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Reforming Education Since the Year 2000: The Case of Russia

Abstract: *This paper analyzes the reformation of Russian education since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, with an emphasis on what happened since the year 2000. It is shown how the 1990s innovative changes were burdened with challenges and problems. The present-day trends and plans include introducing of education standards, making preschool education available to all families, raising school and university teachers' salaries, keeping and widening access to quality education while restructuring (sometimes closing) ineffective institutions, encouraging gifted students, and improving teacher training and school facilities. All this will be possible if financing education is kept stable and gradually increased and if evolutionary change is accepted as general practice with no more revolutionary upheavals.*

Резюме: *Статья анализирует реорганизацию российского образования, начиная с крушения Советского Союза, при особом учете событий 2000-х годов. В ней показывается, как инновационные изменения отягощались сложностями и проблемами. Современные направления развития и планы включают в себя введение образовательных стандартов, наличие дошкольного образования для всех детей, повышение заработных плат преподавателей в школах и университетах, сохранение и расширение доступа к качественному образованию. Одновременно реструктуризации подвергаются неэффективные учреждения (иногда закрываются), поддерживаются талантливые ученики и улучшается подготовка учителей, а также школьные учреждения. Все это будет возможным, если финансирование останется стабильным и будет постепенно повышаться, и если будут приниматься эволюционные изменения в качестве общей практики без дальнейших революционных переворотов.*

Zusammenfassung: *Der Artikel analysiert die Umgestaltung der russischen Bildung seit dem Zusammenbruch der Sowjetunion, bei besonderer Beachtung der Ereignisse seit dem Jahr 2000. Es wird gezeigt, wie die innovativen Veränderungen mit Herausforderungen und Problemen belastet waren. Die gegenwärtigen Trends und Pläne beinhalten die Einführung von Bildungsstandards, die Verfügbarkeit der Vorschulerziehung für alle Familien, die Erhöhung der Gehälter der Lehrkräfte in Schulen und Universitäten, den Erhalt und die Ausweitung des Zugangs zu qualitativ guter Bildung. Zugleich werden ineffektive Institutionen restrukturiert (manchmal geschlossen), talentierte Schüler gefördert und die Lehrerbildung sowie die schulischen Einrichtungen verbessert. All dies wird möglich, wenn die Finanzierung stabil bleibt und graduell erhöht wird und wenn der evolutionäre Wandel akzeptiert wird als allgemeine Praxis mit keinen weiteren revolutionären Umwälzungen.*

The Starting Point

Over twenty years ago, on December 21, 1991, the Soviet Union (USSR) ceased to exist as a state. Many people in today's Russia deeply regret this while being conscious of the many issues that had to be addressed to improve the situation in the country.

Since then, there have been an unprecedented sequence of changes in education. It should be noted that this may be due in part to the education reform announced in the Soviet Union in 1984. Viewed from the present, its importance was in admitting that "the best education system in the world" needed to be changed in several aspects. By the time M.Gorbachev left power in 1991, it was clear that the "reform itself had to be reformed," as many people said and wrote at that time. What was important, however, is that while reforming education in the Soviet Union occurred peacefully and without changes in the political structure, the reforms were initiated by the people whose aim was to change the whole political and social fabric of the country. A detailed and thorough analysis of educational reforms in Russia and the Peoples' Republic of China has been conducted by a team

of Chinese and Russian academics (Россия – Китай, 2007). The present article is of a smaller scope and, while drawing on and agreeing with the main conclusions of the volume mentioned, will give a synopsis of the reforms in Russian education since about the year 2000.

It is worthwhile to mention that educational changes in Russia after the collapse of the USSR were initiated by two very important documents. In July 1991, President B. Yeltsin signed *Decree No. 1* (“Ukaz” in Russia) on priority measures for educational development (Указ, 1991) and a year later the Law on Education was adopted. Both documents made history in Russian education though the economy of the time could not support most of the recommendations. In fact, some of the recommendations have not yet been realized, such as teachers’ salaries should be equal to the average salary in industry and university teachers should get twice as much. However, both documents were clear indicators that those in power consider education a priority.

Pros and Cons

Before discussing the reform results, it should be emphasized that none of the changes were unanimously and enthusiastically supported. As the first Russian Minister of Education, Edward Dneprov, stated, there have been reforms, counter-reforms and pseudo (would-be) reforms (Dneprov, 1994). As part of the radical group in Russian education at that time, Dneprov wanted to do away with many of the practices of the Soviet education system and in part succeeded in doing so. One other aspect to be emphasized is that after 1991 many changes began in the whole social structure of the state and the field of education just followed suit. President M. Gorbachev had created the slogans of openness (“glasnost”) and pluralism. In education, these aims had such an effect that they are the first to be explored. Each aspect of educational reform is discussed by describing the plan, the impact, the current situation, and future directions.

Ideology and Education

There is no doubt that the pressure of political ideology on all aspects of life in the Soviet Union was very strong, including on education and culture. In fact, it meant that what was considered inappropriate for the Soviet citizens to know and/or discuss was excluded from the educational curriculum. Therefore, students could not critique the philosophical writings of “bourgeois” philosophers like Hegel, Kant or Sartre since they had never read a single article by them. Nor could students assess a work of art (be it music or painting or literature) without having heard or seen or read the work of art itself.

Prominent among the pieces of cultural heritage which were forbidden were jazz music, abstract paintings and various dances. Examples include “the bulldozer exhibition” of avant-garde non-conformist painters in 1974 which was forcefully destroyed in Moscow. Dances like rock’n’roll or boogie-woogie could only be learned in small private dance schools but not in larger state-run schools and those who liked the Beatles music could only enjoy it through hand-made, low-quality recordings. People who had a rare possibility to travel abroad had their luggage searched while returning to the Soviet Union to stop “anti-Soviet” printed material from entering the country. The loss of intellectual and spiritual freedom was certainly felt by many.

All this began to change under Gorbachev and still more radically under Yeltsin. The control of the Communist Party over matters of culture and education was abolished, while everything which had been forbidden for reasons of ideology was gradually allowed. Institutions of learning and culture became places of open discussion as school and university curricula were no longer dictated by ideological preferences, and teachers and students received much more freedom in their approaches to teaching and learning.

This was certainly a positive development but it was also a challenge. Textbooks, especially in the humanities, were written depending on the authors' understanding of what is fact and what is fiction. Therefore, students learning history in one school classroom learned from a textbook that J. Stalin was a genius and brought the Soviet Union to victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945 with help from talented generals and brave soldiers. In another classroom of the same school, another teacher using another textbook taught students that J. Stalin was a dictator and the victory of 1941-45 was achieved by immense loss of human life as the generals knew little about military strategy and tactics, and the soldiers were driven to attack solely by fear of brutal repression. If prior to 1991 in the Soviet Union there were just a few history textbooks with strict ideological coordination of the content, there were more than sixty history textbooks at the beginning of this century.

Locating accurate historical information is no easy matter especially while archives were very slowly, and selectively, made public. Some archives and documents that shed light on developments prior to or just after World War II are top secret in Russia and abroad and are likely too sensitive to ever be made public. One example is "Operation Unthinkable" which was released from the 'top secret' category in Great Britain at the beginning of the 21st century (Reynolds, 2006). The documents are the plan of the British Cabinet to attack Russia just after Germany was defeated on July 1, 1945. The plans, developed under the supervision of W. Churchill and supported by the American President, did not materialize because the leaders were convinced that there was little chance of success considering the military and political situation of the time. This new information would certainly influence modern history teachers.

Today the situation is changing. Special commissions of the two state academies – the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Russian Academy of Education – are to give expert opinions on scientific content and pedagogy of all textbooks that are approved for schools. This approach is criticized from three points of view. Some people call it a hidden form of censorship which is specifically forbidden by the Russian Constitution (article 29). Others insist upon still stricter control being necessary as there are many cases where ideological preferences overrun scientific facts. Still others write complaints to officials and organizations insisting on something being included in or excluded from school curricula.

As head of one of the commissions, I see the difficulties quite clearly and understand why the progress is slow and uncertain. The reason is not in the field of education but in the wider social and economic context. The ideological pressure of the Soviet times was not replaced by another acceptable ideology which valued education and culture, though much policy demonstrates the importance of both. As a result, a whole generation of young people grew up with the understanding that money is the only thing that matters and that market ideology will make everything right – and not only in the field of economics. As in other countries with transition economies, this led to a decline in morals as described by most people including professional sociologists. A recent analysis of the morality of the young in today's Russia is presented in a short but informative article by S. Batchikov and S. Kara-Murza (2011). The very title of the article is, in fact, a synopsis of its content: "Chaotic reforms, cultural trauma and pathology of consciousness." The whole situation is called catastrophic by some. I would say that success of reforms in the Peoples Republic of China as I understand them is partly explained by a clever balance of tradition and innovation. The explanation is certainly not new and can be easily found in the important volume prepared by Russian and Chinese experts that has already been mentioned above (Россия – Китай, 2007). It is important to recall that too much emphasis on a market economy can endanger the economy itself as well as the morals of the society. This point was made by successful capitalists themselves and the book by G. Soros – *"The crisis of global capitalism: Open society endangered"* (Сорос, 1999) demonstrates this quite well and was translated into Russian at a very opportune moment.

Access and Quality

Much has been done as far as access to education is concerned. At the end of the Soviet period we had about 600 post-secondary schools which were all run by the state. Now there are more than 3000 universities and post-secondary institutions though the population of Russia is just half of the population of the USSR. With a population of over 400 students per 10,000, we have surpassed most countries of the world. This was attained when all Soviet schools of higher education had degree programs of five years or more. While, we are moving to a system in which most students will end their university life with a four-year bachelor's degree, access to higher education has never been higher.

Perhaps the greatest public interest as far as university students are concerned is in the debate on how school-leavers are admitted to universities. Since 2009 the all-Russia/unified state examination is the standard procedure for admittance, which is similar to the process in many countries. The idea is to check the knowledge and skills of school-leavers by a set of written tests which are the same all over the country and administered on the same day by independent commissions. This is a stark contrast with former oral examinations administered by schools and universities themselves. Though Russia has been experimenting with this procedure since 2001, there are many people who oppose it for several reasons. One criticism is that this approach to assessing knowledge ignores other aspects of intelligence, with creativity being one of them. But in practical terms, a more important reason is the opportunity for corruption and for the unauthorized use of modern information technologies which have resulted in scandals all over the country. These are criticisms of the general public and a substantial part of the expert community. In contrast, those in authority support the procedure. My understanding is that this exam is an appropriate way to get a general assessment of school-leavers' achievement but as the sole criterion of admitting to university it is not completely reliable.

In the USSR there were slightly over five million university students and now there are about nine million in Russia alone. Often, growth in quantity is accompanied by problems of sustaining good quality. Motivation to access higher education is steadily rising after the slump of the 1990s. During the 90s, getting a university education did not appear to be worthwhile for it took much time and gave little reward. Now university teachers complain about many school-leavers' poor knowledge, and still poorer skills and study habits. Accordingly, the Russian President ordered the Ministry of Education and Science to monitor post-secondary schools to find the ineffective ones. Nobody seemed to oppose the monitoring but the criteria and the swiftness of the procedure called forth massive criticism on the part of university teachers and rectors (presidents). Though as many as 50 indicators were used to assess the universities, they included those that had always been criticized by academics. One issue was the cumulative result of the unified state examination characteristic of the students who entered different universities. As a result some classical universities, as well as some universities of fine arts, were named by the Ministry as "having symptoms of ineffectiveness." The ensuing criticism and accompanying students' protests led to milder pronouncements and the exclusion of some universities from the list. But the procedure itself will continue with the declared aim to improve some of the ineffective universities while closing the worst ones. There is at least one point of general consent: there are too many universities, some providing a very poor quality of education.

While access to higher education is certainly the most disputable issue, there is another problem of interest. In the Soviet period about 80% of all pre-school children went to kindergartens or an even earlier level of a creche (a day nursery). Now with the general income of the people slowly rising, most parents prefer to keep their children at home until about the age of three when they can go to kindergartens or similar preschool groups. Since the slump in the 1990s Russia has not yet

reestablished the network of preschool institutions it used to have, though most educators and most parents agree that even medium-quality kindergartens prepare children for school better than an average family. In fact, it was the “low income” argument that stimulated people to send children to kindergartens in the Soviet times. But the Soviet experience was used by the whole world to let women have better career possibilities and to better prepare children for school. Now many countries surpass Russia in the percentage of children going to preschool institutions while parents in Russia have problems sending a child to a kindergarten as they have to line up for it. Some measures are being taken to alleviate the problem and I am optimistic about the future.

There is another problem facing school-aged children—that of school quality. Previously, children went to school closest to their homes. Rare exceptions were cases of schools for children with special needs and so-called schools “with a bias” (schools with advanced programs of foreign languages, mathematics, physics, biology etc.). Since the 1992 Law on Education was adopted, parents have the right to choose schools and by way of personal contacts and the internet they are seeking better schools. Quarrels in front of the school doors are not uncommon during enrollment time. It is another example when a reform (the right for choice) is coupled with a problem (not all schools are considered to be “good”). Nowadays schools are obliged to accept children who live in the school area and then other students can be considered. In Moscow and some other cities, schools are enrolling children using the internet, a practice that may continue to grow.

Now that strict control of school and university curricula of the Soviet days gone, the problem of what to teach is exacerbated by the newly acquired freedom of choice. As far as universities are concerned the debate is usually limited to the professional community of university teachers and scientists. But school curricula have really become a national issue and since the beginning of the 1990s the work on national school standards is ongoing. At the very beginning of this time, the standards were limited to the content of school education. Since about the year 2000 these efforts have gradually shifted to a wider scope. A 2007 amendment to the Law on Education set the national educational standard at three provisions or requirements: the structure of the basic program of education (including an explicit list of the subjects to be taught); the level of student achievement; and the conditions of learning (quality of school buildings, salary of teachers and teaching load, use of advanced technologies). This wider understanding of education standards is also kept in the new Law on Education in the Russian Federation adopted in 2012 and signed by President V. Putin on January 5, 2013. The Law is to be implemented beginning with September 1, 2013.

The standards for primary and elementary schools have already been adopted and are gradually being introduced in schools. The complete secondary education standard (11 years of study) has been very hotly debated. The most important point of disagreement is how much the new school system should keep from the previous system. In my opinion, a complete break from traditional values and practices is destructive. Since the new standards are to be introduced all over the country by 2020, there is still time to think about and to experiment with the standards adopted by the Minister for Education and Science, A. Fursenko, shortly before he left office.

Management and Finance

Education management and finance are so closely interwoven that they can and should be discussed together. A well-known drawback of the Soviet education was a very high degree of centralization. However, this was a positive feature in the transition period of the 1920s and 1930s because of the vast territory of the country and stiff resistance to change. It also helped during the immense stress of the war of 1941-1945 and the restoration after it. But it all changed later. The rigidity of the system left little space for the creativity of teachers and students as well as for incorporating regional features. Therefore, the two key words of the reforms in educational

management at the beginning of the 1990s were 'decentralization' and 'democratization.' This meant giving more administrative powers to lower levels of management including educational institutions themselves and more independence in spending money. The particular features were embodied in the text of the 1992 Law on Education. They are in line with the practices of other countries and are of no special interest in this discussion.

More important in an analysis of the major educational reforms is the issue of finance. Contrary to the *Decree No. 1* by B. Yeltsin and the 1992 Law on Education, financing education in the 1990s was insufficient. The time was marked by low wages for all educators and sometimes they did not receive any wages for several months. This is why teachers' strikes were more frequent than strikes by other workers. Compared to those times, there has been a noticeable increase in educational budgets, and now it is about 4% of the gross domestic product. Still, some innovations were introduced (or at least proclaimed) at that time and partially adhered to. Instead of strict itemizing of budgetary spending, schools were given greater flexibility and independence regarding how they used their financing. Schools were allowed to charge fees for some extracurricular activities and for education services for people who did not belong to the schools. The money earned could then be used to increase teachers' salaries and develop material resources. Some measures were taken to make teachers' wages dependent on the quality of their work. Unfortunately at that time, those policies were not implemented in all schools so these measures continue to be introduced, with slight variations. The general idea is that "money should follow students." This means that schools have to compete to enroll more students and this practice is actively being executed.

Another innovation since the Soviet model is using parents' and sponsors' money to finance education. The USSR was justly proud of all education being free of charge, with short-term courses like tailoring or car-driving being rare exceptions. Since 1990, there exists in Russia thousands of non-government (private) schools, colleges, universities and other educational institutions. Still, more often a part – sometimes a substantial part – of the student body in state-run institutions pay tuition fees.

Since about the same time, there has been a stipulation that education should be financed by the state within limits, so that parents and post-secondary students only pay for what exceeds this limit. However, until now private schools rarely received state funding as educational authorities were sometimes short of money. It happens, too, that the more elite schools prefer not to take money from the state because of stricter accountability for this money. But there is strong pressure now to make the state financing of education work. It is partly explained by the demographic pattern. Because of a dwindling population, there are fewer potential students so tuition fees account for less of institutions' overall budgets. In this current situation money allotted by the state becomes more attractive. Many rectors (presidents) of state and private universities have apprehensions that the transition to three- or four-year bachelor's and five- or six-year master's programs will mean a decline in educational revenue. There have been many statements to the contrary from the authorities at various levels. However, only time will tell if shorter programs translate into less money.

Socialization and Upbringing

As the afore-mentioned reforms demonstrate, changes are typically coupled with challenges and flaws. But there is one aspect where I would say we have almost failed in Russia. This is the socialization and inclusion of the young into the newly formed social, economic and cultural fabric of life. The issue of socialization was considered of special importance in the Soviet Union but its system of values was quite different from that of the present. Getting rid of the former system of values presented difficulties of two sorts. First, some of society's values changed, not because they were intrinsically bad but because they were specifically valued in the Soviet system and they were

therefore “too Soviet.” A good example is the value of patriotism which was one of the objectives of education in the Soviet Union. ‘Patriotism’ became a derogatory word by those who came to power in 1991. In the same vein, ‘coordination’ and ‘mutual assistance’ gave way to ‘criticism’ and ‘competition,’ ‘collectivism’ was converted to ‘individualism,’ and ‘cultural values’ was supplanted by ‘material and monetary gains.’ This contributed to higher crime rates, especially among the young people, as well as other societal and economic problems.

Certainly education alone is not responsible for the problems of society. There are other factors which influence socialization which have been analyzed in detail elsewhere (Запесоцкий, 2008; Никандров, 2000). Messages found in the media including posters, banners, leaflets and advertisements which people come across in their daily lives create a distorted and unattractive image of Russia which many people internalize.

Through television and radio broadcasts, youth are exposed to violence, sex, and messages about attaining material success at all costs. Most parents, educators, as well as the general public are aware of this. However, on the one hand the Russian constitution specifically forbids censorship. Therefore, any attempt to reduce the number of violent and sexual images on TV screen can be interpreted as censorship. On the other hand, such TV shows bring the most money to these TV stations. The internet is also full of such images. While there have been several attempts to establish supervisory boards to address the problem, they have all failed. This is an important issue to monitor because it appears that this situation in Russia is more serious than in other countries.

As it stands, however, the education system has to cope with the problems created by the media rather than rely on their help in the process of socialization. In several articles and a report presented at the joint session of all the Russian state academies of sciences, I tried to highlight the messages that appear in the mass media in present-day Russia (Никандров, 2007; Никандров, 2010 et al.). Though some people in this country may disagree, the report was supported by the session. The messages the media send the public can be summarized as follows:

1. The negative or evil ideas and deeds take the dominant position in the world and are consequently emphasized in the media.
2. Our world is the world of violence of all sorts (physical, military, sexual, psychological).
3. The basic sexual instinct is the basis of everything. It is difficult to distinguish between “normal” and “too much of” but many observations support the idea that, in quantity and openness, sexually explicit visual material is more widely available in Russia than any other country in the world. The cult of the “dolce vita” (literally “sweet life” in Italian), material success in general and money in particular, is natural and necessary. Therefore, higher (spiritual) needs are explained either by stupidity or by poverty.
4. Consumerism rules the world, not only in economy but in overall relations between people as everything can be bought and sold.
5. Competition and rivalry for profit and resources are natural. Mutual help and altruism are exceptions appropriate to freaks or saints as the basic principle is “take all from life.”
6. The Russian authorities at all levels of government do not take care of the people and are highly corrupt. They were better in the 1990s (that is when we strictly followed the US lead in everything – N. Nikandrov).
7. The Russian army, police and the law-enforcing agencies in general are against the people, and are cruel and corrupt.
8. Civil patriotism was possible in the past (e.g., in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945) but now it is impossible because of the relations between the people and those in power.
9. The rights and freedoms of people in Russia are not adequately defended and are purposefully violated by those in power and by the people towards each other, which happens more often than in “civilized,” that is “Western,” countries.

10. The high dignitaries in the Russian Orthodox Church tarnished their reputations by their collaboration with the state security authorities in the past and now by their use of their position of power for purposes of material gains.
11. The development of Russia is behind other countries.
12. There are insurmountable conflicts between the countries of the Union of Independent States which are caused by the events of earlier Russian history and the imperial habits of present Russian leaders.
13. The Russian authorities are ineffective because they are split. There is conflict between the federal and the regional authorities, among the various branches of power, as well as in the Putin – Medvedev dynamic.

There is a lot of text and visual material which provide support for these statements. And there is also much TV and other media content to support a more balanced view of Russia. But for various reasons, if the number of images, number of repetitions and proximity to prime time are considered, more negative messages about Russian society are presented than positive messages. These messages have the effect of producing excessive anxiety in people, particularly those with other similar psychological problems.

Apart from the aforementioned joint session of the academies of sciences, I also had opportunities to speak about this issue in both houses of the Federal Assembly (the Russian Parliament). I am optimistic the issue of socialization will be addressed because similar pronouncements have been made by President V. Putin, Prime Minister D. Medvedev, and other important figures in decision-making positions. I am optimistic, too, because the newly adopted Law on Education in the Russian Federation signed by V. Putin on January 5, 2013 specifically mentions socialization for the first time in Russian law-making practice. Nevertheless, the current pattern of the socialization, which is no less important than education, is presently fostering unfavorable behavior in young Russian citizens and the necessary changes are yet to come.

Other Hopes for the Future

In summary, there have certainly been important achievements in the education system though they are all coupled with challenges. There is much more freedom in society and much more choice in education – but it is often misused. Access to education has never been so easy – but it has contributed to poor quality in many educational institutions. Teachers are free to experiment with the content and methods of instruction – but the teaching load is too high and some teachers leave schools for better salaries and less stress. There are many initiatives by educational authorities to change things for the better – but teachers and specialists in education are not always consulted. There is accountability of schools and competition among them to get more and better students – but it does not always help to maintain social justice. People demand good quality education – but that means more lessons, more study and poorer student health. Monitoring the quality of education is important and necessary – but the principles, methods and the practice itself is hotly debated and severely criticized.

The educational and state authorities of Russia are certainly conscious of the above-mentioned problems. They are also conscious of the disappointment of the public about all of this. As a result, pronouncements about the importance of education are common for all government officials at all levels, up to the very top, and not only during times of approaching elections. Issues regarding education also take priority in various documents adopted at the highest (presidential and governmental) levels for the current period until about 2020. In May, 2012 the last part of the school standards were adopted and, as already mentioned, the new Law on Education in the Russian Federation was signed by the President. Analyses of this important document provides several measures which give an idea of general trends in educational development for the coming

years.

The Law on Education took several years to be worked out as it passed through a very intricate system of debates and corrections. The number of suggestions made by professionals and ordinary citizens was in the thousands, which is in itself unprecedented. Much of the discussion in the Duma (the lower house of the Russian parliament) was understandably highly publicized for two reasons. First, education concerns everyone in the country. Second, it is therefore a good chance to gain (or lose) points in election campaigns (of which there have been several, including the presidential and the parliamentary election, as well as regional and local ones). With so much feedback, the Law on Education could not have been consensus-based for practical reasons. As well, it is almost five times longer than the previous version of 1992 with all of its corrections and reference articles. Some important stipulations are included which will provide quality elements in the educational system of the country. On the other hand, some changes are not for the better. One example: the new Law on Education omits the term "basic professional education" which denotes training factory workers in vocational schools. The argument for this change is that the country currently needs fewer workers and only those with basic training since professional education will be included in the higher level of the "secondary professional education." Since the Russian Constitution stipulates that "basic professional education" is free of charge but "secondary professional education" is not, many poorer students who have some support from the state such as free board and lodging may lose this support.

It has been repeated many times that the practice of education being mostly free of charge is to be continued. The promise dates back to the very beginning of independent Russia (1992) but there has been a widening practice of taking fees for various aspects of education so people have apprehensions. Some misgivings are slogans of the political opposition and they are not unfounded. Up to now there have been elaborate and strict financial and organizational rules for which service fees can be charged and how this is to be done. However, they are not strictly adhered to and people often complain that too much money has to be paid for too many things. The new Law on Education provides some guidelines for the practice and contains specific stipulations for the whole educational system being free of charge within the limits of the federal state standard of 37 hours per week.

As for preschool education, the most important goal is to assure full access to it for all families who need and want it. This is to be achieved by 2016. Now about 60 per cent of children go to various types of preschool settings and by the beginning of 2012/2013 school year, about two million parents lined up to get the service for their children. The problem is so acute that special emphasis was noted in the Ukaz (Decree) of President V. Putin "*On the national strategy of action in the interests of children.*" The Ukaz was signed on June 1, 2012, International Children's Day, just three weeks after Putin's inauguration. In the new Law on Education, preschool education is emphasized but some people fear this focus will introduce a sort of final examination for very young children.

The Law on Education is important, too, for making certain that the existing provisions of the new general education standards are now gradually introduced in schools. As mentioned above, education within the limits of the standards is to be free of charge. This is why teachers and parents are closely watching what is being promised and implemented in this field. The present day standards are a compromise between a wider content of education proposed by the Presidium of the Russian Academy of Education and a narrower content (which is understandably cheaper) proposed by another group, as is the standard of the upper secondary education (years 10 and 11 of the school program). My hope is that, since the last mentioned standard is to be fully introduced by about 2020, there will be a bias towards wider education content. The immediate task is to monitor bringing education standards into school practice and introducing the corrections shown to be necessary by school practice. In 2012 the Russian Academy of Education instituted a Commission

with the participation of the regional ministers of education to coordinate the procedure.

The government promises to put more money into education practice and infrastructure. So far this has been demonstrated with the growth of the budget in recent years which is greater than in some other fields. This can be attributed to the growth of the gross domestic product (GDP) which is stable. For example, in 2005 the GDP was 21609 billion rubles while in 2011 it was 54369 billion rubles. At the same time the percentage of the GDP spent on education was kept at about 4%. The same is true about the “consolidated” budget (the sum total of all the money from the budgets of various levels). The general education schools are financed mostly by the municipal budgets. This explains a very substantial difference among teachers’ salaries in various regions of Russia. Though some measures are taken to alleviate the problem, the average salary of a teacher in Moscow is 55.600 rubles (September, 2012), while in the region of Orel it is 13.300 rubles, and in the Altay region it is 12.300 rubles. Steps are also being taken to make teachers’ salaries more dependent on the quality of their work but there is no consensus about how the quality is to be evaluated. The primary task now is to raise teachers’ salaries to the average level of salaries in each particular region. The task is realistic and is sure to be achieved soon.

The Law on Education adds certainty to the very sensitive issue of finance in general and teachers’ salaries in particular. The teachers’ status is also elevated though they are not, as some people had hoped, made “civil state servants.” The issue of teachers becoming civil servants has been discussed since the beginning of the 2000s. My understanding of the problem is twofold. On the one hand, civil servants in Russian terminology and practice get high salaries and sometimes higher bonuses of various sorts. However, they are less independent in their professional behavior and this is something Russian teachers are becoming more and more conscious of and accustomed to since the early 1990s.

Many experts foresee some trouble with the introduction of the normalized per capita approach to financing schools and universities. Seemingly, this is the only logical way of action: the more students, the more money (“Money follows students!”). But the practice of implementing the approach revealed problems. It is difficult to implement in rural schools where the task of teaching is no less demanding than in urban areas while classes are smaller. The practice of restructuring and merging schools is not easy to implement because of large distances between townships and villages with poor transportation and road facilities. And it has been shown that closing a school in a village most likely means “closing” the village itself because younger people with children leave for other places with better educational facilities. Still, steps are being taken in this direction and computer/internet technologies are helping.

In the latter respect considerable progress has been made. All schools are now provided with computers and internet facilities. Sometimes this is the only way to make up-to-date knowledge and methods of teaching immediately available in far-off places. Using interactive electronic textbooks is also gaining popularity. The new Law on Education introduces the possibility and practice of distance education technologies. While they are already being used more widely, the provisions in the Law are making distance technologies a practice among more schools with the possibility of getting almost all forms of education under the obligatory supervision of, and testing by, teachers.

The Law on Education requires more attention to be paid to encouraging gifted students of all ages. Appropriate programs are adopted for gifted children and university students as grants are provided for them and their teachers. With the unified state examination as the main criterion of admittance to higher education, the so-called “olympiads” (competitions among schoolchildren in various subjects) provide gifted children a chance to be encouraged for their specific abilities and achievements. Sometimes success in the competitions is considered more important than the poorer results of their state examinations. No less important is the provision for learners with special needs (physical, mental/emotional or behavioral) in education. The general idea is that of

inclusive education, like almost everywhere in the world. This approach is gaining strength as this is the first time it is stipulated in law.

Important changes are ahead for the Russian higher education system. On the one hand, Russia is the number one country for the percentage of people with higher education diplomas (54 per cent while Canada is second with 51 per cent and Israel is third with 46 per cent). It should also be mentioned that most of these graduates have studied for five years or more whereas the majority of other countries' degrees are four year bachelors' programs. But it is not that simple. The quality issue is quite real in many universities and post-secondary institutions, particularly in many non-government institutions.

The other problem is that of demographics. There are too few school-leavers to fill the many existing university vacancies. And, last but not least, now most students will end their university life with a Bachelor's degree, with only about 10 per cent of graduates continuing their studies in masters programs. The specialist five-year programs which were of chief importance before will now be an exception. Given all of these changes, the plans are to close or restructure about 30 per cent of universities by 2016.

It is also a benchmark that at least five Russian universities have been ranked to be among the top 100 international universities. The Quaquarelli-Symonds ranking, similar to other rankings, place special emphasis on research, number of teachers, students from abroad, and citations per faculty. Though many experts consider the "publish or perish" approach outdated, measures will also be taken to raise the corresponding indicators in leading Russian universities, including better financing.

Something must be done to improve teacher training. As it is now, about 5 per cent to 10 per cent of graduates of teacher training institutions become school teachers. Others find employment elsewhere. The solution is seen in making teacher training institutions part of larger universities to enhance their training in the fields of their future school subjects. However, this may result in lowering their preparedness to teach, which only time will tell to be true or false. Some rectors (presidents) of teacher training institutions have apprehensions about this move as they fear that they will become Cinderellas (low-placed servants) in larger universities. Hopefully the higher status of educators in the new Law on Education will help attract better students wishing to become teachers.

As mentioned above, higher education standards attract less public attention than those of general education. However, with the introduction of bachelor and master degrees as levels of higher education, working out the hundreds of specialized standards will also present a serious practical task if not an altogether new problem.

An important feature in the changes to be implemented in the near future is that more attention is to be given to moral education. This was considered indispensable in Soviet times and was all but forgotten in the 1990s. More often than not, it is now discussed under the general heading of 'forming the identity of the citizens of Russia.' It is now part of the educational standards at all levels. However, it is crucial at the level of general education (forms 1 to 11) and it took much time and effort by the Russian Academy of Education to make this happen. The hope for this change has been eroded, unfortunately, by a little progress in positive socialization--that is to say, making the young to adhere to a system of values of good citizenship. As shown above, the general messages of mass media and other socialization instruments works against, rather than in cooperation with, the education system and has been kept almost intact since the 1990s. Hopefully the newly formed Committee on mass media in the State Duma will have more success in cooperating with various levels and institutions of education in insuring positive socialization and better moral education (Дармодехин, 2012). If not, the above-mentioned messages of the media will produce even more harm.

With a lot of criticism on the part of some experts and interested citizens, I am still optimistic. It is very easy to say that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. But hopefully we will not lose the gains that have been achieved as we have passed through difficult times in education. What we do need is a time of evolutionary change rather than revolutionary upheavals and in this respect there is a certain consensus in Russia.

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