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Strategies for Training and Developing the Students' Transformative Skills

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Abstract: *Globalization, the economic condition and the international financial crisis have resulted in systemic changes in a variety of fields, including physical education and sports. Nationally, demographic changes and migration contributed to a large decline in the number of pupils/students in educational institutions. The current concerns facing the Republic of Moldova's sustainable growth and the European Union integration are the desired ones, requiring active participation of the school/academic communities in effecting change and achieving national/international competitiveness. According to national statistical data and the Legatum Institute's global prosperity index for 2021, "the Republic of Moldova ranks the 60th out of 167 states in the chapter "Education at a higher level than Romania (64th place), but significantly ahead of other Central and Eastern European countries" (Ministry of Justice, 2022). Management and leadership technologies, organization and personnel, methods and tactics used in (initial and ongoing) specialist training require constant improvement aimed at performance and competitiveness. In this context, the development of transformative and perspective skills in the physical education and sports systems will help to lay the groundwork for a knowledge-based society, with citizens' help in order to achieve these long-term responsibility skills, integration into society and contribution to its development. The article's strategies for teaching and developing transformative skills in students are confirmed by educational theories that give a scientific foundation for these processes.*

Keywords: *change; knowledge; transformative pedagogy; skills.*

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Introduction

Transformative pedagogy focuses on developing a critical awareness of one's own life experience, social structure, global challenges, as well as fostering social consciousness and active participation in social change (Potolea, 2003). Its role in the development of students' personalities is reflected with priority in the instructional process oriented towards emphasizing: critical learning (encouraging students to examine their beliefs, values, and experiences in order to identify their outdated assumptions and replace them with better and broader grounded perspectives), reflection and self-reflection (encouraging students to develop a further understanding of how their own experiences and identities can influence their way of discovering the world), dialogue and collaboration (approaching honest communication and idea sharing in order to achieve a greater collective knowledge); personal and social development (raising students' critical awareness and commitment to social and civic action), experiential learning (learning via direct experience, active exploration of information and individual engagement in behaviors that lead to further and transforming understanding); multiple viewpoints and inclusion (encouraging students to research and comprehend multiple perspectives while promoting diversity respect and inclusion in the classroom and beyond) (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

The approach to learning that meets the needs of modern society in terms of change, diversity, pragmatism, effectiveness, competitiveness etc. entails a complicated process of developing transformative skills in students. According to us, the development of transformative skills in students can only be successful if they are entered in transformative learning circumstances. Thus, it will contribute to the development of students' abilities to reflect critically, innovate, solve complex problems, work successfully in a team, think critically, adapt to change and contribute to societal transformation (Cerghit, 2002).

The aim of the research is to propose ways for developing transformative skills in students, as well as approaches that teachers may use to contribute to the development of their personality in light of future obstacles.

Research objectives: identifying the fundamental and necessary transformative skills for students in modern society; developing successful pedagogy tactics; researching the impact of transformative skills on student performance, adjusting the future curriculum.

The methods used in the research: analysis of specialized literature; questionnaires and interviews, researching the attitudes of students, teachers, and parents regarding transformative skills training and the efficiency of the methods used; direct observation of student behavior in the classroom or in projects carried out through extracurricular activities, assess collaboration, creativity, and problem solving; Portfolio analysis to determine if their content contains projects, thoughts and evolutions of recorded progress, contributing to the transformative skills training; Qualitative data analysis to better understand students' experiences and how they develop their transformative skills.

The scientific novelty of the article resides in the fact that it addresses an important theme in contemporary education, namely the skills development that go beyond traditional knowledge, focusing on the transformation of students in a dynamic and complex world. Specifically, the article emphasizes the introduction of the concept of transformative skills, which refers to the skills that allow students not only to adapt to rapid changes, but also to contribute to their development, actively participating in the transformation of society. These skills, such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and empathy, encourage students to be innovative and propose solutions to global problems such as climate change, social inequality, or they can become leaders in their communities, initiating projects that address local needs. The research makes essential contributions to the field of education, as it strengthens the theoretical framework (by explaining and systematizing the concept of transformative pedagogy); proposes innovative pedagogical strategies to support the formation and development of transformative skills in students; promotes the formation of an ethical and social conscience in students (through education for active citizenship and global responsibility); contributes to information and education influence, offering recommendations for the integration of these skills and the adaptation of the curriculum, including physical education and sports. We also believe that through these contributions, the academic and practical dialogue in the field of education can be strengthened, promoting an education model that not only imparts knowledge, but trains young people capable of being organized.

The present research merges the following theories:

a) *Constructivism* (Piaget, 1972).

According to this view, learning is an active process where students form their own knowledge through experiences and interactions

with their surroundings and peers. Piaget focused on cognitive development, while Vygotsky included a social and cultural component.

Constructivism is inextricably tied to the concept of transformative skills, which are founded on learners' ability to reflect on their own experiences, think critically and apply knowledge to new contexts. This study is thus based on constructivism theory, which emphasizes direct experience and interaction as a means of learning.

b) *Experiential learning theory*

According to David Kolb, successful learning is when students cover a four-stage cycle of concrete experience, reflection on experience, abstract concept development and practical testing of new information. This approach promotes the development of abilities that allow students to adapt and form through continuous learning and reflection experiences. The theory's application in the current study shows that by engaging students in practical tasks followed by reflection, experiential learning theory can be a useful theoretical framework to explain the benefits of these tactics (McLeod, 2017).

c) Socio-cultural learning theory (Vîgotsky, 1971)

According to Vîgotsky, learning is a social contact and the social and cultural environment has a significant impact on cognitive development. The concept of a proximal development zone highlights the value of cooperation from other students or teachers. Collaboration, mentoring and learning communities are all strategies that increase learning through social interactions and are therefore strongly tied to this notion. In this context, the strategies proposed in this study promote the collaboration among learners and may reflect a socio-cultural approach to learning.

Based on these theories, we conducted an empirical research on May 17, 2024, in tandem with the organization of the informative-methodical seminar, "Opportunities for developing and strengthening educational partnerships," which was attended by teachers, representatives of educational institutions, and education directorates from Chisinau and other districts of Moldova. In this context, sociological questionnaires were distributed to seminar participants, 135 people (97 female and 38 male). The average age of the participants in the study was 42 years.

The seminar's theme and approached topics were among the most diverse, as follows: training transformative skills and perspectives in the system of physical education and sports; favoring social skills, teamwork, self-discipline, self-management and the development of

leadership and entrepreneurship skills; the role of school in forming skills and life habits in young generation; critical thinking in the educational specialized process; trends and challenges in extracurricular education to physical education, etc.

Findings and results

The training of transformative skills in students entails a sequence of educational actions and activities, organized and carried out in a planned, methodical manner by teachers, specialists from many fields, parents, and representatives of local and central public institutions/authorities (Nicolescu, 2007).

In the study, we thought it was suitable to use a sociological questionnaire to identify the need for training/developing transformative skills in students, as well as the strategies and methods that teachers might use in this regard. Table 1 summarizes the questionnaire's content.

Table 1. Content of the sociological questionnaire

No. ct.	Subject approached in the sociological survey content	Percentage data of the answers	
		Positive	Negative
1.	The need to train Students ' transformative skills in the knowledge society	67%	33%
2.	The main characteristics of transformative pedagogy	47%	53%
3.	The benefits of transformative pedagogy	51%	49%
4.	Personal change in transformative pedagogy	65%	35%
5.	Social change in transformative pedagogy	81%	29%
6.	Strategies and methods for training/developing transformative skills	79%	21%

The data in Table 1 demonstrate that teaching students transformative skills is a crucial component of their professional training system. The training of transformative skills in students is an important goal of modern education since these skills allow students to adapt to rapid societal changes, be creative and think critically. This fact was proved by respondents based on their positive responses (67%) to the question "Do you consider that training transformative skills in students is necessary in today's society?"

In response to the presentation of some transformative pedagogy characteristics, 47% of participants offered positive answers and 53% gave negative ones, indicating that most respondents are unfamiliar with this problem. Table 2 lists several key aspects of transformative pedagogy, with an emphasis on forming a critical awareness of one's own life experience, social structure and global challenges, as well as fostering social consciousness and active participation in social change efforts.

In response to the question "Do you know what are the benefits of transformative pedagogy?" 51% respondents gave positive answers. Figure 1 visually depicts the benefits presented by individuals interviewed.

Table 2. Essential characteristics of transformative pedagogy

No. ct.	*Characteristics*	*The role of transformative pedagogy*
1.	**Critical learning**	encourages students to examine their beliefs, values, and experiences to identify outdated assumptions in order to replace them with better-founded, broader perspectives
2.	**Reflection and self-reflection**	reflection on one's own experiences and beliefs is central; self-reflection can develop students a further understanding of their own experiences and identities that can influence their way of perceiving the world
3.	**Dialogue and collaboration**	facilitate transformative learning through open dialogue and collaboration between students and teachers (this involves honest communication and exchange of ideas to develop greater collective understanding)
4.	**Personal and social change**	develops critical awareness and commitment to social and civic action
5.	**Experiential learning**	Learning through direct experience, actively knowledge exploring , engaging in practices that lead to meaningful and transforming understanding
6.	**Multiple perspectives and inclusion**	fosters the exploration and understanding of diverse perspectives, respect and acceptance of diversity both within and beyond the classroom.

Transformative pedagogy represents two primary goals: personal change and social. This education method not only seeks to transform students' perspectives and understanding of the world, but also to encourage them to take action to experience good change in their life and society (Meyer & Land, 2003). Personal change refers to an

individual's internal transformation, including setting a new self-understanding, re-evaluating one's own views and values, embracing new actions and attitudes. Social change refers to broader societal developments created by the collective individuals' actions and groups driven by critical consciousness and desire to build a better and more just world. The benefits of personal and societal change in transformative pedagogy include the development of engaged and interested students, improved interpersonal and community interactions, building an inclusive and relevant educational environment. In this framework, we can state that personal and social change in transformative pedagogy are inextricably linked, supporting and enhancing each other (Mezirow, 2012). This method not only affects students' lives, but also helps to establish a fair and inclusive society.

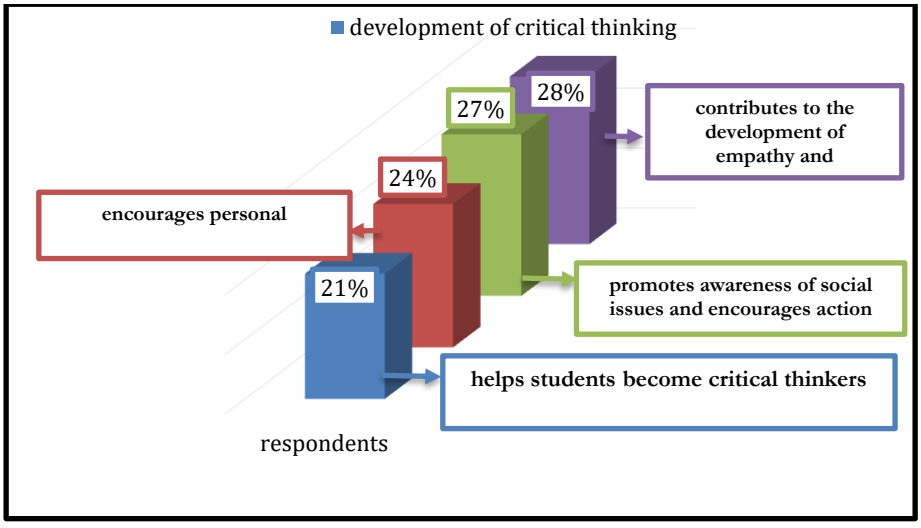


Figure 1. The benefits of transformative pedagogy

According to specialized literature, experiential learning is a teaching method that highlights students' active participation in the learning process through direct experiences and reflection. Unlike traditional learning approaches, which frequently rely on memory and passive teaching, experiential learning emphasizes active participation and reflection on experiences in order to develop knowledge, skills, and values. Experiential learning is founded on many essential elements that set it apart from other educational approaches: *active participation* (students

actively participate in the learning process, having the opportunity to explore, experience and apply knowledge in practical contexts); *reflection* (reflective learning encourages students to analyze and evaluate their experiences, understand what they have learned, and how this knowledge can be applied in the future); *authentic context* (learning is frequently performed in authentic contexts or close to real-world circumstances, making the learning process more relevant and useful in everyday life); *integration of theory with practice* (experiential learning supports the integration of theory and practice by allowing students to use theoretical knowledge in practical contexts and learn from concrete experiences). *personalized learning* (experiential learning enables a personalized approach to learning based on each student's requirements, interests and learning styles, promoting autonomy and self-determination in the learning process). Several models and theories support experiential learning. One of the most well-known is David Kolb's experiential learning model, which explains the learning process as a four stage cycle:

❖ *tangible experience* (students attend a direct experience, either through a practical activity or through involvement in a real situation).

❖ *reflective observation* (following the tangible experience, students assess what occurred, determine their responses and opinions, considering various perspectives.);

❖ *abstract conceptualization* (based on reflection, students formulate new concepts or theories, explain their experiences in order to apply them to other situations);

❖ *active experience* (students apply new concepts and theories in various circumstances, testing their ideas and adjusting them as they learn from further experiences).

The Kolb cycle merges the traditional learning on the cycle: reflection, comprehension, choice; application with the innovative learning cycle: creation and decision; application and connection of both in a new, comprehensive, and stronger cycle: reflection, comprehension, creation, choice, and application – the experiential-learning-kolb-cycle (Kolb, 2014).

Teaching strategies have an important role in the training of transformative skills, providing students with opportunities to develop critical, creative and social skills, enabling them to become active changing agents. These strategies not only support the acquisition of knowledge, but also the formation/development of attitudes and values that are essential to face the challenges and complexities of the modern

world (Meyer & Land, 2003). In Table 3 we present these strategies, with their brief description.

Table 3. Didactic strategies in the training of students' transformative skills

No. ct.	Didactic strategy	Description	Skills trained/developed
1.	Problem-Based Learning (PBL)	Students will engage in groups to address real or imaginary problems, which will motivate them to research, collaborate and develop critical thinking and creativity.	problem solving, critical thinking, collaboration, research skills
2.	Project-Based Learning	Students will work on more complex long projects (even weeks) researching a topic in depth	creativity, planning, resistance to failure, critical thinking, collaboration
3.	Collaborative learning	Students will work in teams to explore concepts and solve problems. This type of learning promotes the development of social skills and the ability to work effectively in a team	communication, leadership, empathy, collaboration, decision-making
4.	Experiential Learning	Students learn through direct experiences and reflection on those experiences. This may include field trips, simulations, role playing or involvement in community projects	adaptation, problem solving, autonomy, responsibility
5.	Reflective Learning	Students will be encouraged to reflect on their own learning experiences and identify ways to improve processes (reflective journals or group discussions are useful techniques)	self-assessment, critical thinking, self-awareness, continuous improvement
6.	Inter- and trans-disciplinary learning	Integrating multiple disciplines to approach a problem or topic from various perspectives	cognitive flexibility, application of knowledge in various contexts, systemic thinking

7.	Mentoring and learning through relationships (Learning through mentorship)	Students will work with mentors or professionals from various fields, who will contribute to the development of practical skills	practical, applied learning, career development, autonomy
8.	Personalized Learning	Adapting teaching style and educational resources to individual student needs, allowing to progress at their own pace	self-regulation, autonomy, personal responsibility

Conclusions

Modern teaching practices, such as student-centered learning, collaboration, critical thinking and the use of technology, play an important role in developing transformative skills. They train students not only to achieve academically, but also to be engaged, innovative citizens who can adapt to a rapidly changing society. Thus, strategies that place the student at the center of the educational act, such as problem-based or project-based learning, promote critical thinking and autonomy. These strategies actively include students in the learning process, promoting self-regulation, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities. Working in groups promotes the growth of social and communication skills, as well as the capacity to collaborate in varied teams. Students learn how to communicate their ideas, negotiate solutions and take responsibility for common outcomes. Debates, Socratic conversations, and case studies are examples of didactic methods that foster critical thinking. They help to develop analytical and evaluation skills. These strategies allow students to examine information from several viewpoints, contributing to the development of well-informed decision-making abilities. The use of technology in the educational process, such as e-learning platforms or interactive digital tools, enables students to access a wide range of material, experiencing with new types of learning and develop digital skills that are crucial in today's global economy.

Teachers can change their tactics to match the particular needs of their students by using continuous formative assessment. Constructive criticism helps students understand how to improve their performance and motivates them to actively participate in the learning

process. These may include project-based learning, problem-solving, teamwork, reflection on experiences and the use of digital tools. Each method helps to form the skills required in order to become active and innovative citizens who can adapt and respond to the challenges of a changing environment.

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