

ON OCCASION OF THE 300TH ANNIVERSARY: HRYHORII SKOVORODA'S PEDAGOGICAL IDEAS AS A PRECURSOR OF DIFFERENTIATED TEACHING

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Abstract. *On 3rd December 2022, we celebrated the 300th anniversary of the birth of Hryhorii Skovoroda – one of the greatest Baroque thinkers, poets, educators and writers of the XVIII century. His influence on the development of Ukrainian and worldwide pedagogy is difficult to overestimate, however, today we would like to stress the importance and relevance of his ideas by analysing them through the prism of a modern approach to education – differentiated teaching and learning. H. Skovoroda's studying at Kyiv Mohyla Academy, where he had a chance to meet famous and prospective philosophers, thinkers, and activists of the time, and his experience of teaching and lecturing at famous Ukrainian educational centers shaped his views on teaching methods. Combined with his philosophic views these ideas prove to be relevant in the modern conditions. The article analyses the main principles of differentiated learning – principles of taking into account the individual characteristics of students, accessibility, systematicity, consistency, autonomy, and consciousness through their connection to Skovoroda's*

ideas. The analysis showed that H. Skovoroda formulated some of the fundamental principles of personality-oriented learning, which were precursors for developing ideas of differentiated learning.

Keywords: *H. Skovoroda, differentiated learning, personality-oriented learning, methodological principles.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Hryhorii Skovoroda is rightly considered one of the greatest Baroque thinkers, poets, educators, and writers of the XVIII century, a prophet of the Ukrainian Renaissance. Being a travelling philosopher, he dedicated his life to spreading his novel ideas on human nature, world perception, and self-cognition by setting his own example of moral development, way of life, and search for happiness. His influence on further unfolding of philosophical thought is difficult to overestimate, but Skovoroda`s pedagogy is by no means less important. Skovoroda was a person of encyclopaedical knowledge (Sherstniuk, Malys, 2018) and was fond of teaching. However, his path as a teacher was intricate and full of obstacles.

H. Skovoroda studied at Kyiv Mohyla Academy, a prominent Ukrainian educational center, where he got acquainted with novel scientific and pedagogical ideas of the time. He received an opportunity to meet famous personalities of Ukrainian culture, such as S. Todorskyi, S. Liaskoronskyi, M. Kozachynskyi, H. Konynskyi, who influenced the formation of Skovoroda`s progressive ideas (Tkachenko, 2007) and set background for his future development, thus ensuring coherence and sustainability of the Ukrainian scientific thought and cultural movements. With such a background, Skovoroda was invited by bishop N. Sribnytskyi to teach poetry in Pereyaslav Colegium. He compiled his own textbook for the course, but his innovative approach didn`t find the bishop`s approval. When Skovoroda was being pressed to stick to the traditional scholastic approaches to teaching, he replied “Alia res sceptrum, alia plectrum” (Ruling men is one thing, fiddling to them another – Latin). This episode, after which he was fired, marked the first standing of Hryhorii Skovoroda as an adamant teacher who fights for his principles and views on pedagogy. He never stopped teaching, and after leaving college, he became a teacher in the aristocratic family of Stepan Tomara.

Later on, Skovoroda had another chance to continue his career as a lecturer in Kharkiv Colegium. There he taught moral and ethical norms, but his approach differed greatly from the official feudal-church morality. Skovoroda`s interpretation of God, which contradicted the official church dogmas, and the content of his lectures, where the philosopher formulated the main provisions of his ethical humanistic views (Zorik , 2011), raised concern among Colegium rectorate. After refusing the demand to become a monk, Skovoroda left the Colegium and started to lead the life of a travelling philosopher, thinker, and teacher. It was during this period that he became a truly people`s philosopher. He travelled from village to village spreading his knowledge in the form of talks, songs, poetry, and in each house, he was warmly welcomed. Unfortunately, Skovoroda didn`t live to the

first publishing of his works, but after his death, his numerous followers and students continued his mission and made his works renowned.

This year we celebrate the 300th anniversary of the birth of the Ukrainian philosopher. This occasion presents us the chance to rethink his philosophical and pedagogical ideas in the new contexts of the modern world. This article aims to shed light on the correlation of the pedagogical ideas of H. Skovoroda and modern ideas of differentiated learning and to show that Skovoroda's heritage influenced the development of humanistic principles of learning and was a precursor of the new movements towards personality-oriented teaching.

2. PHILOSOPHIC AND PEDAGOGICAL IDEAS OF HRYHORIY SKOVORODA

As rightly stated by R. Mykhailyshyn, 'In the person of H. Skovoroda we see quite a rare example of complete harmony between teaching, worldview, and lifestyle. He lived as he taught and taught as he lived, following the wise commandments of Ukrainian folk pedagogics.' (Mykhailyshyn, 2021). The philosophical humanistic views of Skovoroda permeate his teaching approach and stand as the background of his pedagogical ideas. Among the rich heritage of his works, it is difficult to single out thoughts that are the most illustrative of this philosophy and teaching interrelation. Let us concentrate only on those, related to a person-oriented approach to teaching, widely spread and promoted in modern education theories. A person-oriented approach to teaching is aimed at fostering the formation and development of personality. Personality refers to the enduring characteristics and behavior that comprise a person's unique adjustment to life, including major traits, interests, drives, values, self-concept, abilities, and emotional patterns.² A peculiar personality with unique character traits, temperament, specific interests, qualities of perceptual processes and intelligence, needs, and abilities is called individuality. Following Tkachenko (2007), we can single out the following philosophical ideas of H. Skovoroda in relation to the theoretical principles of personality-oriented teaching.

1. *Two human natures – visible and invisible and the supremacy of the mind.* Skovoroda's philosophic interpretation of a person's identity is a two-fold combination of visible (material) nature and invisible (spiritual) part. The internal, invisible part of a human constitutes the essence of a person, in contrast to its material, visible part – flesh. H. Skovoroda stresses that the spiritual part plays a leading role in the formation of a personality, and formulates the supremacy of mind.

'Thought is our main point... Thus, it is not our flesh, but our thought that is the main in a human. It is in it that we constitute. And it is us.' (Skovoroda, 1973)

It follows from this that the development of intellectual skills, abilities to think and analyze, formulate ideas is the main goal of personality development. The true aim of education, thus, should be promoting the elaboration of spiritual part of human nature, and not simply cramming the formalistic scholarly dogmas.

2. *Self-cognition and understanding.* In Skovoroda's philosophy it goes that the most important thing in personality actualization is understanding of their own essence.

² According to American Psychology association

<<https://www.apa.org/topics/personality#:~:text=Personality%20refers%20to%20the%20enduring,%2C%20abilities%2C%20and%20emotional%20patterns>> accessed August 12, 2021.

'Failure to understand yourself, word by word, is the same as to lose yourself.' (Skovoroda, 1973)

As striking and relevant as this idea is in the modern area of psychological well-being, we cannot lessen its significance to teaching and learning. In the modern education paradigm, this idea is closely connected with a personality-centered approach, where recognition and acceptance of students` diversity, and the unique nature of their talents, skills, and abilities are a must. Skovoroda wrote that the process of self-cognition is not an easy one, and requires relentlessness and effort. He compares the way to understanding oneself with finding the hidden by diligently performing work:

'Search, knock on the doors, sweep your house diligently. Dig deeper. Look through everything. Get to know all corners. Finger all secret places, experience, listen carefully.'

In this way in 1767 H. Skovoroda emphasized the necessity of conducting a deep self-analysis to be able to accomplish the person`s individual mission in the society, which leads us to the next philosophic idea.

3. *Self-actualization and finding happiness.*

In H. Skovoroda`s point of view, the goal of self-cognition is to achieve full actualization of personality and find a decent place in the community by choosing the right type of work. The idea of choosing proper work, the work you have the inclination and talent to perform, in other words, *'srodna pratsia'* (Ukr. – 'appropriate work') was a breakthrough idea of the time.

'The hornet is an image of people who live by stealing someone else's and who are born only to eat, drink, etc. And the bee is the coat of arms of a wise man working in a related matter' (Skovoroda, 1973)

Skovoroda insists that only by doing proper work can a person find happiness. Happiness, in turn, lies in self-actualization in harmony with one`s needs and abilities, being the final point on the way from self-recognition, finding the proper work and actualization.

'Nature is the initial cause of everything and a self-propelled spring'. (Skovoroda, 1973)

Summing up the above, we can say that the ideas of the development of a person`s abilities, self-cognition, and self-understanding, as well as finding the sphere of activity where a person has talent and inclination to work form the fundamentals of modern educational views, in particular, of personality-oriented approach to teaching. Let us analyze in more detail the evolvement and formation of principles of differentiated learning.

3. DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Differentiated teaching can be understood as a holistic system that takes into account and develops in the learning process personal characteristics of students which can affect their academic performance (Baklazhenko, 2016). The methodological aspect of the problem of differentiated teaching was considered by L. V. Gorodnycha, N. E. Zherenko, V. M. Zhukovsky, T. P. Lysyichuk, O. B. Metelkina, N. D. Solovyova, M. M. Sosyak, T. I. Trukhanov. Western researchers such as M. Imbeau, C. Santopietro, K. A. Tomlinson, and K. Shank analyzed the characteristics of students that affect academic performance.

The main ideas of differentiated teaching can be traced back to the XVII century Europe, the Age of Enlightenment, when a range of ideas centered on the pursuit of happiness and sovereignty of reason gained popularity. Melikova (2008) identifies four stages of the historical development of the problem of differentiated teaching: initial, theoretical, empirical, and technological.

The initial stage of the problem of the differentiation of teaching is marked by the ideas of Rousseau (1979), who pointed to the negative impact of formalized monotonous tasks on personality development and Dewey (1991), who argued that successful learning depends on the natural abilities of students and their interest in learning.

Domestic theoretical studies of individualization date back to the theories of developmental learning. The ideas of learning as a means of personal development were formed by Ushynskiy (1983), and created the basis of the theoretical stage of development of differentiation. Later, the growing contradictions between collective forms of learning and the individual nature of knowledge acquisition have led to a new wave of research on the problem of differentiation and the development of creative and active personality, which formed the empirical stage of the problem. Differentiation is becoming a penetrating technology, and gains use in various fields of learning.

The technological stage of development of the problem of individualization of learning began in the 60-70s of the twentieth century and is marked by thorough research, the range of which included such aspects as means of improving learning efficiency, cognitive activity, organization of frontal, group and individual work. After the 1960s, the range of research problems expanded – there appeared works on the use of a programmed approach, developmental learning, individual style of activity.

At the technological stage, individualization has become the subject of many studies not only in pedagogy but also in psychology. Psychological theories of personality have developed over a long period of time and have acquired different interpretations within different concepts: Freudianism, behaviorism, existentialism, humanistic and sociological theories.

The first researcher of the typology of personality is considered to be Hippocrates, who built his classification on the basis of four types of temperament: sanguine, choleric, melancholic and phlegmatic. The Swiss psychiatrist C.G. Jung added to this typology of personality parameters of extroversion-introversion based on studies of psychological attitudes of individuals, which can be aimed at active knowledge of the world around or abstraction from it (Jung, 2016).

In the second half of the XX century the stage of thorough research of individual psychological characteristics of personality began. In particular, such parameters as level of intelligence, cognitive style, epistemological style, (R. Sternberg, D. A. Kolb), a theory of the complex structure of personality were proposed. Recent studies of individualization on the border of psychology and pedagogy belong to Tomlinson (2014), Ehrman, Lou Leaver, & Oxford (2003), Grasha (2002) and others.

We can now see that the ideas of differentiated learning evolved in the XVII century, and that they are being actively developed nowadays. However, we believe that H. Skovoroda, inspired by the trends of the Age of Enlightenment, set the background to domestic ideas of progressive education approach – differentiated learning.

4. PRINCIPLES OF DIFFERENTIATED TEACHING IN H. SKOVORODA'S WORKS

As it has been illustrated, philosophic thoughts of H. Skovoroda are related to the fundamental ideas of pedagogy and education. Let us analyze in more detail the main methodological points of differentiated teaching – one of the leading approaches to education in modern schools and tertiary schools to see whether its traces can be found in Skovoroda's ideas.

Differentiated approach to teaching is based on the principles of taking into account the individual characteristics of students, accessibility, systematicity, consistency, autonomy, and consciousness.

Thus, the principle of *taking into account the individual characteristics* of students leads to the paradigm of a personality-oriented approach to teaching. This principle assumes that each student is an individual with their own characteristics, in particular, learning strategies, ability structures, preferences in the choice of activities, topics, tasks, etc., which must be considered and properly reflected in learning. Applying this principle in teaching means that the teacher should bring the teaching of the discipline as close as possible to the needs of each student. Of course, a person's personality is a highly complex structure. Within the educational process, it is impossible to take into account and even diagnose all the individual psychological characteristics of students. Therefore, the implementation of the principle of taking into account the individual characteristics of students involves, above all, the analysis and identification of those characteristics of students that directly affect the success of learning. We believe that it is important to take into account previous personal experience, individual motivation to learn, and learning styles of students in the learning process as well as boost their motivation to study.

In line with this principle, H. Skovoroda also paid attention to the motivational aspect of education and emphasized:

'If you do not love sciences with all your heart, then all your work will be in vain.'
(Skovoroda, 1973)

The idea of taking into account of personal characteristics of a person shows through the concept of *srodna pratsia*, as was illustrated above.

The principle of *accessibility* is closely related to the previous principle and stipulates that the study material should not create excessive difficulties for each student. Difficulties in mastering the subject arise, first of all, due to the mismatch between the level of training of students and the level of materials to study. This principle dictates two important conclusions for differentiated learning: first, learning should be gradual and feasible, and second, educational material and tasks should be adapted to the actual level of students' competence. Thus, the principle of accessibility can be implemented in the selection and adaptation of educational materials so that they correspond to the specified levels of students.

No less critical for a differentiated approach to teaching is the principle of *systematicity and consistency*, which provides for the systematic improvement of students' competence, taking into account the current level of its formation. Generally, this principle dictates the direction of learning from simple to complex, from known to unknown (Nikolaieva, 2013). The sequence of exercises in teaching should start with

easier exercises, and then move on to individualized and more complex exercises. In particular, it is necessary to organize the learning process so that students receive tasks corresponding to the level determined by preliminary testing, but with the ability to perform higher-level tasks and the rapid transition to higher-level tasks.

H. Skovoroda also insisted on the sustainable character of learning and despised idleness, which is 'is heavier than the Caucasus mountains.' Continuous learning is a key to successful study:

'There is no hour that is not suitable for studying sciences, and those who moderately but constantly study subjects useful both in this and in the future life, find study not as work, but as pleasure.' (Skovoroda, 1973)

The principle of *autonomy, consciousness and activity* suggests that the learning process should motivate each student to independent and active learning, conscious assessment of their own experience. Differentiated learning, involving students as active participants, requires their direct participation in forming their own learning trajectory, in the process of choosing adapted tasks and exercises. The principle of autonomy, consciousness, and activity plays a vital role in the methodology, as it determines the nature of the interaction between student and teacher. Thus, the student does not act as an object of study, but as a subject of study, i.e. they must be actively, consciously, and, to some extent, autonomously involved in the educational process; be aware of their own individual characteristics that affect the success of learning, choose the appropriate tasks for these characteristics, and so on.

In this regard, it should be noted that H. Skovoroda stresses that learning is valuable and enjoyable if it corresponds to the inner needs of a person.

'Science perfects affinity. But if the affinity is not given, then what can science accomplish? Science is practice and habit and is the daughter of nature.' (Skovoroda, 1973)

5. CONCLUSIONS

The first roots of differentiated learning appeared in Europe in the XVII century, and no wonder that such a progressive philosopher as H. Skovoroda felt the vibes of novel Enlightenment ideas and formulated them in his own words. If we read carefully Skovoroda's works we can find ideas of personality-centered and differentiated teaching in them. As he stated, personality development lies in continuous self-education and self-cognition; morality and spiritual self-improvement are the components of personal development; the path of self-development is a constant hard work; the best contribution to the common good of society is doing the work you have talent and abilities to do; the happiness itself lies in doing the work you have inclination to do, and for each person this happiness is different; a person is born for happiness and the main task of the teacher - not to hurt their free development in accordance with the inclinations and abilities given by nature. These simple, but crucial principles seem self-evident today, at the age where the main approach to teaching is student-centered one. However, we have come a long way towards the day, when this approach is applied commonly, and it has only become possible due to the contribution of outstanding personalities, one of whom is Hryhorii Skovoroda.

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