they do, work in a non-formal environment with non-formal means of informal influence.

Random people appear unexpectedly, spontaneously, often once in a lifetime, but they can have a significant impact as informal educators, as “relays” of something to someone. This category of informal educators may remain completely unknown in terms of personal biography, professional training and profession. The important thing is that they prove their worth here and now through the experience that they know how to transfer to another person. It is not the authority that is important, but the benefits that they bring.

An interesting example in this category is the child who, without realizing it, may happen to be an informal adult educator with his out-of-the-box thinking and unlimited imagination. The conditionality of the classification is that at a certain point in life, professionals or non-professionals may find themselves in the role of random people.

The meaning of the terms according to the second criterion:

Formal – ... a person who carries out activities in institutionalized and organized structures in a strictly regulated and systematized way (bodies and structures of state power and corporate business).

Non-formal – ... a person who carries out activities in the institutionalized and organized structures of civil society in a freely chosen systematic way.

Informal is a person who carries out activities outside of institutionalized and organized structures in a freely chosen, unsystematized way, at ease, everyday in his personal life" (Zhelyazkova-Teya 2020, pp. 53 – 54).

In the presented typology of informal educators, the entire triad formal - non-formal - informal is used to show the similarities and differences between them, as well as to illustrate the complexity of distinguishing them, since in real life the same person can simultaneously enter and even at the same time in different roles both horizontally and vertically of the social positions included in the table 2.

Table 2. Typology of informal educators

№	Professionals Formals	Non-professionals Non-formals	Random people Informals
Global network as a social environment			
1	professional content creators	non-professional content creators	members on social networks
Public environment			
2	professional politicians	politicians - amateurs	politico
3	political analyst	political mastermind	political supporter
4	administrators	collaborators	citizen
5	security guards	co-prisoners	informer
6	patriarch	abbe	layman
Working environment			
7	managers	coach	helper
8	mentors	colleagues	visitant
9	manufacturers	sellers	consumer
10	gardening technicians	gardeners	a villager
11	HR (Human Resources)	PR (Public Relations)	IM (Image Maker)
Educational environment			
12	teachers	tutors	mastermind
13	lecturers	coachers	learning
14	pedagog-formal	pedagog-non-formal	pedagog-informal
15	psychologist	companion	executor
16	social teachers	social workers	interlocutor
17	scientists	postgraduate	undergraduate
Cultural environment			
18	organizers	volunteers	participant
19	professional actors	non-professional actors	informal actor
20	art therapists	animators	artificer
21	producer	performer	spectator
Family and personal environment			
22	parents	relatives	neighbors
23	husband / wife	intimate partner	youngling
24	fellow students	friends	randomly met people
25	upbringers	guide	fellow travelers

The typology of informal educators can include methodologists, curators and personifiers, as well as people of different genders, ages, cultural and religious affiliations.

There are many more concrete examples of informal educators, because everyone can be one under certain circumstances. Our task was to show the criteria and approach to their typology. When they take on the role of informal educators, regardless of their qualifications and status, they do not see life as a job, but use it as a free school for invaluable informal education. It is important that each person entering the role of an informal educator participates only where and when he has the necessary strength to fulfill his role.

Any essence, any phenomenon or any process can be described by the six substantial questions of being. We will apply them to the analysis of informal educators.

Who can be an informal educator? Both children and adults of the five generations.

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|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Generation T | Traditionalists | 55 – 65 and older |
| 2. Generation X | Analog, lost | 40 – 54 years |
| 3. Generation Y | Millennial, Me-Me | 27 – 39 years' old |
| 4. Generation Z | Digital | 18 – 26 years |
| 5. Generation Alpha | Digital, unprotected | born between 2010 – 2025 |

The five generations differ in: 1. dominant values; 2. relation to new technologies; 3. adaptability to change; 4. attitudes towards training and improvement; 5. attitudes towards communication and interaction with people of other generations; 6. ability to work and mindset to work (SSMEIM 2022, p. 7).

What do informal educators do? Subject-subject transfer of knowledge, skills and competences as learned good and working practices.

Where can informal pedagogical interaction with informal educators take place? Practically everywhere.

All levels of formal education: preschool, school, university, doctoral.

All types of non-formal education: training courses; professional conferences, trainings and seminars; amateur courses; private lessons; internships; on-the-job training with a mentor; training in safety techniques, fire safety, labor protection, civil defense, skills development, etc. similar; entrepreneurship and self-employment training.

All possibilities of informal education: activities with printed materials; television and radio broadcasts; excursions; learning good habits with the help of family, friends and colleagues; computer, audio and video training and online training; visits to libraries and study centers, leisure clubs and schools; master classes and workshops.

Most often, informal educators meet in the School of Life as a workshop and forge of knowledge, skills and competences, where life experience is learned informally, life strategies are created and a unique destiny is experienced.

When can we rely on informal educators? Anytime. There are no breaks in life. This is shown in the answers to the remaining substantive questions. But in answering the question *When?* has an interesting feature.

There are intervals in life that stimulate and support informal educators. These time slots are called free time. "Free time is that part of people's active life activity during which they can fully develop their qualities and skills. It is that part of social time that remains outside of work, social and personal duties, and the satisfaction of biological needs" (Boiadjieva & Velikova 2022, p. 107).

Empirical studies among two groups of the type "social communicators" and "harmonious rationalists" – students of pedagogy and working pedagogues – show that they devote most of their free time to communication. 78% (highest) with friends and 57% with family among students, or communication with relatives and friends occupies 2.4 hours of the day. For working pedagogues, the first two places (every day and almost every day) are communication with family and non-formal contacts – conversations with acquaintances, friends, neighbors, colleagues. In the ideas of the students' perfect day, the first three places are again communication: 64% with friends, 64% with the loved one, 50% with relatives, family (Boiadjieva & Velikova 2022, pp. 112, 118, 124, 128).

The illustrated real-life practice shows that free time, as the main resource of informal education, to the greatest extent stimulates the process of communication, when people become informal educators for each other. Because it is precisely in the time outside of formal commitments (mandatory study or work), outside of non-formal employment (courses and schools), that there is time for free informal realization, in which you yourself choose from whom, what, where, when, how and why to learn or whose experience you apply.

How do informal educators work? They use all known forms and means of transmitting experience from person to person through the whole range of trial and error learning techniques and technologies.

Why are there informal educators at all? The purpose of learning is preparation for a fulfilling life. The meaning of full living is reaching one's own personal peak and through it inclusion in the world turnover of resources – human, material, financial, valuable, cultural, educational. Climbing one's own personal peak is easier with the support of the knowledge, skills, competences and acquired experience of informal educators. In fact, informal educators preserve, develop and transmit healthy living traditions from generation to generation. To them we owe the development of folk creativity, the preservation of authentic folklore, the observance of customs and rites, the maintenance of ethnic roots healthy and strong as practical answers to the questions Who are we? and Why are we?

Approaches to informal human learning that characterize the work of informal educators: benevolence, empathy, responsiveness, contact (communicativeness), enthusiasm, correctness, tact, artistry, respect for the human personality, "the idea of a person as an intrinsically valuable, self-developing and self-governing subject of the noosphere, recognition and respect for the pluralism of life positions, understanding of teaching as a way of human life" (Zmeev 2000, p. 37).

However, entering into the situational role of an informal educator still requires a certain set of competencies in the field of cognitive, social, functional or regulatory competencies. The authors of the article “Socio-Pedagogical Competence of a Specialist in the Social Sphere – Theoretical Provisions and Directions of Research” state that “Competence is defined by us as an integral characteristic, a complex personal education that ensures the professional and personal development and self-development of a specialist, the formation of a value-semantic orientation, subjective position, experience of professionally oriented activity, which is based on fundamental knowledge and acquired practical experience” (Serjakova et al 2016, p. 78). Here, self-development and the acquisition of practical experience are especially important.

Informal educators have one, several or all general cultural competencies that allow them to help other people, even if they do not have professional training as teachers: communicative, humanitarian, social, environmental, economic, aesthetic competence.

For informal educators, one can also apply the conceptual model of psychological and pedagogical competence, which includes general scientific competences, general professional competences, social and personal competences, and organizational and personal competences (Serjakova 2008, p. 186). “A competent person has an authorial (self-authoring) level of cognitive complexity, in which he can be independent of the many expectations and claims of his environment, able to control his actions based on his own feelings, thoughts and values, act independently, and not be an instrument of someone else then actions, to be the author of your own life, and not to play a role in someone else's scenario” (Serjakova 2008, p. 135).

This will bring us closer to *Homo creabilis*, self-created man. He knows how to use his life experience as a unique informal education. Including with the help of therapeutic tools such as body movement therapy, dance therapy, music therapy, drama therapy, play therapy, fairy tale therapy, art therapy, bibliotherapy, creative self-expression therapy.

An important place here is occupied by the vector “know thyself” from the concept of personality psychoplasticity – “self-worth of a person: self-knowledge; identification of personality resources; developed reflection; the value of physical and psychological health; self-regulation skills; skills in achieving personal and individual socially significant goals; disclosure of the creative potential of the individual; skills of independent activity and decision-making; psychological defense skills; confidence in yourself and your abilities” (Levanova & Pushkareva 2013, p. 139).

More common to informal educators are the core competencies adopted in Europe: adapt, think, do, search, study, cooperate. In an implicit form, informal educators are subject to the principles of social education. An important part of it is helping others in their self-organization and independent activity, amateur

communication, personality development through social experience, in the self-construction of one's life.

The listed competencies are not a difference inherent only to informal educators. They are also inherent in their “students” – people who develop themselves through informal learning. But there is one competence that is common to all people, and that is personal competence, expressed in the readiness to constantly learn, to acquire new knowledge and skills, to self-develop and realize your personal potential. The realization of these competencies is often related to the creation of innovations in personal development.

The global web is replete with examples of followers of self-proclaimed people who just want to become famous. They too have stepped into the role of informal educators, but the problem is less with them and more with those who have chosen to follow them. Just as one chooses the school, university or school in which one wishes to study, one should also choose one's informal educators.

Like all educators, informals also bear their responsibility. People don't always realize that they are acting as informal educators by sharing their personal space on social networks. It is understandable why the personal stories of celebrities arouse so much interest - other people want to measure up to them, that is, they become subjects of pedagogical interaction. The new fashion of the so-called “umbrella” school implies the bearing of exclusive responsibility on the part of the parents, who act as informal educators for their children, who must, however, meet the requirements of the state educational standards.

The Bulgarian pedagogue Lubomir Popov, studying life pedagogical thinking, considers the object of pedagogy as a unity of scientifically based and “life pedagogical practice”, as well as scientific and “life pedagogical thinking” (Popov 2006, p. 15; 2009, p. 224). The Pedagogy of informal education enables every person who strives to develop in himself both the universal and the unique to do so successfully.

4. Conclusion

Back in 2011, we identified “The 100 Positions We Unconsciously Do in Our Lives (Informal Education and Experience)”¹. The list of 100 positions taken from the National Classification of Professions and Positions (2011) Alphabetical Position Designator. It was developed in accordance with the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08), which is approved as a European standard for the member states of the European Union.

Living, unexpectedly for ourselves, we touch a large number of professions and exercise parts of them, which in official workplaces are called positions. Without having specially prepared, we imperceptibly perform at least once in our lives individual functions and tasks inherent in the listed 100 positions. Through these positions, each of us is “self-employed” in the workplace called life path. Only

those who are not afraid of the huge list of tasks and do not look at their life as work, but use it as a free school for invaluable informal education, are successful in it. The unique experience thus created makes us wiser, more skilled and better. Awakened in this way own potential, talents and abilities are self-preparation for the role of informal educators.

The future is related to the development of the Pedagogy of informal educators as a section of the Pedagogy of informal education. In order for a person to be a good informal educator for himself or for others, to carry out quality pedagogical interaction with other people without harming them, he will have to possess not only the necessary personal qualities indicated in the previous section, but also pass appropriate general scientific, general theoretical and psychological-pedagogical training. This preparation should take place in the structures of formal and non-formal education for the purposes of informal education. A good informal educator can be an educated person who has basic knowledge of the world, has obtained legal capacity in some profession, has developed his personal qualities and is the owner of multilateral competences.

One of the tasks of the Pedagogy of informal education (PIE) is to prepare people for their role as informal educators. The more specialists are involved in the development of PIE and the more diverse they are, the faster and better its potential to support people in their growth as *Homo creabilis* will be built. And PIE itself, with its attractiveness, innovation and polyvariance, will take its place among the modern pedagogies of the XXI century. Starting from ancient times and reaching the present day, PIE fully lives up to its motto: “First in the past, modern today, leading tomorrow”.

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NOTES

1. 100-te DLAZHNOTI, koito izpalnjavame neusetno v zhivota si (INFORMALNO obrazovanie i opit). URL: <<http://iii-bg.org/blog/?p=95>> [In Bulgarian].

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