

Russia: Evolutional Changes Against Revolutionary Upheavals

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Abstract This chapter analyzes the process of education reform in Russia since the disintegration of the Soviet Union with an emphasis on what has happened since 2000. It is argued that the innovative changes in the 1990s were burdened with challenges and problems. They will only be put right if financing education is kept stable and gradually increased and if evolutionary change is accepted as general practice with no more revolutionary upheavals.

Keywords Challenges • Educational reform • Evolutionary change • Innovation • Stable finance • Russia

Over 20 years ago the Soviet Union ceased to exist as a state. It happened in law or, rather, technically on December 21, 1991. The author belongs to most people in today's Russia who deeply regret the disintegration of the great power though being conscious of many things that had to be done to improve the situation in the country and avoid the tragedy.

Since then, an unprecedented sequence of changes in education followed – as elsewhere and everywhere. In fact, this can be said about the twentieth century as a whole and about many countries. Special mention is due to the reform of education announced in the Soviet Union in 1984. Viewed from the present, its importance was in admitting that “the best education system in the world” (the official point of view at that time which I partly share) does need 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 then. What was important, however, is that while reforming education in the Soviet Union occurred peacefully and without changes in the political structure, the reforms that followed

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were initiated by the people whose declared 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 performed by a team of Chinese and Russian academics (Россия Китай 2007). While drawing on and agreeing with the main conclusions of the volume mentioned, this chapter will give a synoptical view of the reforms in Russian education since about the year 2000 up to the present and beyond.

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 most measures and norms were proclaimed with a clear understanding that the economy at that time could not support them. In fact, some of them are not realized even now like the requirement that teachers' salary should be equal to the average salary in the industry and the university teachers should get twice as much. But it was good propaganda since both documents were clear indication that those in power consider education as a priority.

1 Pro and Contra

Before passing on to 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 puts it, there have been reforms, counter-reforms and pseudo (would-be) reforms (Dneprov 1994). In fact, this way of things can be observed in all spheres of life and in many countries, and the very terms were not coined by the man. He belongs to the most radical-minded people in Russian education who at that time wanted to do away with much of the practice of the Soviet education and in part succeeded in doing so. One other thing to be emphasized is that many changes had begun in the whole social structure of the state and education just followed suit. President M. Gorbachev had put up the slogans of openness ("glasnost") and pluralism. In education that meant so much that it is the first change to be mentioned and evaluated below. In the part that follows, several significant changes in education will be discussed in a similar way: what was the plan, what happened later, what we have now, and what we are planning to do next.

2 Ideology and Education

There is no doubt that the pressure of political ideology on all aspects of life in the Soviet Union was particularly strong. Suffice it to say what it meant in practical terms for education and culture. In fact, it meant that whatever in the contents of

education and culture was considered inappropriate for the Soviet citizens to know and/or discuss was excluded from it. So one could know a whole list of flaws in the philosophical writings of “bourgeois” philosophers like Hegel, Kant, or Sartre without having read a single article by them. Or one could give a very low assessment of some work of art (be it music or painting or literature or anything else) without really having heard or seen or read the work of art itself.

Prominent among the pieces of cultural heritage were jazz music, abstract painting, and various dances which were forbidden. Not to burden the writing with numerous examples, let us limit ourselves to a few. In 1974, “the bulldozer exhibition” of avant-garde nonconformist painters was forcefully destroyed in Moscow, the name calling the instrument actually used to flatten many paintings, while some painters were arrested. People who liked the Beatles music could only enjoy it with hand made low-quality recordings. Dances like rock’n’roll or boogie-woogie could only be learned in small private dance schools but not in larger state-run schools which were quite numerous. People who had a rare possibility to travel abroad had their luggage searched while returning to the Soviet Union to forbid some “anti-Soviet” printed matter from entering the country. Personally the author of the article has little love for abstract painting and admits that all this had a positive side, too, while people knew classical works of art much better than it is the case now. But still there was very limited intellectual and spiritual freedom which was certainly felt by many.

All this began to change under Gorbachev and still more radically under Yeltsin. The monopoly of the Communist Party in matters of culture and education was abolished, while everything which had been forbidden for reasons of ideology was gradually brought to light. Institutions of learning and culture became places of open discussion, content of school and university education was no more dictated by ideological preferences, and teachers and students received much more freedom to teach and learn whatever they chose.

This was certainly a positive development though 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. So students of history in a 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; he was helped by talented generals and brave soldiers. In another classroom of the same school, another teacher using another textbook taught his/her students that J. Stalin was just a dictator, the victory was achieved by immense loss of human life, the generals knew little about military strategy and tactics, and the soldiers were driven to attack solely by fear of brutal repression. If in the Soviet Union there were just a few history textbooks with strict ideological coordination of the content taught, there were more than 60 textbooks at the beginning of this century.

It is to be admitted that finding the balance in recent history is no easy matter especially while the archives were just very slowly made public and very selectively, too. And some of them that shed light on developments prior to or just after World War II are top secret here in Russia and abroad. Of course some of them are really too sensitive to be ever made public. Just another example of the difficulty is “Operation Unthinkable” which was released from the top secret

category in Great Britain at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Reynolds 2006). It is a well-documented story about 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 planners convinced their superiors that there was little chance of success considering the military and political situation of the time. So what would a teacher of history emphasize in his/her lessons – the close cooperation of the USSR and the Western allies or the preparation of World War III by the latter?

Nowadays, 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. As always this is criticized from several 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 while there are many cases where ideological preferences overrun scientific facts. Still others write complaints to officials and organizations insisting on something being included into 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. Getting rid of the ideological pressure of the Soviet times was not accompanied by any other system of values which would include values of education and culture acceptable for most people though much is said about 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 put everything right – and not only in the field of economics. As elsewhere in countries with transition economies, this led to a decline in morals admitted by most people including professional sociologists. A recent analysis of the morality of the young in today's Russia is presented in a short yet informative article by Batchikov and 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,” while the whole situation is called catastrophic. I am not that pessimistic though I view it as very serious. I would say that success of reforms in the Peoples Republic of China as I understand them is partly explained by clever balance of tradition and innovation. The explanation is certainly not new and can be easily found in the important volume prepared together by Russian and Chinese experts that has already been mentioned above (Россия Китай 2007). Here, it is perhaps important to recall that too much hope in the market economy endangering the economy itself as well as the morals of the society was criticized by successful capitalists themselves. For example, the book by G. Soros “The Crisis of Global Capitalism: Open Society Endangered” (Сорос 1999) shows this quite well and was translated into Russian at a very opportune moment.

3 Access and Quality

Much has been done as far as access to education is concerned. At the end of the Soviet period, there were about 600 institutions of higher education which were all run by the state. Now there are more than 3,000 universities and university level institutions, though the population of Russia is just half of the USSR population. With over 400 students per 10,000 population, we have surpassed most countries of the world. True, all Soviet institutions of higher education had programs of 5 years or more. Now we go over to the system in which most students will end their university life with a 4-year bachelor's degree and many experts are not happy about this. Still access to higher education has never been that large.

Perhaps the greatest public interest, as far as entering universities is concerned, is the debate on how school-leavers become university students. Since 2009, the all-Russia/unified state examination (national standard examination) is the standard procedure which is similar to those 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 of them is that this sort of checking knowledge leaves other aspects unnoticed and not evaluated, creativity being one of them. But in practical terms, a more important reason is that intricate techniques of swindling combining corruption and use of modern information technologies result in scandals all over the country. This is yet another example of the criticism of the wider public and a substantial part of the expert community contrasting the staunch position of those in power who are for the procedure. My understanding is that this exam is a good way to get a general assessment of school-leavers' achievement but it is less reliable as the sole criterion for admitting to the university.

As everywhere growth in quantity (in the USSR there were slightly over five million university students, now there are about nine million in Russia alone) is accompanied by problems of sustaining good quality. Motivation to get higher education is steadily rising after the slump of the 1990s. At that time the whole way of life seemed to show that getting an education is not worthwhile for it takes much time and gives little reward. But now university teachers complain about many school-leavers' poor knowledge, still poorer skills and study habits. Accordingly, the Russian President ordered the Ministry of Education and Science to monitor institutions of higher education to check out 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 indications were demanded of the universities to make judgment, they included those that had always been criticized by the academics, one of them being the cumulative result of the foregoing unified state examination characteristic of the students who entered this or that university. As a result some classical universities as well as some

universities of fine arts were labeled by the Ministry as “having symptoms of ineffectiveness.” The ensuing criticism and sometimes students’ protests led to milder pronouncements and the exclusion of some universities from the list. But the procedure itself will be continued with the declared aim to improve some of the ineffective universities while closing the worst ones. There is at least one point of almost general consent – the understanding that there are too many universities and their affiliations with very poor quality of education.

If access to higher education is certainly the most disputable issue as far as access to education in a wider sense of the word is concerned, there is another problem of interest. In the Soviet period about 80 % of all preschool children went to kindergartens or even earlier level of the creche (maternity school). With the general income of the people slowly rising, most parents prefer to keep their children at home till about the age of three when they could go to kindergartens or similar preschool groups. Since the slump in the 1990s, we have not yet reestablished the network of preschool institutions, though most educationists 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 better prepare children for school. So many countries now surpass Russia in the percentage of children going to preschool institutions, while for us it is very often a difficult problem to send a child to a kindergarten and parents have to line up for it. Some measures are taken to alleviate the problem and my estimates are optimistic.

In schools of general education, there is another problem – that of school quality. In earlier days children went to school closest to their homes. Rare exceptions were cases of corrective schools for handicapped children 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, better schools are sought. At times of enrollment, it often comes to quarrels in front of the school doors. It is yet another example when an achievement (the right for choice) is coupled with a problem (not all schools are considered “good”). So nowadays schools are obliged to take in children who live in the school area and only then other cases should be considered. In Moscow and some other cities, there is a recent experience with using the Internet for enrolling children in schools with the possibility that the procedure will be used elsewhere.

Strict control of school and university curricula of the Soviet days is now gone. However, the problem of what to teach not only remains but 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. However, school curricula have really become a national issue, and since the beginning of the 1990s, the work on national school standards has been going on. At the very beginning it was limited to the content of school education. Since around 2000, the efforts were gradually being shifted to a wider scope of problems. By a 2007 amendment to *the Law on Education* (and since 1992 there have been dozens

of amendments), the national educational standard is a set of three provisions (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 basic school levels have already been adopted and are gradually introduced in schools. The complete secondary education standard (11 years of study now) has been very hotly debated. The most important point of disagreement is how much the new school should keep from the previous days. In my understanding complete break of traditional values and practices is dangerous and destructive. Since the new standard of upper school levels is to be introduced all over the country by 2020 only, there is still time to think and to experiment the standard adopted by the Minister for Education and Science, A. Fursenko, shortly before he left office being the basis, for this discussion.

4 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. In fact, 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 creativity of teachers and students as well as for introducing regional features. So the two keywords of the change in educational management at the beginning of the 1990s were decentralization and democratization. That meant giving more administrative powers to lower levels of management including educational institutions themselves and more independence in expenditure. 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.

More important 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 very poor. The time was marked by low wages of all workers of education and sometimes by no wages at all for several months. This is why teachers' strikes were then more frequent than other workers' strikes. Compared to those times, there has been a noticeable increase in educational expenses though even now they are about 4 % of the gross domestic product (GDP). Still some innovations were introduced (or at least proclaimed) and partly adhered to. Instead of strict itemizing of budgetary spending, schools were to be financed in gross with greater flexibility and

independence. Schools were allowed to take fees for some extracurricular activities and for education services for people who did not belong to these 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 were mostly good wishes so these measures are being introduced now with slight variations. The general idea is that "money should follow students." This means that schools have to compete to enroll more students than others, and this is actually applied now.

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

Since about the same time, there exists the provision that the content of education within the limits of the state standard should be financed by the state, while the parents or older students themselves should only pay for what exceeds this limit. However, until now it was rather rarely the case when private schools did receive the money. Sometimes educational authorities are short of money. It happens, too, that the richer schools prefer not to take money from the state because of stricter accounting when money is allotted from state budgets. But there is strong pressure now to make the provision work. It is partly explained by the demographic pattern. Because of dwindling population there are fewer potential students so less money can be earned as tuition fees. In this situation money allotted by the state becomes more attractive. Many rectors (presidents) of state and private universities have apprehensions that the transition to 3 or 4-year bachelor's and 5 or 6-year master's programs will mean decline in educational spending. There have been many statements to the contrary from the authorities at various levels and I believe in their good intentions. But I think only real practice will show if the intentions come to real money.

5 Socialization and Upbringing

The aforementioned changes (and there have been many more) are of the sort that some achievements are naturally (though unfortunately) coupled with challenges and flaws. Nonetheless, there is an aspect where I would say we have almost failed in Russia. This is socialization or inclusion of the young (and not very young) into the newly formed social, economic, and cultural fabric of life. It was considered of special importance in the Soviet Union but the 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 the values were dropped not because they were intrinsically bad but because they were specifically valued in the Soviet system, because they were "too Soviet." A good example is patriotism, which was one of

the objectives of education in the Soviet Union and was made 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 were supplanted by material and monetary gains. This brought about more crime especially among the young people and other societal and economic problems.

There is little doubt that education alone cannot be made responsible for this. Unfortunately, the content of socialization in its wide sense has the same message which has been analyzed in detail elsewhere (Запесоцкий 2008; Никандров 2000). The whole message of the media, posters, banners, leaflets, and advertisements which people find in their post creates a distorted and unattractive image of Russia. With the many drawbacks we have in Russia, it is not that bad but the image forms the mentality of the people.

The other thing of importance is that violence of all sorts, sex in all possible ways, and propaganda of material success, which is reached no matter how, fill the TV and radio broadcasts with understandable influence on the young. This is not to say that parents, educationists, or ordinary people do not understand all that. But on the one hand, the Russian constitution specifically forbids censorship, and any attempt to lessen the number of violence and sex images on the TV screen can be interpreted as censorship. On the other hand, such films and broadcasts bring the most money to TV and other media. The Internet is also full of that stuff. So there have been several attempts to set up supervisory boards which would help to settle the problem, but they all failed. I hope there will be a gradual shift for the better because my personal observations and available statistics show that the situation in Russia in this respect is more serious than in other countries.

As it stands though, the system of education has to cope with the problems presented 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 are collectively carried by the mass media in present-day Russia (Никандров 2007; Никандров 2010). Though some people in this country may disagree, the report was supported by the session and I will sum up the messages in several statements:

1. The negative or evil ideas and deeds take the upper hand in the world and should consequently be emphasized in the media.
2. Our world is the world of violence of all sorts (physical, military, sexual, psychological).
3. The basic (sexual) instinct seems to be the basis of everything. It is difficult to distinguish between the “normal” and “too much of”, but many observations support the idea that in quantity and the openness with which corresponding visual material is shown in Russia we overrun the whole planet.
4. The cult of the dolce vita (literally “sweet life” in Italian), material success in general and money in particular is natural and necessary, the teaching of “reasonable needs” is an aftermath of the communist times, higher (spiritual) needs are explained either by stupidity or poverty.

5. Market rules the world not only in economy, but also in overall relations of man to man for everything can be bought and sold.
6. Competition and rivalry for profit and resources are natural; mutual help and altruism are exceptions proper to very few freaks or saints, the basic principle being “taking all from life.”
7. 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 (i.e., when we strictly followed the US lead in everything – N. Nikandrov).
8. The Russian army, police, and the law-enforcing agencies in general are against the people, cruel, and corrupt.
9. 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.
10. The rights and freedoms of man in Russia are not adequately defended and are purposefully violated by the powers and by the people towards each other, which happens more often than in “civilized,” that is, Western countries.
11. The high dignitaries in the Russian orthodox church were tarnished themselves by their collaboration with the state security authorities in the past, while now by the unashamed use of their special position for purposes of material gains.
12. The development of Russia is extremely low.
13. There are insurmountable contradictions and conflicts between the countries of the Union of Independent States which are called for by the events of the Russian history of earlier days.
14. The Russian authorities are ineffective through being split. There is conflict between the federal and the regional authorities, among the various branches of power as well as in the Putin–Medvedev tandem.

No doubt clever choice of text and visual material (and there is many of both) will produce support for these statements, as for anything else. And – again no doubt – there is also much TV and other media content to support a more balanced view of Russia. But for various reasons, the balance is mostly on the negative side if the number of images, number of repetitions, and their proximity to prime time is considered. This produces excessive anxiety in the people while persons with phobia and other similar psychological problems are more affected.

Apart from the aforementioned joint session of the academies of sciences, I had chances to speak about all this in both houses of the Federal Assembly (the Russian Parliament). I am optimistic because similar pronouncements are made by President V. Putin, Prime Minister D. Medvedev, and other important figures who take decisions. Optimistic, too, because the newly adopted *the 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 overall pattern of the socialization which is no less important than education proper is unfavorable for the mentality and behavioral patterns of the young Russian citizens and the necessary changes are yet to come.

6 Other Hopes for the Future

Summing it all up, we can certainly mention important achievements in the sphere of education though they are all coupled with challenges. There is much more freedom in the society and choice in education – but it is often misused. Access to education has never been so easy – but it entails poor quality in many institutions of education. Teachers are free to experiment with the content and methods of education – but the teaching load is too high and some teachers leave schools for better salaries and less stress. There are many moves 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 of education – but that means more lessons, more study, and poorer student health. Monitoring quality of education is important and necessary – but the principles, methods, and the practice itself are hotly debated and severely criticized.

The educational and state authorities of Russia are certainly conscious of all the abovementioned problems. They are also conscious of much disappointment in the society about all this. So pronouncements about the importance of education are common for all government officials at all levels up to the very top and not only at times of approaching elections. Issues of education also take priority places in various documents adopted at the highest (presidential and governmental) levels for the period till about 2020. In May 2012, the last part of the school standard was adopted and, as already mentioned, the new *Law on Education* in the Russian Federation was signed by the President. Analyzing the all-important document, we can come to several provisions which give an idea of general trends in educational development for the coming years.

The *Law* took several years to be worked out and passed through a very intricate system of debates and corrections. The number of suggestions made by professionals and ordinary citizens amounted to many thousands which is in itself unprecedented. Much of the discussion in the Duma (the lower house of the Russian parliament) was understandably highly politicized for two reasons. First, education does concern everyone in the country. Consequently, second, it is a good chance to make (or lose) points in election campaigns and there have been several including the presidential and the parliamentary let alone the regional and local ones. So in practical terms, the *Law* could not have been made short or consensus-based. In fact, it is almost five times longer than the previous version of 1992 with all the corrections and reference articles of the latter. Some important provisions are there and will uphold social and quality elements in the educational fabric of the country. Some changes while being seemingly formal make a real difference – and not always for the better. Just one example to illustrate the thesis: The new *Law on Education* omits the term “basic professional education” which denotes training factory workers in schools of vocational education. The argument is that now we need fewer workers with only basic training, and this level is to be absorbed by 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 like free board and lodging may at least for the time being lose the support.

It has many times been repeated that the practice of most education being free of charge is to be continued. Since the promise dates back to the very beginning of independent Russia (1992) and there has been widening practice of taking fees for all sorts of things in education, people do have apprehensions. Some of them are slogans of the political opposition but they are not unfounded. Up to now there have been elaborate strict financial and organizational rules and patterns for which services fees can be taken 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* puts some order into practice and contains specific provisions for the whole school system of education being free of charge within the limits of the federal state standard of 37 h/week.

As far as preschool education is concerned, the most important goal to achieve is to assure full access to it for all families who need and want it. This is to be achieved by 2016. Now just about 60 % children do go to all types of preschool institutions, and by the beginning of 2012/2013 school year, about two million children (or, rather, parents) lined up to get the service. The problem is so acute that special emphasis was made on it in the Ukaz (Decree) of President V. Putin “On the national strategy of action in the interests of children.” The Ukaz was signed on a symbolic day of June 1, 2012, the date being the International Children’s Day celebrated in many countries and just 3 weeks after Putin’s inauguration day. In the new *Law* preschool education is presented as one of its levels, alleviating fears of some people that the provision of preschool education, though reasonable in itself, will introduce a kind of final examination for the very young children.

The *Law* is important, too, for making certain the existing provisions of the new general education standards which are now gradually introduced into schools. As mentioned above what is 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 done 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. It is still more so with 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 introduce the corrections shown as necessary by the 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 the infrastructure of education. As far as the bulk of money and resources is measured, this is certainly true, and the growth in the latest years is greater than in some other

fields. This is the result of the growth of the GDP while the part of it allotted for education is stable and sometimes even dwindles. For example, in 2005 the GDP was 21,609 billion rubles, while it was 54,369 billion rubles in 2011. At the same time the percentage of the GDP spent on education was kept at about 4 % with very slight variations about the figure. The same is true about the “consolidated” budget (the sum total of all the money from the budgets of various levels). The schools of general education 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), in the region of Orel 13,300, in the Altay region 12,300, etc. Steps are also 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 still to raise teachers’ salaries to the average level of 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’ salary in particular. The teachers’ status is also put up though they are not (as some people hoped) made “civil servants.” The issue of teachers becoming civil servants was being discussed since the beginning of the 2000s. My understanding of the problem is twofold. On the one hand, civil servants in the 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 the Russian teacher is getting 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”). Nonetheless, 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 transport and road facilities. And it has been shown that closing a school in a village most probably “closes” the village itself which merely disappears because younger people with children leave for other places with better educational facilities. Still steps are taken in this direction and computer/internet technologies help too.

In the latter respect, considerable progress has been made. All schools are now provided with computers and the 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 strength. The new *Law on Education* introduces the practice of distant technologies in education. While they are already being used more widely, the law provision makes it possibility to get almost all education via distant technologies under the obligatory supervision and testing by the teachers.

The *Law* requires more attention to be paid to encourage the gifted students of all ages. Appropriate programs are adopted for gifted children and university students, grants are provided for them and their teachers. With the unified state examination as the main criterion of admission 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 achievement. Sometimes the success in the competitions overran the poorer results of the state examinations. No less important is provision for learners with special problems in education (physical, psychic or behavioral). The general idea is inclusive education as almost everywhere in the world. It is gaining strength even now, but this is the first time it is stipulated in law.

Important changes are ahead in the Russian higher education system. On the one hand, Russia is country No. 1 in the percentage of people with higher education diplomas (54 % while Canada is second with 51 % and Israel is third with 46 %). It should also be mentioned that most of them studied 5 years or more, whereas the majority of other countries’ diplomas are 4-year bachelor’s diplomas. But not all is that simple. The quality problem is quite real in many universities or university type institutions of higher education. It is acute in many non-government institutions but not only there.

The other problem is that of demography. 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 as bachelors with about 10 % of them continuing their course of study to become masters. The specialist 5-year programs which were paramount before will be an exception. All those changes considered, the plans are to close or restructure about 30 % universities by 2016.

It is also a benchmark to achieve that at least five Russian universities are among the first 100 in international rankings like that of Quacquarelli Symonds by about the same year. The QS ranking as other similar rankings place particular emphasis on research, number of teachers and students from abroad, and citations per faculty. Though many experts consider the “publish or perish” approach outdated, measures will 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, just about 5–10 % graduates of teacher training institutions do become school teachers. Others find employment elsewhere. The solution is seen in making teacher training institutions part of better universities to enhance their training in the fields of their future school subjects. However, this may result in lowering their didactic and psychological preparedness which only time will show true or false. Some rectors (presidents) of teacher training institutions have also apprehensions that they will be “Cinderella” (low-placed servants) as part of larger universities. Hopefully the higher status of teachers (“education workers”) 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 more attention given to moral education. This was considered indispensable in the 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 1–11) and it took much time and effort by the Russian Academy of Education to make this happen. The hope for this change is unfortunately slightly eroded by very little progress in positive socialization, that is to say, making the young to adhere to a system of values of good citizenship. As it stands and as shown above, the general pattern of mass media and other socialization instruments working against rather than in cooperation with the education system is 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 abovementioned message of the socialization pattern will produce still 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 have passed through difficult times in education not to lose the gains that have been achieved and mentioned above. What we do need is some time of evolutionary change rather than revolutionary upheavals, and in this respect there is a certain consensus in Russia.

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