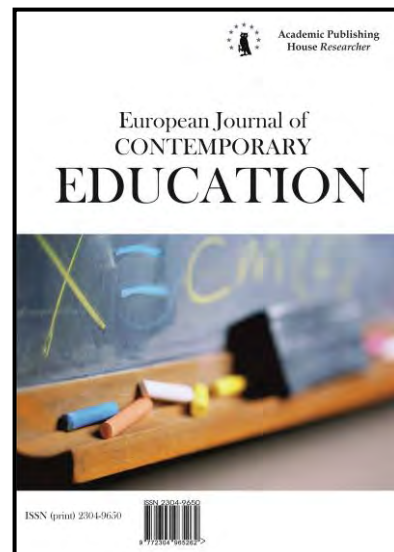




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## The History of Education

### Cooperation Pedagogy by K.N. Ventzel

Alexander P. Abramov <sup>a, \*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Southwest State University, Russian Federation

#### Abstract

The article theoretically interpreted and empirically proved the consistency of the methodology of cooperation of Konstantin Nikolaevich Ventzel, who became one of the consistent supporters of free education and training. On the basis of his own pedagogical experiments at the Yasnaya Polyana school, Tula province, using the approaches and educational methods of L.N. Tolstoy in the 60-70s of the 19th century K.N. Ventzel created his own theory of cooperation pedagogy and free education. **The result of such innovations is a “living person”** – a vessel of the greatest quantity and the highest quality. It is on the basis of cooperation between a teacher and a student that a harmonious personality is built, whose modal qualities are morality, unity of thoughts and feelings, love of freedom, and creativity, independence, the ability to work collectively, humanity and philanthropy. The creation of such a person is the ultimate goal of **cooperation pedagogy**. **K.N. Ventzel’s pedagogical innovations** on the formation of a community of educators and pupils, teachers and students can act as the fundamental principles of the pedagogical process, both in Russia and in other countries of the world. The concept of cooperation currently meets the interests of society and the social basis of the Russian people.

**Keywords:** K.N. Ventzel, pedagogy, cooperation, freedom, creativity.

#### 1. Introduction

Socio-cultural, socio-economic, technological and other challenges of our time actualize the problem of creating qualitatively new teaching forms and models at all levels of education with a focus on accessibility, openness, cooperation between educators and students. In turn, the changes taking place against their background have made the tasks and presented new requirements for the teacher (mentor).

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\* Corresponding author  
E-mail addresses: [abramov\\_ap@inbox.ru](mailto:abramov_ap@inbox.ru) (A.P. Abramov)

The contradiction between the objective need to modernize all levels of Russian education, in accordance with the requirements of the XXI century and the lack of a clear strategy of its reform, presupposing the preservation of the best traditions of Russian education accumulated over the centuries, predetermined the need for scientific understanding of the ideas and concepts of outstanding Russian theorists and educators-practitioners who laid the foundation of the world's best education. One of these innovators was the supporter and developer of the concept of cooperation and free education, Russian and Soviet teacher Konstantin Nikolaevich Ventzel (1857–1947), whose ideas are relevant, in demand and need more in-depth study.

The analysis of the latest publications on the problem is presented here. The issues of transformation of all levels of education in accordance with the principles of cooperation can be found both in the author's works (Abramov et al., 2019) and in the works of other famous Russian scientists, such as E.N. Astafieva (Astafieva, 2016), S.N. Blinova (Blinova, 2020), M.A. Goncharov (Goncharov, Shkurov, 2017), Yu.M. Druzhnikov (Druzhnikov, 1996), G.B. Kornetov (Kornetov, 2017), N.V. Maminova (Maminova, 2019), Yu.V. Musica (Musica, 2018), E.Yu. Petryaeva (Petryaeva, 2017), I.P. Smirnov (Smirnov, 2020), O.E. Chuikov (Chuikov et al., 2018). Practical methods are presented by empirical studies of foreign teachers, such as R. Hun Ping Cheung (Hun Ping Cheung, 2018), D.S. Safarova (Safarova, 2020; Schmerse, 2020), E. Sjølie E., S. Francisco & L. Langelotz (Sjølie et al., 2019).

## **2. Materials and methods**

We use the scientific works of K.N. Ventzel, works of Russian and foreign researchers devoted to the activities of the teacher as the main information sources. They contain specific practices of using various forms and methods of cooperation. Comparative analysis of pedagogical research in the second decade of the 21st century made it possible to form a theoretical basis for research, structure and generalize the data obtained.

The retrospective and the possibilities of reproducing the forms of cooperation pedagogy are considered through the interdisciplinary prism of Russian history, pedagogy and psychology.

The use of general scientific research methods: systematization, comparison, collation and generalization of data, made it possible to characterize the conceptual provisions of the cooperation pedagogy by K.N. Ventzel in the context of determining their scientific and socio-pedagogical significance.

## **3. Discussion**

Since the second half of the nineteenth century, the pedagogical community, theorists and practitioners have been in an active search for effective educational models that could be used as a basis for teaching and educating the younger generation.

**In the story “Cadet Monastery” by N.S. Leskov, we find a description of the training and educational practices of that time on the example of the cadet corps of imperial Russia. The characters in this story are the director of the corps Persky, the maniple Bobrov and the corps doctor Zelensky. They are presented as an ideal image, “moral norm” of a teacher and educator, whose main principle is cooperation. “The examples of such educators are reflected in the souls and imprinted on the heart, because without an example that elevates feelings, there can be no education” (Leskov, 1989). It is no coincidence that, having its own socio-cultural specifics, the model of cadet education has been recognized and is recognized as the most successful at the present time (Abramov et al., 2017).**

At the beginning of the 20th century, the concept of upbringing became the leitmotif of the cooperation pedagogy. There is individuality of the student with his inner world, needs and interests in the center of cooperation pedagogy. It is reflected in the works by A.V. Lunacharsky (Lunacharsky, 1922), A.S. Makarenko (Yanovskaya, 1993), M.M. Rubinstein (Rubinstein, 1921), S.T. Shatsky (Chuikov et al., 2018), V.N. Soroki-Rosinsky (Abramov et al., 2019).

Historical and pedagogical excursus into the cooperation pedagogy is conducted by N.V. Maminova. The author quite reasonably notes that the innovative teachers of the first third of the twentieth century have considered the community of educators and pupils as a principle of the pedagogical process and as a condition for the formation of morally valuable guidelines for students (Maminova, 2019).

The ideas of Ventzel were actualized in the post-Soviet period, when there was an urgent need to restructure all levels of Russian education. The analysis of educational cooperation strategies is presented by L.K. Grebenkina and N.A. Kopylova during this period ([Grebenkina, Kopylova, 2010](#)).

In her works E.Yu. Petryaeva has presented e-learning methods based on the analysis of innovative directions in the development of cooperation pedagogy in a digital environment ([Petryaeva, 2017](#)).

G.B. Kornetov has made a significant contribution to the study of the pedagogical system of cooperation. He has defined the theory of K.N. Ventzel, as the most promising, since modern society, against the background of the development of sciences, increasingly needs the pedagogy of cooperation and methods of free education ([Kornetov, 2017](#)).

In turn, M.A. Goncharov and A. Yu. Shkurov have defined the approach in line with the pedagogy of open cooperation not only as a historical and pedagogical one, but also as one that has prospects in the model of a socially active school ([Goncharov, Shkurov, 2017](#)).

The special role of the teacher in the formation of students' creative abilities on the basis of cooperation methods is empirically proved by E.N. Astafieva ([Astafieva, 2016](#)).

Possible prospects for the application of the theory of free education, which was popular among the pedagogical community at the beginning of the last century, are given by I.P. Smirnov, conducting a comparative analysis of the main provisions of the cooperation pedagogy with modern regulatory documents in this area (Fundamentals of State Youth Policy, Strategy for the Development of Education in the Russian Federation for the period until 2025) and real practice of education. Based on the works of K.N. Ventzel, the author has shown different, often polarizing views on the problem, which is still at the epicenter of scientific and pedagogical discussions ([Smirnov, 2020](#)).

D.S. Safarova has disclosed the foundations of cooperation pedagogy, defined its role in increasing the efficiency of the educational system and national education in schools of Uzbekistan in her research. Referring to the works of thinkers of the East, the author has emphasized that the success of educational activities is inextricably linked with the actions of mudarris (the one who conducts the lessons), ustozov (mentor) and murabbi (educator), who build their teaching practices on the principles of cooperation ([Safarova, 2020](#)).

The consistency of K.N. Ventzel, his methods and models of cooperation between educators and students are repeatedly confirmed by the highly rated scientific publications of foreign scientists (from the Scopus and Web of Science databases). Studying the behavior of preschool children, researchers in Hong Kong have concluded that children with a teacher-centered approach display more creative thinking than children with an isolation-centered approach. It turns out that learning has a sociocultural specificity ([Hun Ping Cheung, 2018](#)).

Researchers from Norway, Sweden and Australia focus on the training of teachers who should have the ability to create a communicative learning space of joint cooperation, depending on the mental specifics of the learners ([Sjølie et al., 2019](#)). The need to create and maintain an educational cooperation environment at all levels of education is confirmed by the results of a longitudinal study of the following children (n = 554 from 3 years old in preschool age to 8 years old in the second grade) conducted by German scientists. Pupils who have the skills to work together with adult educators and preschool mentors have better academic and behavioral outcomes ([Schmerse, 2020](#)).

The experience of Finland is also noteworthy, where one of the main principles of cooperation pedagogy is "equality of":

- schools (no elite or not prestigious);
- all subjects (in-depth study of some subjects at the expense of others is not welcome);
- parents by profession and social status (questions of teachers, questionnaires concerning the place of work of parents are prohibited);
- students (there is no "sorting" of their abilities or career preferences);
- education of healthy children and those with disabilities;
- teachers (regardless of the subject they teach);
- rights of adult (teacher, parent) and child (the principle of "respect for the student").

The pedagogical concept of cooperation has become widespread in the West.

#### **4. Results**

At present, supporters of the traditional Soviet school believe that children are allowed a lot, and pedagogical polemics come down to a discussion of children's rights. At the same time, even before the October Revolution of 1917, the concept of free education by K.N. Ventzel appeared, suggesting the introduction of an approach that is called cooperation pedagogy now. Ventzel's concept of free upbringing is based on humanistic principles, when the child is perceived as the center of the Universe with his own unique talents and inclinations (Blinova, 2020).

Cooperation pedagogy was the most widespread after the revolution of 1905–1907, the basis of which was the concept of "free education".

In the cooperation pedagogy and theories of free education there are some ideas of the French educator J.J. Rousseau, who was one of the first to announce the natural strategy of upbringing and education of children. These ideas were further developed by E. Kay in Sweden, by S. Fore and P. Robin in France, by M. Montessori in Italy, by John Dewey in the USA, and by the anarchist P. Kropotkin in Russia. To this day, preschool institutions adhere to these pedagogical methods in the United States. The undoubted merit of K.N. Ventzel is to create his own Russian version of cooperation pedagogy. As Y.M. Druzhnikov has noted, it was Ventzel who not only outlined the prospects for its development, but also the projection of a person in the future society, which educated him proceeding not from his own needs, but from the needs of the individual (Druzhnikov, 1996).

Actively criticizing the old educational system, resenting the school policy of imperial Russia, K.N. Ventzel, like other supporters of the theory of "free education", tried to oppose it with the positive ideal of the new school. Denying any form of violence against the child's personality, Ventzel believed that learning should be subordinated to the development of personality (Ventzel, 1911).

The ideal of new system of free education by K.N. Ventzel complements the theoretical and practical searches of Russian teachers at the turn of the XIX–XX centuries. Ventzel devoted his entire long life to creative search, trying to escape from the era of the old school, not a perfect upbringing system, reproducing an absolutely enslaved child-slave. According to the teacher, children are the best creatures on earth ("swelling flower buds", "spiritual individual scent"). In this regard, it is of great interest Ventzel's judgment that a child is not yet a person, an individual must be raised from a child. "Man subsequently arises from a child" (Ventzel, 1923).

At the beginning of the 20th century, K.N. Ventzel tried to apply his theoretical principles of cooperation pedagogy based on a specific educational institution – the House of the Free Child (House of Labor, Temple of Life), which would be attended by children aged 3 to 13 years. These institutions did not have a curriculum, training programs, and there was no classroom system. Only such an educational space, according to the theorist, was able to ensure the transition from old forms of exploitation to a society of a new type, which should be based on freedom of labor and creativity. According to K.N. Ventzel "Homes of the Free Child" could solve such a social issue best of all. Children freely united into mobile age groups according to their interests and, communicating (in every possible way cooperating) with their peers and with adults, acquired the necessary knowledge and work skills. Workshops were supposed to become the center for obtaining such skills. A special role was assigned to parents who replaced teachers. Ventzel organized a library, a toy museum, a reference bureau, a laboratory, a natural history study, and a parent club. Thus, a unique community of parents and children was formed. Such a society of children, parents, and teachers was opposed to the state school. Almost a century later parents, both in Russia and in the West, are increasingly trying to make friends with their children and that is an interesting analogy.

K.N. Ventzel tried to create its own alternative to the old school in practice, not accepting it as the main organized subject of education and upbringing of the younger generation of the new Russia.

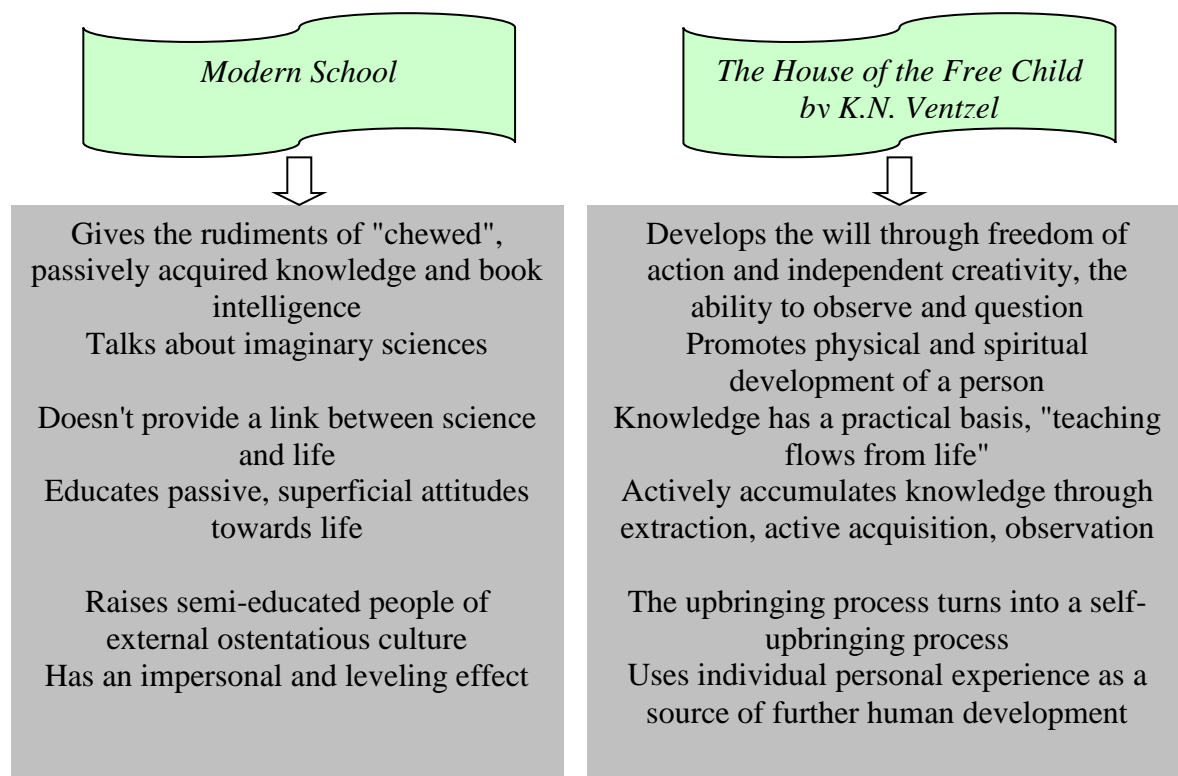
The teacher sincerely believed that only individualization in teaching could lead to the best results. In an effort to develop the creative skills of children in every possible way, sincerely loving students, he unnecessarily idealized and overestimated their abilities and experience.

In a way, the Houses of the Free Child became the prototype of the Soviet Houses of Children's Creativity.

In order for children to study diligently, it is necessary to have their desire and the main goal of K.N. Ventzel is to instill such a desire in them.

Trying to convince the pedagogical community of the consistency of their ideas, K.N. Ventzel outlined the principles of free upbringing in his report "Free education and family" at the All-Russian Congress on Family Education in 1913:

- concept of free education is based on the principle of diversity of education: how many children, so many systems of education;
- education is not a deliberate formation of a child in accordance with an ideal, but a process of liberating creative forces in a child;
- highest goal of education is the development of creative individuality;
- individuality does not stand in conflict with the public and culture, but, on the contrary, true society and true culture are associated with the development of individuality;
- child's initiative is important, its active character;
- it is necessary to contact the child with nature;
- development of mental activity and will is in the foreground, without which education will not be harmonious;
- education should lead to the ability to set goals and strive to achieve them;
- basis of education is free creative productive labor;
- child needs assistance in developing personal morality and personal religion. All teaching of this or that code of morality must be rejected (Ventzel, 1912–1913).



**Fig. 1.** Differences between Modern school and The House of the Free Child by K.N. Ventzel

K.N. Ventzel had a dissenting opinion regarding the pressure of adults on the world of children. It would seem that, desiring good, parents cannot always positively influence their children, hindering creative development. He is against violence against the personality of a child, his will, against strict supervision and the way they think, against formalism in teaching. Therefore, there can be no uniform requirements in the matter of education. At the same time freedom is not permissiveness in the theory of cooperation. The new school according to Ventzel should also be guided by the principles of freedom. It should be aimed at developing a free personality, and not at educating a slave and an obedient performer. A special role is assigned to the teacher, who should act as a guide. He is not a dictator, but an organizer, a first assistant or, in today's language, a communicator who helps the student to determine the choice of real goals and ways to achieve them.



From an early age, K.N. Ventzel tried to form a creative attitude to everyday things in children, thereby doing what is now called problem learning: to set a goal, find a way to fulfill it and analyze it. Drawing some analogy with today, the researcher of the historical and pedagogical heritage of Ventzel Yu.V. Musica highlights several fundamental differences between the modern school and the House of the Free Child (see [Figure 1](#)) ([Musica, 2018](#)).

At the same time, K.N. Ventzel, not doubting the certain influence of society on a person, brought into question the need for the absolute power of society over an individual during his childhood and early childhood.

The educational system according to K.N. Ventzel takes into account the nature of each individual, since it exists for children, and not vice versa.

Not recognizing any form of violence against the person, Ventzel, nevertheless, accepted the events of 1917 and the Bolshevik ideas, since even before the revolution they promised to create the school as a "free association of students." At that time, as if knowing in advance about the millions of homeless children who would appear in the next decade, he appealed to all peoples of the planet with the "Declaration of the Rights of the Child" ([Ventzel, 1918](#)). According to Yu.M. Druzhnikov, this concept appears to be more significant than the one adopted by the UN half a century later ([Druzhnikov, 1996](#)).

K.N. Ventzel came up with the idea of creating a model of an educational institution for preschool children, which he called an "ideal kindergarten." Already at this initial educational level, **he singled out "two equal units": on the one hand – the educator, on the other – children.**

Ideal kindergarten is a pedagogical community, which, according to K.N. Ventzel as follows:

– **"a small business unit, a labor association, in the construction and life of which children take the most active part (self-service work, making manuals and toys, caring for plants, animals, agricultural labor, etc.);**

– a place of happiness, joy and freedom (a place for meeting all social, scientific, aesthetic, moral and other needs of the child);

– a place of the full and harmonious life of the child" ([Ventzel, 1923](#)).

According to Ventzel, "free upbringing" of children does not imply the development of programs, plans and schedules. All classes are conducted according to the intention of the children themselves. In the activities of the educator, improvisation and creativity should be present, while the children themselves become creators – **"little artists". The task of the teacher is to help children improve themselves and find on their own better forms for the embodiment of beauty.**

In the Soviet period, the ideas of cooperation pedagogy were only partially realized in the first years of Soviet power. And they were gradually consigned to oblivion. Criticism of Soviet teachers boiled down to the fact that defending the idea of school autonomy from the state is not acceptable, since the new social conditions contribute to the creative self-realization of the individual and free labor in any way. Experimental teachers of that time, including K.N. Ventzel, were accused of anarchism, left and right deviations.

In his works K.N. Ventzel questioned "How can a person behave in the conditions of the X state? Is there a chance to remain a person?". And **he answered** "Everything depends on the person himself, how he builds his life trajectory – to be a slave or a free person". At the same time, the teacher identifies three types of "people-slaves":

– those who substitute their will for ambition, lust for power, voluptuousness, cowardice and fear;

– people obsessed with this or that idea;

– people who subordinated their will to the will of another person, state, nationality, party, class.

The main instruments of enslavement are the state, family, party, trade union, and public organizations. Any collective reproduces such types of relationships as automatism leading to slavery, and creative activity as a path to spiritual freedom. The beginning that is stronger wins. It is in childhood, according to Ventzel, that a free personality or a future overt or secret slave is formed.

As a result of the practical development of his ideas and methods, K.N. Ventzel reached the following general conclusions that form the basis of cooperation pedagogy:

1) The educational institution must be adapted to the living conditions of the child and his personality.

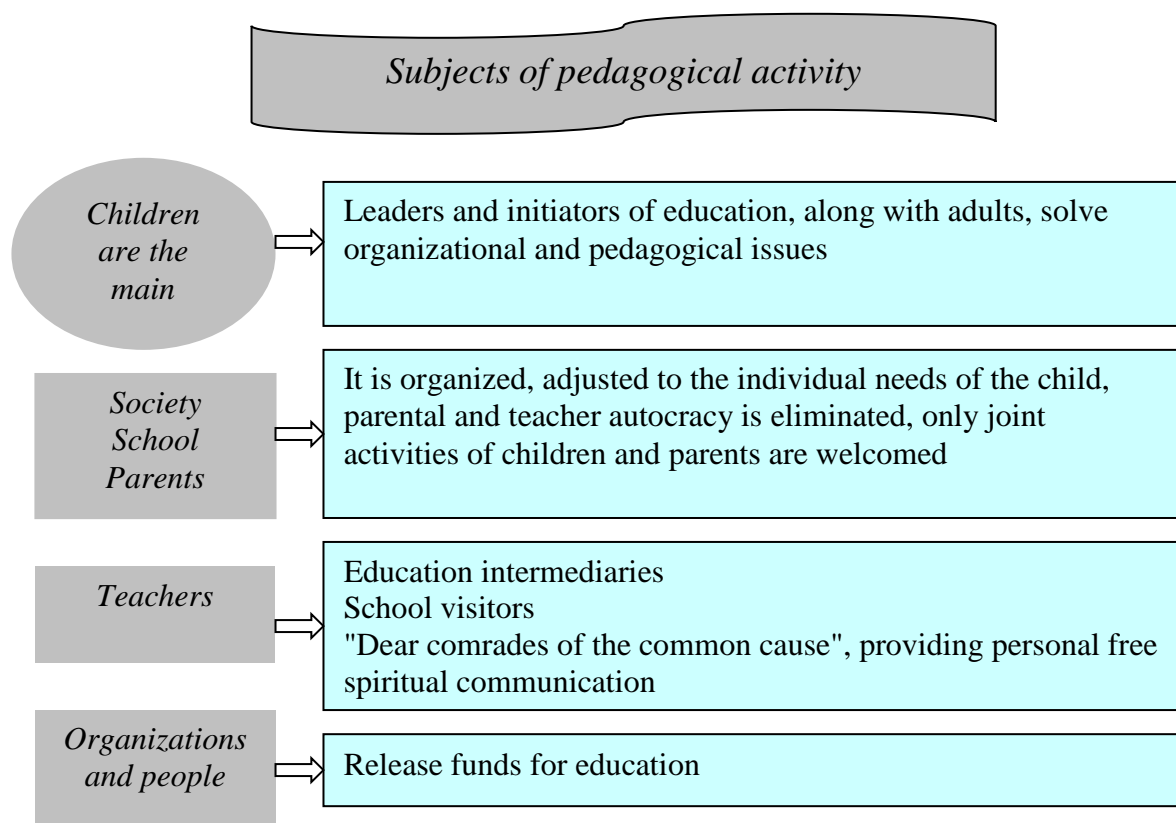
2) Productive labor is closely related to education and upbringing. Productive child labor has practical, educational, developmental, spiritual, and educational goals. Through work, the child

works on himself, develops the necessary character traits that allow him to lead himself, teaches him to do without adults, and fosters internal discipline.

**3) Education should be aimed at the release of the child. “Freedom is the ability to do everything that does not harm the physical and spiritual development of the child and does not harm other people. There should be no more boundaries. ”Society and teachers are only voluntary helpers for children.**

4) The highest authority for a person and society is the authority of the unwritten law, which is the same for everyone. Communication can be educational only if it obeys the highest authority, that is, the law, which is the main one. The law is the true authority that constitutes the soul of the form of communication of people with each other.

5) The educational system is created by the efforts of all subjects of pedagogical activity (see Figure 2).



**Fig. 2.** Subjects of pedagogical activity

K.N. Ventzel proclaimed the cult of the human person. He defined the child as the savior of **humanity, who would be given “the opportunity to develop freely and comprehensively and become a creative person who feels his kinship and unity with humanity and the world” (Druzhnikov, 1996).**

Ventzel's mandate is still relevant to those who want to follow the path of creativity and liberation from the chains of invisible slavery successfully:

- hold on to supreme Self, eternal and immortal;
- listen only to the voice of free creative consciousness;
- direct your spiritual gaze to the most ideal, the most sublime (Kornetov, 2013).

Reflecting on freedom, K.N. Ventzel identified three stages:

- freeing the child (pedagogical task),
- liberation of oneself (ethical task);
- liberation of society (political task).

Undoubtedly, Ventzel's merit is that he has offered the new community to transform the family on the basis of equal rights for children and parents, advocated the creation of the

International Union for the Struggle for the Rights of the Child and tried to condemn political education as a form of violence against the future generation by the authorities.

At the same time, certain provisions of Ventzel's ideas are quite contradictory, since he is trying to transform life itself through school.

**In turn, the teacher's thesis about trust in future generations inspires optimism:** "For its moral progress, humanity needs the greatest possible number of individual free creators of a new independent original morality and the smallest possible number of representatives of "herd morality" (Ventzel, 1923).

## 5. Conclusion

In pedagogical historiography, the educational and training systems of Russian scientists are recognized as one of the best.

The theory of cooperation and free learning by K.N. Ventzel should not be recognized as part of the "pedagogical pantheon", without any doubt. We can find ideas for solving the problems facing modern social reality there.

**K.N. Ventzel's pedagogical innovations on the formation of a community of educators and pupils, teachers and students can act as the fundamental principles of the pedagogical process both in Russia and in other countries of the world.** The concept of cooperation currently meets the interests of society and the social basis of the Russian people. Ventzel's message to all teachers is also quite relevant: "to provide the young generation with the opportunity not to fall into a state of "invisible slavery" and not to become a slave inside, in the realm of the spirit, having the appearance of a completely free person from the outside."

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