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Cultural-historical Activity Research in crisis contexts: challenges and perspectives

SYMPOSIUM

**ZPD: CONTEMPORARY VIEWS IN THEORY AND PRACTICE OF
EDUCATION AND PSYCHOTHERAPY.**

PART ONE

**Perfectionism In Modern Students: Destructive Personality Trait
And Block Of The Movement In Zone Of Proximal Development**

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Is ZPD only about development and not about health? Is the Worsening of Student Mental Health challenge for Educational System or only for Mental health services ?

- 1. University students are five times more likely to be diagnosed with a MH issues when compared to the general public (*Stallman, 2011*).**
- 2. Nearly 30% of undergraduates suffer from depressive symptoms, which is threefold higher than the general population (*M.Etherson, M.Smith, 2018*).**

Researchers are increasingly interested in identifying factors that contribute to depressive symptoms to help curb the ever-increasing depression epidemic among young people.

Student Mental Health- the blind spot or the hard puzzle for Educational System?

- **Australian psychologists Usher and Curran (2018) identified that 25% of participants from 5 Australia's universities (N=2326) indicated that they have been diagnosed with a MH disorder.**
- A cross-sectional study was conducted by administration of further and higher education students at Federal Institute of Technology in Southern Brazil under the guidance of psychiatrist Gisele de Ávila (2020) . The sample size was estimated as 450 students, to be representative of the 4083 students enrolled at the institute at that time. **81% of the subjects were screening positive for depression and/or anxiety symptomatic.**
- Higher education is increasingly being held responsible for ensuring that they have in place plans, programs and practices to promote positive student MH.
- Period between ages 17 and 25 is a phase of 'emerging adulthood' (Arnett, 2000). It means that it is **a phase of developing one's own identity.** What is wrong with this for modern students?
- ***From the cultural-historical perspective: What is the pathological core of social situation of development for them?***

Social situation of development:

«The way where the social becomes the individual...»

L.S. Vygotsky (1896-1934)

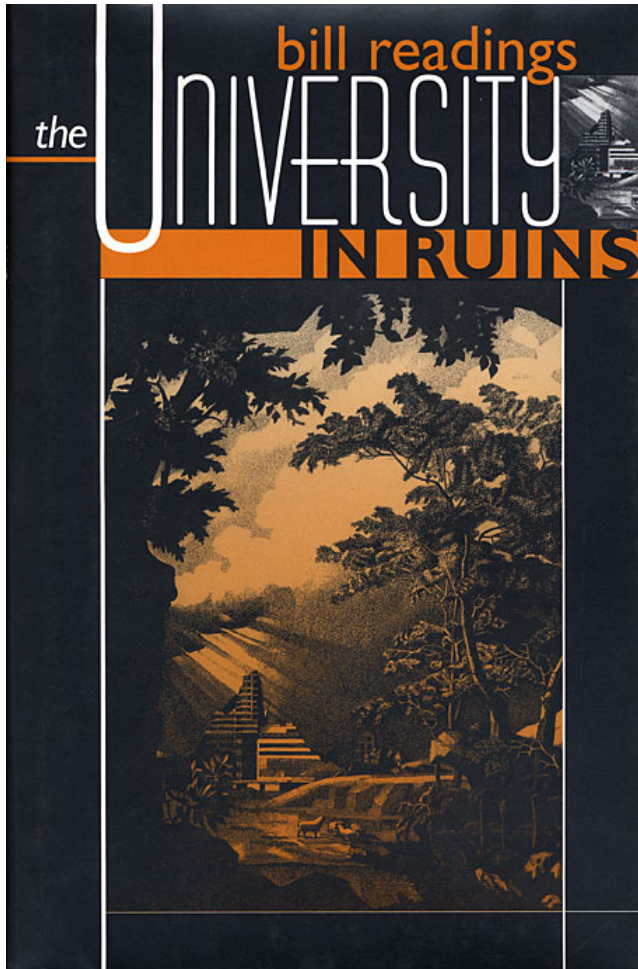


Social situation of development

- *“Social situation of development at a given age is a starting point for all dynamic changes in development taking place throughout this age period”.*
- ***“It determines globally the forms and the way which the child follows to acquire new and new aspects of the child’s personality taking them from the environment as from the basic source of the child’s development; the way where the social becomes the individual”***

(L.S. Vygotsky, 1984).

Pathological core in cultural-historical situation: Universities Turning into Transnational Corporations



«The University in Ruins» (1996)

Bill Readings was Associate Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Montreal, he sadly died at the age of 34 in a plane crash.

The main question of his book is:

How to keep the place for Thinking in the new historical situation with universities, which are turning into market and are interested in profit more than in Thinking?

Our main question from the cultural-historical perspective is:

What is the pathological core of social situation of development of modern students?

The Process of Replacing the techno-humanitarian balance with the discourse of perfectionism in the Educational System forms the pathological core of cultural-historical situation in general



- “The current crisis of the University in the West is a consequence of a fundamental change in its social role and internal systems, implying the loss of traditional humanitarian disciplines of a central place in the life of the University.
- **...the discourse of perfection supplants the ideology of (national) culture in various institutions and countries”.**

B. Readings, University in Ruins, 1996

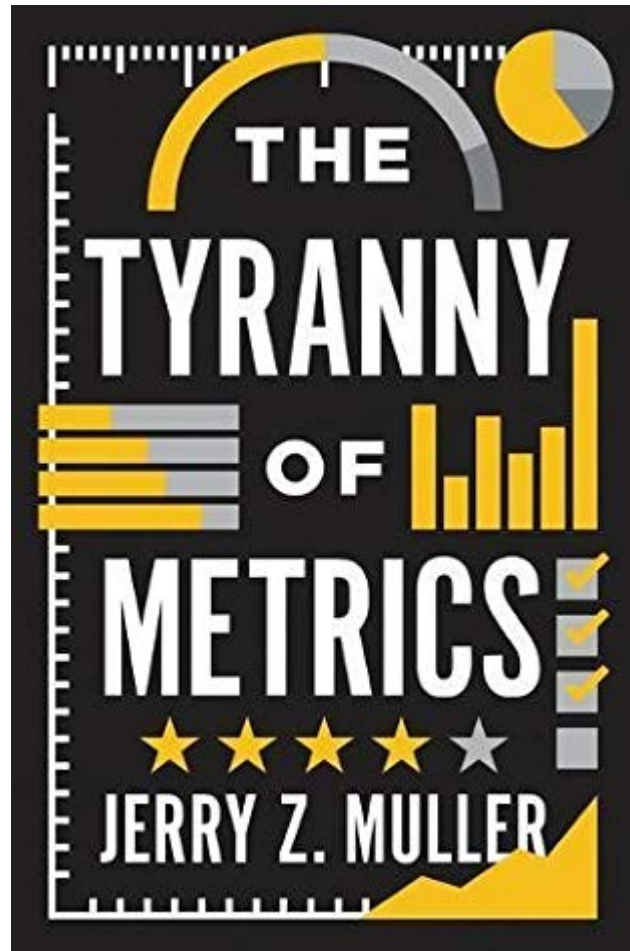
The value of perfection forms **the pathological core in social situation of development of modern students**



“... the fact that such an old school, like the New College of Oxford, began to include **words of commitment to excellence (perfection)** in all its public statements, including announcements of hiring, it seems to me more revealing **for long-term trends in higher education...**”

B. Readings «University in Ruins», 1996.

20 years after Bill Reading's foresight Jerry Muller tried to explain: «**How the obsession with quantifying human performance threatens our schools...**»



Jerry Z. Muller is professor of history at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC.

The Tyranny of Metrics, 2018

«Today, organizations of all kinds are ruled by the belief that the path to success is quantifying human performance, publicizing the results, and dividing up the rewards based on the numbers. The result is a tyranny of metrics **that threatens the quality of our lives and most important institutions.**»

Let's add to this conclusion: tyranny of metrics threatens also the MH of new generation

Social psychoanalysis wrote about Market culture and mental health before Bill Reading's warning

E. Fromm (1900-1980)



Market culture and mental health

- **E. Fromm** emphasized that the market culture of competition and individualism determines the requirements for the individual and sets its properties **instead of identity development:**
preoccupation with the question of what the market demands and expects from me instead of developing of my own identity.
- In the modern world, as **B. Readings** wrote, these are, above all, **the demands to be perfect!**

The perfectionistic epidemic forms the social situation of development

“From the 1980s onward, neoliberal governance in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom has emphasized competitive individualism and people have seemingly responded, in kind, by agitating to perfect themselves and their lifestyles”

(Hill, Curran, 2017, «How perfectionism became a hidden epidemic among young people?»)

Thomas Curran (Assistant Professor, University of Bath)



Andrew Hill (Associate professor, York St John University)



Social Values of Perfection become Personal Beliefs

- “In this new market-based society, young people are evaluated in a host of new ways. Social media, school and university testing and job performance assessments mean young people can be shifted, sorted and ranked by peers, teachers and employers. There is, then, **enormous pressure on young people to demonstrate their value and outperform their peers... they are struggling to cope.**” (*T.Curran, A.Hill, 2017*).
- “In particular, emerging epidemics of serious mental illnesses speak to the **negative effects of this market-based society, and a culture which is fundamentally changing the way young people think about themselves and others**” (*T.Curran, A.Hill, 2018*)

“Perfectionism Is Increasing Over Time”:

A Meta-Analysis of Birth Cohort Differences From 1989 to 2016

(T.Curran, A.Hill, 2017)

- **More than 40,000 American, Canadian, and British students** completed the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Hewitt & Flett, 1991) between 1989 and 2016 (70.92% female, mean age 20.66).
- “Irrespective of age, gender and between-country differences, young people become more demanding of themselves and others, and **perceive that others are expecting them to show achievements and perfection**”:

All indicators of perfectionism have significantly increased over the past 27 years:

- The growth of self-oriented perfectionism by 10%
- The growth of Other-oriented perfectionism by 16%
- The growth of **socially prescribed perfectionism** by **32%**

Changes in Perfectionism in Russian College Students Samples over Recent 10 Years

(Kholmogorova, Garanyan, Tsatsulin, 2019)

Two different samples, who completed the **Three-Factors- Perfectionism Questionnaire** (75% female, mean age 20.5) in **2005-2008** and in **2017-2018**

Irrespective of their gender and age, young people become increasingly demanding to themselves; strongly believe that others expect achievements and perfection from them and are constantly ruminating about their own imperfection:

- **Self-oriented perfectionism** ^ by **18%**
- **Socially prescribed perfectionism** ^ by **34%**
- **Perfectionist cognitive style** ^ by **99%**

Conclusion: In the last 10 years, all indicators of perfectionism and depression have increased significantly among Russian students. Socially prescribed perfectionism and Perfectionist Cognitive Style, but not Self-oriented Perfectionism have high correlation with depression symptoms.

Perfectionism as a set of a personal beliefs is the core of psychological mechanisms behind the growth of MH problems among students:

- A key reason why perfectionism and depression go hand-in-hand **is social disconnection** (Etherson, Smith 2018) and **deficit of social support** (Garanyan at al, 2009).
- The main conclusion of **the recent most extensive study of the factors-protectors against depression** under the guidance of J.Smoller (2020): *“Emotional connection with other people and the ability to discuss your experiences with them is the main protector against depression”*.
- Our last research of *psychological factors of depression and professional burnout during pandemic among residents of Sklifosovsky Research Institute for Emergency Medicine* showed the **importance of the contribution of the experience of loneliness, as well as high rates of perfectionism and alexithymia, to mental distress and professional burnout of residents - yesterday's medical students** (Kholmogorova et al, 2021).
- Perfectionism of students triggers **maladaptive social comparisons** (Garanyan, Shchukin, 2014) and **problematic internet use** (Gerasimova, Kholmogorova, 2019) with **focus on self-presentation** instead of searching for educational content (Kasarinova, Kholmogorova, 2021).

Education, Development and Health: **The theme of our Report with Victor Zaretsky at the next Russian Symposium**

- Perfection values in higher Education system as the pathological core of social situation of development of young generation becomes the set of maladaptive perfectionistic individual believes in modern students.
- ***These believes blocks development in general***, because students cannot move forward, be open and ask for help when they need it (***zone of proximal development***).
- **They set unrealistic goals to do every thing immediately and well, to earn approval and are afraid to ask for help when they need it.**
- **Blocked development means serious MH problems!!!**

Subjectness position in Learning and the Value of Collaboration with Others are Protective Factors against Perfectionism

Studies devoted to the **Subjectness position** in learning activities and general well-being of school students

(Zaretskii, Zaretskii, Kulagina, 2014; Kholmogorova, Klimenkova, 2019):

In contrast to the students with all other attitudes, the students with high levels of **Subjectness position** scores demonstrate: high levels of motivation for learning; making their own meaning of a subject matter of their studies; no school-related conflicts with parents; prevalence of positive relationship with teachers, **high indicators of reflexive functions.**

They can resolve the task of the phase of “emerging” adulthood

Conclusions:

- From the perspective of L.S. Vygotsky’s cultural-historical concept, the social situation of the youth development can be considered negative.
- Social and philosophical issues of social values are arising.
- **We need educational system and mental health services that are able to support subjectness position instead of perfectionistic values :**

The theme of our Report with Victor Zaretsky at the next Russian Symposium

Let us be imperfect but active, optimistic, ready to collaborate with others, support them and ask for support if we need it!

I'm not OK, You are not OK - and that's OK

Thank you for attention!