



EDITORIAL

© 2023 Zabolotna. This article is distributed under the terms of CC Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International as described at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>

DOI: 10.31499/2306-5532.2.2023.299829

WAR ... EDUCATION: COMPLEX SYNTAX OR PREPOSITIONS DO MATTER

Oksana Zabolotna

*Doctor of Sciences, Professor,
the Studies in Comparative Education Editor-in-Chief,
the President of the Ukrainian Educational Research Association
Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University, Uman, Ukraine
ORCID: 0000-0003-4901-1053; e-mail: oxana.zabolotna@gmail.com*

On May 17, the Studies in Comparative Education Editor-in-Chief and the UERA President prof. Oksana Zabolotna gave a CERC talk (CERC stands for Comparative Education Research Center of the University of Hong Kong) as part of the cycle of Post-Soviet Studies with Anatoly V. Oleksiyenko.

The talk drew the attention of people from different countries: China, Indonesia, Lithuania, Poland, and others. The talk concerned the following ideas:

The words 'war' and 'education' are abstract notions, but if connected by different prepositions, they acquire real meaning and require action to save humanity. The presenter looked at different prepositions that might connect the words 'war' and 'education' and reinforced the phrase with examples from Ukrainian higher education during the current Russian-Ukrainian war.

The text of the lecture is below.

Key words: Russian-Ukrainian war, education, educational losses, propaganda, Ukraine

17 травня головний редактор журналу "Порівняльна педагогіка" та президент УАДО проф. Оксана Заболотна виступила з доповіддю в CERC (CERC - Comparative Education Research Center of the University of Hong Kong) в рамках циклу "Пострадянські студії з Анатолієм Олексійенком".

Розмова привернула увагу людей із різних країн: Китаю, Індонезії, Литви, Польщі та інших. Розмова стосувалася наступних ідей:



Слова "війна" і "освіта" є абстрактними поняттями, але якщо їх з'єднати різними прийменниками, то вони набувають реального змісту і вимагають дій для порятунку людства. Доповідачка розглянула різні прийменники, які можуть поєднувати слова "війна" та "освіта", і підкріпила тези прикладами з української вищої освіти під час нинішньої російсько-української війни.

Текст лекції подається нижче.

Ключові слова: російсько-українська війна, освіта, освітні втрати, пропаганда, Україна

I am Oksana Zabolotna, a university professor from Uman, Ukraine. Today, my presentation will explore the intricate relationship between war and education through several lenses: the context of the Russian-Ukrainian War; its implications for Education AGAINST War; the mobilization of Education FOR War; and the potential of War FOR Education.

When the war initiated by Russia against Ukraine began, I was in Poland, serving as a visiting professor. The safety I found there was juxtaposed against a compelling call to return to my homeland. My decision to return was driven by a sense of duty to my family and to those in my country who needed support. My mission, underscored by a profound commitment to truth, brings me before you today. Thank you for lending me your ears and your time. Please forgive me if my words are marked by an excess of honesty, openness, or emotion. The reality of preparing for this talk amid frequent bomb alarms has been a testament to the resilience required in these times.

With each preparation for a presentation, I'm reminded of how rapidly the situation in Ukraine evolves—daily changes that seem to compress time itself. Every day is a testament to a year's worth of living, aging us in wisdom and resilience. We learn to navigate loss, to analyze, learn, hope, and to cherish memory.

It's crucial to understand that this war did not begin on February 24, 2022. It's a continuation of a historical struggle against an aggressor intent on territorial conquest, cultural appropriation, and the erasure of people's histories.

Consider the following examples of rhetoric and practice that reveal the stark contrasts in narrative:

- Putin claims that Ukraine has never existed as an independent state or nation. Yet, Kyiv's history, nearly twice as old as Moscow's, is rich with evidence of Ukrainian heritage dating back centuries.
- Putin asserts that Russia secured victory in World War II, suffering over 24 million casualties. However, this figure represents the losses of the USSR as a whole, which included 15 republics. Evidence suggests that 8-10 million of those were Ukrainians, representing about 40-44% of the USSR's total losses. Unlike Russia, where only a fraction of the territory was affected, Ukraine was



entirely occupied and served as the primary battlefield, deeply impacting its entire population.

- The Russian presidential spokesperson, Peskov, claims that "Russia has never attacked anyone" throughout its history. Yet, since the formation of the totalitarian USSR, Russia has scarcely seen a period longer than two years without engaging in conflict.

These examples highlight how the same words can carry vastly different meanings, depending on the perspective:

- One world seeks to live, while the other seeks its destruction.
- One aspires for peace, while the other thrives in conflict.
- One dreams of a future for our planet, while the other aims to annihilate it.
- One moves towards the future, while the other regresses to the past.

In exploring the dynamics between 'war' and 'education', we will delve into the significance of prepositions and their ability to transform meanings and actions. This linguistic examination extends beyond mere semantics, touching upon the essence of social processes and the current situation in Ukraine.

The words 'war' and 'education' are abstract notions. Still, if connected by different prepositions, they acquire real meaning and require action to save humanity and make an indissoluble bridge between the past and the future.

I will look at different prepositions that might connect these words and reinforce the phrase with examples from Ukrainian higher education during the current Russian-Ukrainian war. I will also share some stories of the Ukrainian Educational Research Association members I represent today.

The war has become a powerful reminder that we should value every day, every person close to us. It is so painful to read on different Ukrainian universities' websites and Facebook pages that they are mourning their best sons – either academics, students, or alumni. All that remains is a memory of highly intellectual and faithful Ukrainians who could give birth to the nation's new generation that is now desperately struggling for existence. For the existence of Ukraine, Europe and the Humanity. Russians are trying to root out everything that is Ukrainian – books, museums, churches, schools, universities, even children.

And this is the disgusting and hideous War AGAINST Education part. You must be perfectly aware that education is one of the most potent tools for maintaining the nation's spirit, so russians are now trying to physically destroy it by bombs and missile strikes. A special site <https://saveschools.in.ua/> created by the Ministry of Education and Science provides information about the destroyed educational establishments (kindergartens, schools, vocational schools and universities) in numbers and in pictures. As by May 16, 1748 educational establishments suffered from bombardments. 144 were completely destroyed. Some of them were destroyed with people, like the school in Bilohorivka Lugansk Region, where on May 8, practically all the village inhabitants were hiding. They were hiding and were buried there as the bomb from the aircraft was purposefully sent onto the school. In the same way, as the bomb was dropped on the Mariupol Theatre in spite of the fact that the word CHILDREN written before the building was clearly seen from the plane. I guess it was the reason why the explosion's epicenter was exactly there – another step to the



extinction of new generations of Ukrainians.

War AGAINST education is led in the occupied cities and villages – with kidnapping school principals and teachers who do not want to open schools in occupation. Why? If the children are at school, Russians can use them as a human shield, manipulate their parents or kidnap and deport them to Russia. Universities in occupation also faced the uneasy choice – to surrender and become an outpost of betrayal and lie or move to other regions of Ukraine and start from scratch as displaced ones do. However, even if they lose all the buildings and infrastructure, they preserve their good name, faithful students, and academics. Actually, this is what real education is about.

On May 5, our association, together with the Drohobych University, organized a roundtable where its members from Ukrainian Universities on the territories temporarily occupied by russians told their personal war stories and the stories of their universities in Mariupol, Melitopol, and Herson <https://uera.org.ua/en/node/205>. Olga Goncharova from Melitopol and Olena Fedorova from Kherson told us how they organized underground opposition to help their universities break collaborators' plans to make them pillars of the aggressive regime in their regions. As a result, they became displaced as well as Mariupol State University, the buildings of which were completely destroyed, many academics and students killed or died under bombs and missiles. However, the survivors are now working on the University revival and dreaming about its development in a new place which is Kyiv. At the same time, they are desperate about the part of their university community who are still in Mariupol and are kept there as in a concentration camp. As Vladyslav Kudlay, who managed to escape, told us, the Russians took away their passports and made them work hard to get some food. And the work they were supposed to do was connected with taking away dead bodies and clearing the streets from remnants and rubbish as the occupants were preparing for the war parade in the blocked Mariupol – blocked but not occupied as the Azov Regiment was defending the Island of Freedom inside the destroyed city that used to be one of the fastest developing in Ukraine.

War AGAINST education damages school and university buildings, books and museums, memorials, and concert halls. Russians may do their cruel and dirty job by killing school and university students and teachers. However, it will not be able to wipe out the culture of the nation with roots as long as its education teaches citizens to think critically, inspires them to dream, and shows them how to love freedom and be free.

Free from pressure, fear, and propaganda. Education and propaganda are like water and oil that will never mix. They should never mix. If they mix, it is ultimately a different story. It is a story of Education FOR War where the role of education is imposing propaganda targeted at inhuman actions. Here I will show examples demonstrating that schools and universities can play an infamous role if they are led by a distorted purpose that has nothing to do with development, critical thinking, academic integrity, and independence.

The first example is the History subject taught at Russian schools and universities. It is falsely imposing on russian young generation a distorted colonial vision of Ukraine. The picture that emerges is that of a country that has never existed



and will never exist. The country that has never had its language, education, and culture. Russians do not even use UKRAINE as the country's name preferring to call it Malorussia that is Small Russia. Their history books are marked by manipulation facts, their omission, and distortion of events. Ukraine is presented as a country of racism, xenophobia, religious intolerance, extremism, neo-Nazi sentiment, banditry and physical violence («White Paper on Human Rights Violations and principle of the rule of law in Ukraine» which appeared on the website of the russian federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2014.)

We are not fascists or nazis as Russia presents us. So don't be deceived by Russian public narratives about the non-existent threats that they say they feel from us. Russians' real main narrative is their deeply rooted refusal to recognize Ukraine's right to exist. That simple and that clear. You can see it in their media, private conversations, official statements, and infamous putin's articles published last year.

The very fact of our claim to have the right to exist is offensive to Russians. So offensive that they are ready and willing to destroy us.

And in fact, it is not about a threat from Ukraine or about a threat from NATO as russians present it. It is about deeply rooted terrorism, gangsterism, and looting on their part. And hatred for everything that is Ukrainian. People who are being killed, books that are being burnt, history that is being distorted, pieces of art that are being stolen, the freedom that is being encroached on. Just fancy – they are burning Ukrainian books; they have a list of authors and books and even school history textbooks to burn! Russians have been preparing it for a long time! They are planning to open schools and make teachers follow the imposed curriculum! They attempt to as they call it 'save' people from sieged cities and deport them to depressive regions like Russian Sakhalin. And instead to populate Ukrainian lands with people who do not want to know the taste of freedom.

This kind of hatred demonstrated by russians does not come overnight; it may come gradually – through education, through media, through fear and silent acceptance. It is not about putin exclusively. It is about millions of russians supporting him. It is about teachers who justify the aggression and deliver lessons of patriotism to russian children. It is about schools with portraits of cruel killers presented as Z – heroes. It is about university rectors supporting the inhuman slaughter for no reason. It is about those who do not support and keep silent...

On the contrary, Education AGAINST War, or, to be more positive, Education FOR Peace, is driven by the need to promote the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that help people live in peace. Here, I can point at it as the principal purpose of primary, secondary, and higher education which has not been paid proper attention to. It has been overlooked as if *a priori* the good had had sufficient strength to fight down the evil.

Yes, it is true that good has strength. However, this strength appeared without the decisive influence of international organizations that were created and are extensively funded to maintain global peace. When the war started, where were the United Nations, UNESCO, the Red Cross, the European Union, NATO, and others? Their bureaucratic mechanisms were too slow and inflexible, and time was of the essence – fast and violent. Where were the intellectuals – Russian and European alike?



They were either silent or calling for peaceful dialogue amidst a barrage of missiles. The resilience came from the momentum of the Ukrainian army, debunking the Western intelligence forecasts that the country would be occupied within 2-3 days. This resilience, and the leadership of the Ukrainian common people who mobilized in no time and performed miracles of networking to create conditions for resistance, were pivotal. Zelensky's firm stance and courageous speeches to the global population also contributed to a shift in rhetoric from 'We are deeply concerned' to 'We stand with Ukraine,' and finally to 'Support will continue until Ukraine's victory.'

Ukraine's victory will indeed come, however, at great sacrifice. With thousands of soldiers and peaceful citizens killed by Russians, millions of Ukrainians have fled abroad or been displaced within Ukraine. Ruined are kindergartens, schools, universities, theatres, museums, houses, and infrastructure. All this could have been avoided if education had fulfilled its most important role based on lessons from history. Education FOR peace is something that we, alas, have overlooked and neglected. And the war we are enduring is not just Russia's war against Ukraine. It is a war for honesty, straightforwardness, democracy, and a peaceful world order.

When do we have to start educating children for peace? At school? University? There is a continual need for negotiation and mutual understanding, demanding that we listen to and learn from each other in order to communicate across cultural and spatial boundaries. I will share a personal story that helped me answer the question, "When?"

Children can easily do it using what I call their Esperanto Baby Language. When my daughter was an Erasmus Mundus PhD student in Poland, she naturally took her family with her. And I came to babysit my two-year-old grandson. It is known that academic teachers can be adept at babysitting, though perhaps not for long durations. During that week, we had an absolutely brilliant experience of multicultural communication at the playground near the residence hall for international students (and their children). My grandson played with a boy, and they both interacted with a fire engine, engaging in constant conversation. The boy's grandmother approached me, expressing her happiness that, at last, there was someone who understood her grandson. It turned out that he lived in France and, not surprisingly, spoke French. His Polish-speaking grandmother didn't understand him. However, my Ukrainian-speaking grandson understood him perfectly, and they communicated fluently. Later on, my grandson honed his skills with children from Macedonia, Georgia, Italy, Armenia, and other countries.

Children are born to live in peace. Children should not be born in bombproof shelters, which frequently happens in Ukraine now. Children should not be killed or raped, and it is what Russian occupants do to Ukrainian children. And when children grow up, they should not be killed in action. They should live in peace, and education FOR peace is a thing that can help and, therefore, really matters.

However odd it might seem, there is a lot that war has done for education. To be more exact, because of the war, people worldwide have learned a lot about Ukraine and its legacy, and about Russia and its true nature. Moreover, the war has helped Ukrainians understand who they really are and act accordingly. And finally, it has shown the world the priorities in the sustainable development goals and the need to



rethink the ways of approaching them.

Some months ago, most people in the world did not know on which continent Ukraine is located. Moreover, they did not realize that such a country exists. Did you know much about Ukraine? Did you know the name of our president? If you didn't know much, never mind. Now, the whole world knows that Ukraine is the country that debunked the myth about the second strongest army in the world, even though Russia's population is 100 million people larger, to say nothing of its territory that is 28 times larger. And the whole world knows that Ukraine is a country of courageous and inventive people who value their independence and are ready to stand for it.

Also, the world clearly sees Russia's true face - that of a country acting with terror, holding the whole world hostage and blackmailing it over energy and nuclear weapons. This is a country that, for decades, spent tremendous amounts on weapons and propaganda instead of making its citizens' lives civilized. Otherwise, they wouldn't have looted and stolen everything they could lay their hands on - from underwear to TV sets and washing machines. Russian soldiers from remote regions (and that is where they predominantly were) had no idea of how to use modern conveniences. However, they knew how to torture, kill, rape, and loot - this is what they had learned from the lessons of Russia's history.

What Ukrainians have learned from the history of Russian-Ukrainian relations is to be ready to defend themselves wherever they are - in the army or at a school, university, shop, factory - everywhere! It is an incredible example of self-organizing, distributing functions, and supporting each other. There is a very vivid association of Ukraine with a beehive (I heard it from Mykhajlo Vynnytsky, and there are a lot of visuals demonstrating the idea). Every bee knows what to do, and they make a perfect model of cohabitation. There is nothing imposed from the outside. Bees are peaceful and can even give people honey if they know the art of beekeeping. But beware of them if you are a stranger willing to ruin their perfect world!"

Far be it from me to say that our country is perfect. We do realize its weaknesses and see how tremendously much we will have to do after the war. We should use the momentum to get rid of the soviet corrupt heritage. Throughout its history, Ukrainians have always been good at mobilizing in the fight AGAINST something or somebody. Unfortunately, they gradually lost their skill when the situation stabilized and returned to usual practices. They were ready for a sprint but not for a marathon. No way this cruel war will let us roll down - too many victims, too many lessons. This time we are learning to unite in the fight FOR something, to be more exact - for our existence, our freedom, our children, and our future. And with this at stake, we will learn to run the marathon of building a new country which is impossible without high-quality education. Actually, this war has shown that the whole world is on the verge of a tremendous change.

And what is the role of universities in the age of disruption, crisis, and change? Ideally, they are to perform their unique function as enablers of constructive change and peaceful life, ensuring that the world is moving towards sustainable development goals.

And what does the war have to do with the goals? Let us have a look together. There are 17 of them:



If Goal 16, which is peace, justice and strong institutions does not become the NUMBER ONE, all other goals may become unattainable. As a result of this war, the global food supply has been severely disrupted as Ukraine is one of the world's key food suppliers. Russians bomb fields, burn and steal crops, and block export from Ukraine to the countries that need it desperately. There may be poverty, and there may be starving people. New global waves of migration may slow economic growth and give rise to inequalities. With Russia's blackmail, energy may be unaffordable. Fires caused by missile strikes, and atomic stations without safety control may lead to severe pollution and climate change.

Our planet is so tiny. We all can suffer from mad ambitions to return the Soviet Union - the authoritarian country of terror. Ukrainians do not want back in the USSR. We want to live in peace. We want our planet to have the future. We hope that the voice of Ukraine matters.

So, you see this talk is not about complex syntax - it is more about the complex situation in our complex world. And it is not about the prepositions AGAINST and FOR that matter (though they do). It is about our moral choices and actions. And about education FOR peace, that does matter.