

EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA

This volume consists of a collection of essays devoted to the study of the most recent educational reform in Russia. In his first decree, Boris Yeltsin proclaimed education a top priority of state policy. Yet the economic decline which accompanied the collapse of the Soviet Union dealt a crippling blow to reformist aspirations and to the existing school system itself. The public lost faith in school reform and by the mid-1990s a reaction had set in. Nevertheless, large-scale changes have been effected in finance, structure, governance and curricula. At the same time, there has been a renewed and widespread appreciation for the positive aspects of the Soviet legacy in schooling.

The essays presented here compare current educational reform to reforms of the past, analyse it in a broader cultural, political and social context, and study the shifts that have occurred at the different levels of schooling – from political decision-making and changes in school administration to the rewriting of textbooks and teachers' everyday problems. The authors comprise Russian educators, who have played a leading role in implementation of the reform, and western scholars, who have been studying it from its very early stages. Together, they formulate an intricate but cohesive picture, which is in keeping with the complex nature of the reform itself.

Ben Eklof is Professor of History and Education at Indiana University.
Larry E. Holmes is Professor of History at the University of South Alabama.
Vera Kaplan is a research associate at the Cummings Center for Russian and East European Studies.

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EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA

Legacies and prospects

Edited by
Ben Eklof, Larry E. Holmes and Vera Kaplan



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CONTRIBUTORS

Kara D. Brown is a PhD candidate in the Education Leadership and Policy Studies Department at Indiana University, Bloomington. Her dissertation, 'Grassroots and Globalization: Bringing Võro-Language Programs into Southeastern Estonian Schools', will be defended in December 2004. Brown's research focuses on minority communities in the Baltic States, language preservation and schooling, women and education, rural education, and regional-language groups and the law. Her Master's thesis, 'Learning to Integrate: The Education of Russian-Speakers in Estonia, 1920-2000' traced Estonian-language education issues in Russian schools over the course of the twentieth century. Brown's current research is on rural education reform and community preservation in Estonia.

Ben Eklof is Professor of History and Education at Indiana University and editor of *Khronika: Chronicle of Education in Russia and Eurasia*. Among his books are *Russian Peasant Schools* (1986), *Soviet Briefing* (1989), *School and Society in Tsarist and Soviet Russia* (ed., 1993), *Democracy in the Russian School* (ed., 1993), *Russia's Great Reforms, 1855-1881* (ed., 1994), *The World of the Russian Peasant* (ed., 1990). Recently, he edited the two-volume English language translation of Boris Mironov's acclaimed *Social History of Imperial Russia, 1700-1917*. Prof. Eklof continues to work on a volume on the daily life of the Russian school before the revolution, and to publish on education in the post-Soviet era.

Isak D. Froumin is Senior Education Specialist at the World Bank (Moscow Office). His research interests lie in the areas of educational policy and civic education. His recent publications (in Russian) include: *School Secrets* (1999), *Problem-Based Approach in Civic Education* (2001), *Educational Policy: Practice of Analysis* (2002). He was principal of the Univers experimental school in Krasnoiarsk from 1987 until 1999.

Larry E. Holmes is Professor of History at the University of South Alabama. During the 1992-93 academic year he lectured in Russian and Soviet history at Rostov State University. His publications include: *The Kremlin*

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DEMOCRATIZING THE RUSSIAN SCHOOL

Achievements and setbacks¹

Isak D. Froumin

The age of education: freedom or conflict

Among the many labels applied to the twentieth century one seldom encounters 'the age of education'. Yet if we were to consider the present as a time of shared, interconnected experiences significantly affecting all of us, then it would be difficult to find anything that has changed the lives of a greater number of people than universal education.

Universal education spawned an entirely new set of problems that led educational leaders of many countries to attempt transformation and renewal. Before the appearance of the concept of universal education, all approaches to educational reform had a single purpose – to achieve a better way of guiding children, to mould them more effectively, and to convey a substantial mastery of knowledge and skills. Early in the twentieth century, Dewey, Montessori, Shatskii and Blonskii (the latter two, Russian progressive educators) emphasized additional goals: supporting children in their development, assisting students in self-realization, and providing equal educational opportunities.

The concept of providing equal educational opportunities was, however, frequently at odds with the notion of creating a competitive learning environment. Today some theoreticians and many practitioners draw on the experience of Soviet and Asian educational systems in an effort to reconcile these two trends. In fact, following the shock produced by the launch of Sputnik, educational leaders in the west began to examine the Soviet experience in earnest.

Many western educators sought to pinpoint the reasons for the Soviet success.² The studies they produced assessed the achievements of Soviet science chiefly as the result of a greater number of courses in schools in mathematics and the natural sciences. Without diminishing the significance of this view, we can now say that these experts used a frame of reference that was too narrow, ignoring, as it were, the clash between egalitarian and libertarian tendencies in

the Soviet system of education. These scholars failed to see the rather original Soviet solution to the conflict between high academic standards and universally accessible education: namely, rigorous levelling (*vyravniwanie*) of children, uniformity of requirements and educational programmes, and high demands made by teachers both of students and of their families. In our opinion, the success of the Japanese educational system can be explained in similar fashion. It employs a frontal approach, strict and regular student evaluation, and little choice of subjects by students. Notably, while western conservatives sought to draw on the Japanese emphasis on strict educational discipline, even if it resulted in greater student failure, the school reform undertaken in Japan in 1989 emphasized greater choice by students as well as reinforcing the interactive, creative character of education.

For a long time the contest between libertarian and egalitarian tendencies was carried out in the realm of high politics and was reflected in government policy in general as well as in changes that were carried out in educational content and methods. After World War II increasing public attention to issues of organization and administration led to a revamping of the system of educational governance. The dual (as well as cyclical) character of this overhaul stemmed from a clash between a tendency towards centralization and efforts at decentralization (the latter involving an intensification of public control) of educational management. In the second half of the twentieth century most countries with well-developed educational systems systematically reapportioned authority among different levels of educational administration.

Comparative assessment of reforms in Russia and abroad

In an effort to assess democratic reform in Russian education and compare it to western models, it would be useful briefly to outline its distinctive characteristics:

- The primary initiative for educational changes in Russia came from below, from teachers, while western reforms came from above as well as from below.
- The primary aim of many western reforms was democratization of governance, while Russian reforms aimed at democratization of the relationship between the teacher and the student.
- Russian reform took place in a school system that was controlled entirely by the state, while western reform had to compete with a network of independent schools.
- Western schools traditionally enjoyed autonomy, while Russian schools were part of a rigid centralized system.
- Western teachers sought to improve the educational system, while Russian teachers worked towards the more ambitious goal of democratic reorganization of an entire society, including and through the school.

- Russian teachers initiated their reform efforts at a time of public euphoria over democracy; in the west the values of democracy gave way to those of efficiency.
- At the same time, western and Russian reforms initially faced the same conditions: problems related to the market economy and to social justice in education; decreased state financing; and parental conservatism.

Naturally, the paths that reform took in different countries have both similarities and differences. Common to these reforms were: the organization of school boards or councils (*sovety*); the establishment of education councils at various administrative levels; an increase in various types of special education programmes for children with special needs (*oslablennyye*) as well as for gifted children; decentralization of decision-making; and granting greater autonomy to certain schools and teachers.

However, considerable differences between Russia and other countries became apparent in the implementation of reforms:

- Russian reformers emphasized changes in instructional methods and programmes, while their western counterparts focused on administrative change.
- In Russia students and teachers were considered to be the primary 'consumers' of democracy, while in the west parents and the general public were regarded as such. Consequently, reforms in democratic governance (the school councils) involved mainly students in Russia but parents in the west.
- Finally, western reformers worked for an evolutionary change of the system; Russian reformers sought revolutionary renewal through the establishment of a diversity of alternative schools and pedagogical approaches.

Significantly, different reform strategies faced similar obstacles, resulting in the following shortcomings (felt more acutely in Russia than in the west): the fictitious character of public participation in educational governance; an increase of tensions at the local level as a result of decentralization; heightened apprehension and even anxiety within the school community (*kollektiv*); intensification of social stratification among schoolchildren as a result of educational choice;³ ineffectiveness of the direct or frontal approach for the teaching of democracy; a discrepancy between slogans on the macro level and practice at the level of the school; and a decline in the level of educational achievement.

Democratization of governance

It was, perhaps, the notion of democratic governance that was 'appropriated' most fervently in the process of democratizing education. Many reformers

equated democratization of governance with democratization per se. The following statement is typical in this regard:

At present the main trend in the democratization of the school includes: guaranteeing mutual respect and continual cooperation between teachers and students and between the wider public and parents; increasing the effectiveness of student self-government; overcoming authoritarian and bureaucratic relationships between the administration and teachers, on the one hand, and parents and students, on the other; and complete rejection of autocratic methods of school administration.⁴

Another scholar put it more bluntly: 'We understand democratization of the educational process to mean the gradual increase in participation of members of the school community – teachers, students and their parents – in governing the school.'⁵

Efforts by officials to 'catch up' with democratization resulted in a large number of publications devoted to problems of democratic governance.⁶ A majority of these studies, however, ignored the unique experience of the public pedagogical movement and that of schools where the impetus for renewal came from teachers and students themselves, where democratization began in the classroom, and where the competency necessary for a democratic debate developed as part of the educational process. More often than not, publications on democratization appeared in response to new ideological requirements and made trivial recommendations for the organization of school councils. The following tired rhetoric concerning democratization of governance typified such studies:

Now the motto of the school collective is: 'We work together, respect each other, and the result of our work is of high quality.' A school council constitutes a legislative body . . . Both the *kollektiv* as a whole and each individual should have mutual responsibilities articulated in the proposed school-wide code of laws.⁷ 'Optimization of governance is the means of democratization.'⁸

At the All-Union Congress of Educators in 1987, school boards or councils were treated as one of the most important mechanisms for democratization. The councils were seen as places where decisions could be made democratically, where people could experience democratic behaviour and interaction. They were also regarded as a conduit for parental and student influence in school affairs.⁹ Thus, these councils were introduced ardently and ubiquitously; their appearance featured noisy elections, sometimes embroiled in scandal, and almost always accompanied by democratic sloganeering and euphoria. However, the call for 'more self-government!' was not accompanied

by a re-examination of the notion itself, which had 'at no stage of development been opposed to discipline', meaning that behind this notion of self-governance lies a perception of the school as an essentially bureaucratic organization and an outdated model of democracy.¹⁰

At the Univers School in Krasnoïarsk, Siberia, the most ignominious teacher, well known for insulting students in class, was elected to the school council.¹¹ The decision-making process in the councils turned out to be a prolonged and ineffective affair, fraught with discord. Ordinarily, such councils tended to rubber-stamp the administration's decisions. Parental involvement and especially student participation were superficial, and there were no provisions for real feedback or for learning from experience.

Experience gained in the Univers School led to two conclusions regarding self-government: first, the need to differentiate its various forms and content according to students' ages; and, second, the need to find an alternative to its rigidly formulated structure. To overcome the latter, a contractual regulation of relations between the students and the school was proposed. The Univers School introduced the idea of contractual relations between the school and its students as early as 1988. Quite a few schools then familiarized themselves with this experience and began to adopt it. According to data collected by S.M. Iusfin, the contract is an important means of 'effective realization of educational aims'.¹² However, as is apparent from the same study, very few schools use it well in attempting to foster genuine student independence.

A majority of schools in Russia became disenchanted with school councils. Many principals tried to curtail their activities, despite directives from above insisting on the preservation of this democratic 'fig leaf'. As noted in one of the first studies of school councils: 'Students and teachers did not rush to "take power", indeed, they were ready to give up the rights of self-governance, to free themselves of the responsibility generated by these rights. Thus, neither teachers nor students were prepared for the implementation of democratic principles in school life.'¹³

To be sure, one can cite dozens of examples of interesting work done by school councils and of children's satisfaction with such activity.¹⁴ However, all of this is a far cry from true democratization of school governance. In fact, school councils can be viewed as an example of a deceleration of the deliberate democratic transformation of the school and of the educational system as a whole. According to data collected by the Association for Assistance to School Councils, 'everywhere in school practice one can observe a state of uncertainty, of expectation, of timid exploration by trial and error'.¹⁵ The main reason for this situation has been the formal transfer of rights and responsibilities to these councils before the functions of various administrative levels were fully understood. Moreover, in Russia (as in many other countries) teachers were unprepared for a new type of relationship with students and for participation in decisions regarding the redistribution of resources and redesign of school programmes. Parents and students were

equally ill equipped, both in practical and psychological terms, for their new role in administration.

The hasty introduction of school councils involved parents in school governance in a way that often hindered real democratization. At a time when the country has undergone tremendous socio-cultural transformations and overhaul of schools, the parents' generation has willy-nilly stood for the old values and way of life. According to our 1995 poll of schools, 45 per cent of parents regarded humanization of the school as harmful. They placed strictness first and a demanding nature second as the most desirable qualities in a teacher. In this poll, love of children lagged far behind.

As in many other aspects of democratizing education, no model exists for parental participation in school governance. Yet, clearly, in a democratic society individual rights are inviolable unless they infringe on the rights of others. Thus, unless parents harm their child (or any other member of society), neither society nor the school has the right to interfere in family business, or to categorically demand the fulfilment of perceived (societal or school) needs. On the other hand, in a multicultural society parents do not have the right to impose their views on professionals. While acknowledging parental opinion, professional educators can reserve the right to act according to their own judgement, but with one qualification: the final decision lies with the parents. If parents do not like the proposed educational system, they have the right to reject it. Thus, from the point of view of parental participation, democratizing the school means that the school enters into a dialogue or a contractual relationship with parents.

In parental collaboration at Univers, the school's tasks and approaches are formulated with particular clarity so that parents are aware of the differences between new and familiar approaches and can anticipate the consequences of their decision. The school's contract with parents also lists parental obligations of support and, naturally, rights of parents, including full information disclosure, special assistance for the child and the family, consultations with teachers upon the request of parents, and transfer of the pupil from one class to another (*smena uchebnogo klassa*). The practice of signing such contracts has been exceptionally useful, bringing about a change in the relationship between the school and the parents, a conclusion supported by surveys and expert evaluation.

Election of school principals often resulted from hasty or, more precisely, fictitious, democratization of school governance. According to the pedagogical press of those years and to the data of an education expert, elected directors often turned out to be ineffectual administrators who did nothing to prevent the disintegration of the school *kollektiv*.¹⁶

The practice of decentralization turned out to be rather controversial as well. The transfer of much of the authority from the basically democratic centre to the regions (there are eighty-nine regions, roughly like American states, in the Russian Federation), with their predominantly conservative

administrations, fell far short of the expected democratization by failing to incorporate public opinion, to address society's educational demands, or to foster creative development of the school and its teachers. School autonomy and protection from inspections also had unexpected consequences. The standard integrated educational environment as well as coordinated school programmes and requirements began to erode.

With the formulation of ten reform objectives in education, Edward Dneprov, who in 1990 became the Russian Federation's Minister of Education, offered a more comprehensive view of democratic change in governance: democratization, less dependence on the state, regionalization, national-cultural autonomy, openness, humanization, focus on the humanities, differentiation, developmental education and lifelong education.¹⁷ He thereby linked changes in governance to new requirements in educational content. Moreover, educational leaders at that time developed a concept of education focusing on the development of a joint state-public system of governance. However, this objective was not fully pursued either in theory or in practice. In the end, Dneprov himself was chagrined to acknowledge: 'What has been done regarding the implementation of one of the key ideas of the reform, the notion of combined state-public governance in education? Nothing!'¹⁸

At the ministerial level, both state-public governance in education and democratization of educational content required substantive elaboration rather than simple declarations of intent. As of the beginning of the twenty-first century, democratization of education has been virtually cut off from ongoing changes in the structure of governance, from the decision-making process, and from a discussion of efficient use of resources. At best, the public has been engaged in education only through parental associations.

As has been the case with many other educational reforms, efforts in Russia with regard to democratization at different levels of governance have remained uncoordinated. Moreover, coordination was not even envisioned, as each level had its own objective. This absence of linkage is apparent, for example, in the basic proposed strategy of involving the public in education through the state-public structures of governance, local self-government and professional communities.¹⁹ Significantly, the school community and, above all, students are not included in the above inventory.

The school's relative isolation from other types of educational institutions was yet another aspect of the democratization process. Democratization of pre-school and professional-vocational education lagged far behind the transformations taking place in the general school, even though, as a western scholar of Russian reform has accurately pointed out, 'it is now obvious that interdependent changes are needed at all educational levels (from pre-school to post-graduate education)'.²⁰

One can point to a number of reasons for the derailment of democratic governance. One is that the transformation of governance did not originate spontaneously, from below, but came as a result of democratization 'from

above' based on slogans and decrees, which brought about cosmetic improvements rather than radical changes in the philosophy of governance. The following revelation by a school principal typified this attitude:

For me, as a head of the school, democratization is a rather complex process. There is a problem of combining strict control by a single person, with accountability for my actions, while at the same time taking into consideration the school *kollektiv's* notions of what is valuable, kind, and intelligent and worthwhile. To run the school under such conditions is much harder for me as a principal. The question is how to combine the traditional system of leadership with what comes from 'below'.²¹

Another reason for the breakdown of democratic governance was the unpreparedness of officialdom for interaction with informal public groups. Scholars and practitioners alike suggested possible ways for interaction to take place but without any tangible effect.²² In addition, observers had different conceptions of democratization: some saw it as a single act – they had only to find the magic word which would make the school instantly democratic; others viewed it as a smoothly unfolding process. However, the process of democratization has not only been lengthy; it has also been fraught with contradictions. It comprises several phases, any one of which could undermine the entire process.²³

The first experience with freedom is intoxicating. Not only children and adolescents but adults, too, test this freedom to confirm its reality and then to determine its boundaries. Such a reaction is to be expected. A reduction of teacher control, even in a limited sphere of activity, brings about a significant increase in non-normative behaviour of children in and outside of school. For a long time psychologists and teachers considered this development to be an epiphenomenon. We would argue that it has been an essential phenomenon, which we have termed 'the phenomenon of extending the realm of social experimentation'.²⁴

Democratizing the educational process

The Russian school has been significantly more successful in democratizing the educational process than in democratizing governance. The primary emphasis has been on changing the dynamics of relationships among the various constituencies of the school community and the style of instruction. Many teachers believe that one of the main difficulties lies 'in the teacher's undemocratic style of behaviour. In their relationship with students a majority of teachers do not abide by democratic norms, are authoritarian, and resolve conflicts which arise in accordance with their notions of common sense.'²⁵ Supporters of this position regard 'bad' teachers as the root cause of the problem

and, being humanists, seek to retrain them, or re-educate them entirely. In practice such retraining is quite varied, ranging from psychological reconditioning to the 'collaboration of teachers and scholars in restructuring educational content with the aim of proceeding from simple knowledge transfer to teaching how to master knowledge independently'.²⁶ Often this approach produces visible results, considerably refining the teacher's system of values and convictions. However, as our data have shown, upon returning to school, more than half of the teachers who have undergone democratizing or humanizing retraining revert to their former methods and instructional styles even as they continue to speak the new jargon. Usually, the reason for this lies in the unchanged structure of school life. Humanization and democratization of relationships within the school community are viewed as socio-psychological therapy unrelated to school structure.²⁷

Considerably less often in the literature but more so in practice, one encounters yet another position, one offered with touching candour in one of the first studies on democratization of the school: 'In our experience the chief difficulty in the democratization of school education lies not in the person of the teacher, in a lack of skill or in a lack of desire to establish with students a relationship based on democratic principles, but in the person of the student, who is unprepared for such a relationship.'²⁸ This situation leads to pressure from the 'local administration' to find students who are already suited for integration into a democratic environment or, more often, a selection of students who may likely be in the future. To be sure, democratic procedures and amicable relationships take root with considerably greater ease in elite schools which select their pupils. But it is doubtful whether this testifies to pedagogical effectiveness.

A marked expansion of student choice can also lead to democratization of education. One of the major reform slogans (especially in the mid-1990s, under Minister of Education Evgenii Tkachenko) was 'education by choice'. This slogan was generated in an atmosphere marked by an abundance of new opportunities, and was based on the proposition that the very process of choice was inherently democratic and educational. Many scholars simply equated choice with democracy. In her engaging study of democratization of the school, E.M. Kolosova wrote: 'Choice is the essence of democratization.'²⁹

However, identification of the conditions facilitating real change rather than merely an illusion of choice was inhibited by the exclusive focus of a vast number of studies on the techniques and technologies of education by choice and by a concern for various organizational schemes. The dynamics underpinning the ability to choose, or the cultural-psychological ramifications of choice, were virtually ignored in pedagogical writing. Only a few studies examined in detail the vast potential inherent in the use of choice, and they drew little attention.³⁰

Even the more refined interpretations of 'education by choice', such as 'a process directed towards the broadening of abilities for a competent choice by

an individual of a life path',³¹ turned out to be catchwords not entirely supported by actual school practice. Choice has often been limited to early specialization or, even worse, to tracking accompanied by rhetoric about responsible choice. In our experience, choice becomes personally and developmentally significant only when it is a part of the pedagogical mechanism providing for the schoolchild's self-determination. It is methodologically incorrect to view choice as a separate element and to impart a special status to it.³² The act of choosing by itself does not have any inherent value. Nevertheless, choice might facilitate in creating innovative modes of activity or in developing independent personality providing that some special institutional provisions exist.

The use of various types of collectives and groups for the learning process is seen as yet another means for the democratization of education. One author calls his 'collective system of instruction' democratic.³³ Yet, for all the attractiveness and effectiveness of group methods, they admittedly are still secondary in the effort to achieve democratization. In principle, group work can be used for other educational purposes as well. Consequently, teachers who utilize these methods must be aware of the need for a comprehensive democratic framework and promote organizational, communicative and reflective, that is, self-analytical, skills.

In light of these arguments there has naturally arisen a cluster of proposals that use dialogical forms of education as a means of democratization.³⁴ To be sure, it is impossible to imagine a democratic discussion as a monologue. Yet democratization is more than a dialogue. The transformation of the content of education is an important condition for using dialogue to achieve the basic aims of democratic education. Attempts by the 'school of developmental education'³⁵ and of the 'school of cultural dialogue'³⁶ to design educational materials that would incorporate dialogue as a natural form of activity are still only the exception in pedagogical practice.

Overcoming alienation

Soviet sociological and pedagogical literature rejected the very possibility that alienation could exist in the USSR since the fundamental requirement prescribed by Marxist ideology was missing – alienation from the means of production. However, the prevalence of alienation during the period of 'developed socialism' (the term applied to the Soviet system during the Brezhnev regime) is widely acknowledged today. The school became a veritable hot-house of alienation. A preoccupation with preparation to live in a totalitarian culture produced (or strengthened) the alienation of children from adults, of entire generations from traditional culture and spirituality, and of teachers from their work. Overcoming this alienation by promoting a wide variety of educational activities is, in our view, the most essential step in the democratization process.

In educational literature of the socialist camp the term 'alienation' was used only in regard to bourgeois society.³⁷ An analogous phenomenon in the socialist school was 'disadaptation' (*desadaptatsiia*). A negative attitude towards the school, sometimes bordering on 'school phobia', was quite vigorously studied by both educators and psychologists.³⁸ However, the vast majority of explanations for this condition as well as recommendations on how to deal with it were purely psychological in nature. The problem was viewed as the result of 'family difficulties, of frequent changes in the educational environment, and of the school's mistakes'.³⁹

In recent years some descriptive studies of alienation have appeared in Russian scholarly writing, but without the use of the term itself. Shalva Amonashvili's blunt statement provides an example of such an approach: 'For the students, a lack of motivation for learning, excessive homework, lowered self-esteem, and the suppression of independent thinking generate a feeling of hostility towards teachers and an aversion towards the school and school life. The fact is that schoolchildren don't like school.'⁴⁰

Moreover, there have been initial attempts to examine alienation from the perspective of interaction between a student and a teacher. Interaction that generates alienation has been characterized as functional:

the analysis of empirical data . . . demonstrates that the functional character of interaction, resulting often in its formalization, persists everywhere. Typical for such interactions are mutual alienation of teachers and students and a consumerist or utilitarian attitude of students towards teachers and each other.⁴¹

Others have viewed the emergence of alienation as the result of the inability to construct a relationship of mutual agency between the teacher and the student, placing the blame for this situation on the non-constructive character of imposed activity.⁴²

Our own experience and research has shown that relationships and types of interaction are important indicators of alienation, but that they are also largely rooted in the institutional character of the school and of today's entire educational environment, including the socio-cultural status of childhood.⁴³ The essential context for understanding alienation is the crisis of contemporary childhood resulting from the disintegration of traditional forms of adult mediation.⁴⁴

We have also discovered that it is in adolescence that alienation manifests itself distinctly for the first time, and that the school as an institution is too aggressive in dealing with age-appropriate problems of maturation. This aggressiveness does not stem from the teacher's orientation, but rather from the traditional structure of adolescent education. In order to combat this aggressiveness we have suggested new models of school structure for adolescents.⁴⁵

One would hope that the Russian tradition of a genuinely collaborative

humanistic pedagogy and the tendency to rely on cultural-historical psychology would enable Russian scholars to construct new theoretical frameworks and practical methods for overcoming alienation.

Teaching democracy: new courses

Efforts at teaching democracy began somewhat later. They consisted of a modification of curricula and the production of new textbooks. Timid attempts to write new texts for the humanities and to create new educational disciplines for the promotion and strengthening of democratic values began in 1991. Previously, regardless of all of the astounding social and cultural transformations that were taking place under Gorbachev, millions of teachers continued both to teach and to control their students' knowledge according to textbooks approved by the Communist Party.

The process of changing curricula and textbooks has been exceptionally difficult. Suffice it to say that when the Soros International Fund's 'Cultural Initiative' announced its programme of support for writing and publishing new textbooks ('The Transformation of Humanitarian Education in Russia'), only two proposals were submitted for textbooks on jurisprudence. A.F. Nikitin, V.M. Obukhov and Ia.V. Sokolov, among others, began to develop new curricula on human rights. However, as aptly noted in I.F. Akhmetova's review of these works, 'neither [internationally accepted criteria] for educating students in the spirit of respect for human rights in a civilized democratic society nor the actual experience of foreign countries were given their due'.⁴⁶ Textbooks meeting these needs have only recently appeared, and their methodological apparatus leaves much to be desired. The essential drawback lies in their failure to make legal issues relevant to students' lives.

Studies by specialists in St Petersburg provide an example of a rather formal approach to problems of legal education.⁴⁷ They argue that the components of a law-governed culture are knowledge of the law and of the legislative process with an emphasis upon law-abiding behaviour; knowledge of one's rights; and a readiness to act purposefully and in a 'legally literate' manner. We recall here John Dewey's insistence on the fundamental tenet of democracy – that citizens must be the subjects of the law (i.e., its agents) and not its objects and victims. Such an approach also encourages a discussion of the rights and obligations of children outside of the school. Significantly, this programme does not treat children's rights in a dynamic manner (i.e., it does not adapt rights and privileges according to the age of pupils and their consequent ability to implement them). Common to all of the proposals of this kind is the implicit acceptance of the traditional school structure, which ignores institutional conditions necessary for the actual exercise of rights.

Vigorous work has begun on the creation of new courses in political science and sociology. Here, however, a narrowly didactic point of view dominates.

The author typically tries to pack into a slim volume as much material as possible, paying no heed to the proper conditions and especially the institutional framework for such instruction. For example, a recent study on teaching political science pointed to the need for dialogue and discussion, for interpersonal relations between a teacher and a student in the educational process. However, according to the author, 'the effectiveness of educational control over the students' activity in teaching political science was chiefly predicated upon the selection of content and on the choice of tools for the activation and control of students' cognitive activity'.⁴⁸ This narrow point of view is not surprising because it rests on the assumption that 'the formation of civic values must be based on a mastery of the basic theories of political science and on the independent implementation of its concepts'.⁴⁹ This understanding of civic consciousness corresponds to a limited understanding of subjectivity or agency (*sub"ektnost'*). Without an awareness of the assumptions of this approach, the following statement would sound simply comical: 'The introduction of score-card testing promotes the transformation of the student from the object of the educational process into its active subject'.⁵⁰ Neither institutional support nor an atmosphere of trust and exploration are necessary in such teaching.

Frustrated by difficulties, some educational leaders decided simply to translate western materials into Russian. This hasty work led to texts that were naive and often useless. Numerous textbooks, whose publication was sponsored by western 'benefactors', offer examples of primitive propaganda. These include a collection of pamphlets under the title, 'A Practical Course in Democracy', where trivial information about American democracy and theoretical constructs current in the early twentieth century are offered for the enlightenment of teachers and students alike.⁵¹

An example of a more successful attempt is the textbook, *Democracy: State and Society*, recommended by the Ministry of Education for general secondary schools, lyceums, and gymnasiums, authored by Canadian and Russian specialists, and structurally grounded in the most recent methodologies. The text provides numerous discussion questions, self-testing, witty illustrations, and logical and elegant narrative. However, it also illustrates the many unsolved problems in the teaching of democracy. First, it offers students only one model of democracy: 'The most important feature, the essence of democracy, is the right to personal freedom and respect for the individual'.⁵² The textbook addresses issues of government and policy rather than how people live in a democratic society. This approach is evident in A.G. Asmolov's introduction: 'The textbook . . . allows children to identify with its protagonists, which are the parliament, state leaders, and the president'.⁵³ The book lacks a real-life context and avoids the debate over problems of an emerging Russian democracy. Numerous examples of the totalitarian Soviet regime's failures are no substitute for a discussion of contemporary life or future alternatives.

To be sure, some translations are useful, because they give teachers an understanding of the work of foreign colleagues. However, their use 'as is' contradicts the very spirit of today's multicultural theory of education that insists on the importance of the national-cultural context.

Finally, we want to point out that in spite of all of the attempts of our western colleagues to create 'a teacher-proof' textbook, there is ample evidence that an authoritarian educator, whether in Russia or abroad, can transform any text about democracy into a tedious tract on morality. Consequently, the desire on the part of Russia's educational leaders to fill schools with new texts may not in the end have any tangible effect on the teaching of democracy. The genuine implementation of new courses requires both teacher retraining and appropriate institutional support. As our data have shown, the neglect of these requirements causes students to give a low rating to civic education courses.

Why is it that democracy as an instructional subject does not generate active interest among students? 'Teaching democracy' can have a counterproductive effect. Superficial and routine misuse of the most meaningful ideas can turn them into meaningless verbiage. An adherence to the practice of the mere transmission of civic knowledge, to the moulding of convictions and values, will continue to reinforce the old paradigm of education, thereby hindering democratization.

Some scholars have attempted to transcend the traditional framework and their efforts are cause for hope. Iurii Troitskii has devised an approach to the teaching of history involving the formation of opinions and of 'historical thinking'.⁵⁴ Troitskii shows that only such changes in instructional goals and methods can alter the position of the student in the educational process and modify the system of evaluation, a process leading to the transformation of the very structure of the school. He suggests teaching without textbooks and relying on new types of educational materials. His innovation promises a systemic revamping of instruction in the social sciences and, consequently, of instruction in democracy.

Other studies employ an instrumental approach to civic education. Encouraging here are attempts to transplant onto Russian soil, courses on the development of critical thinking and conflict resolution.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, such attempts are rare and, in our opinion, while the need has been proven not just for courses, but for comprehensive educational programmes in educating for democracy, the Russian school continues to use new material to reproduce an educational model of the Soviet type. The main reason for the rejection of a fresh approach is not so much the lack of teacher skills as a rigid structure that renders the classroom unsuitable for the implementation of such programmes.

In search of new upbringing (*vospitanie*)

Broadly speaking, the nurturing of democratic values, convictions, relationships and aims that were part of the reform agenda from the outset, by itself constitutes a component of instruction in democracy. Reformers believed that 'in formulating new tasks for education, our contemporary pedagogy must focus on the creation of a special curriculum and methods for the formation of a personality appropriate for a democratic culture'.⁵⁶ However, the educational system has not evolved and teachers cling to a narrow understanding of the school's functions. Only about one-third of teachers think that the school must provide for the socialization of students.⁵⁷ This failure, along with an inadequate understanding of theory, helps to explain why democratically oriented, comprehensive educational curricula are a rarity.

The Russian Ministry of Education has studied various available approaches.⁵⁸ Of considerable importance is G.G. Prozumentova's view of school as an intricately organized joint enterprise between children of various ages and teachers or adults in general.⁵⁹ In this view the school is seen not in terms of the interaction of separate groups of children and adults, but of their shared activity.

A special programme aimed at 'education of students in the spirit of world cultures, mutual understanding and human rights' is offered by Z.K. Shnekendorf.⁶⁰ Its distinguishing feature is an attempt at a comprehensive approach in order to meaningfully connect extracurricular activity to instruction in the humanities and the arts. The author aptly stresses the importance of the 'student-teacher' relationship. One can agree completely with the statement that 'the slide into paternalism or indoctrination' can be avoided by 'participation of students in activity meaningful to them and to their society'.⁶¹ However, this educational programme is not age-specific nor does it take into account the real social context of education or the key prerequisites for success. Furthermore, two of its proposals are too general and rather impractical: 'the development of students' national consciousness on the basis of their culture and language environment' and 'mastery of the achievements of world culture and of the system of humanistic values'.⁶² A.N. Tubel'skii emphasizes the importance of students' experience in democratic behaviour by commenting on the different requirements in western and Russian societies for the formation of their citizens: 'One can assume that, if for the western school it is sufficient to oversee its students' understanding of democratic behaviour [in the context of western] historical-cultural tradition, then the Russian school must become at this stage the main institution promoting this very experience.'⁶³

Nurturing practices

Many teachers turn to self-government as a means to prepare schoolchildren for life under democracy. However, they tend to pay insufficient attention to

specific features of self-government emerging in new socio-economic conditions.⁶⁴ As a consequence – and as noted earlier – self-government based on the inclusion of students in school councils has been a failure. A superficial activity, understandably, cannot become a school of democracy for students, many of whom have been profoundly disappointed by their participation in the councils. Like the former committees of the Young Communist League, many councils provided schooling only in hypocrisy and incompetence. O.S. Gazman finds the reason for this turn of events in the common view of education as indoctrination.

Here is a paradoxical situation. The orientation is towards a democratic, law-abiding, civic society. How can we do that without self-government? And, suddenly, a complete failure of self-government in the school . . . What happened? I can say only one thing: it was predictable. Personally, I see it as positive . . . A new type of genuine societal self-government of children and adults will appear . . . Self-government will emerge not as a result of decree from above, but from below, out of the children's and adolescents' own interests, their need to defend these interests and the rights of the school's citizens. This form of self-government appears, I reiterate, when there are interests that unite the children in the school, and when the school is organized as a civic society.⁶⁵

One of the founders of post-perestroika humanistic education, Gazman clearly rejects a political model of school democracy and relies instead on the idea of civic society and on the 'natural' activity of schoolchildren in a freely organized school structure. However, only the most general, humanistic requirements for the organization of such a school are to be found in his work⁶⁶ and that of his followers.⁶⁷

Student participation in school legislation and governance represented a new direction in the formation of a democratic and law-governed society in that institution. A.N. Tubel'skii first sought to help students understand the necessity of a system of laws and rules and to propose their own laws in his 'School for Self-Determination'.⁶⁸ Today this idea has been adopted by hundreds of schools.

Despite the presence of these innovative approaches, the prevailing position has been one that rejects value-based education. According to sociological data, only 6 per cent of teachers consider education in the school to be an important factor 'in the formation of students' civic values'.⁶⁹ Understandably, the refusal of the school to participate in value-based education is effective in its own way. Thus, according to T.P. Gurina, about 40 per cent of students in the senior grades do not have socially significant values, and passive consumerist attitudes are on the rise.⁷⁰

Fear of indoctrination is another obstacle to using the school for socializa-

tion or for political education. In our work with members of the Association for Innovative Schools we have often encountered the widespread belief that the school 'should only teach'. Educators who support this view overlook the new historical context. An Australian scholar of Russian education has aptly observed that this rejection of value-based education takes place at precisely a time when 'the new orthodoxy, which emerged during the transition to the market economy, is becoming more severe than Communist dogma, particularly because it is informally introduced into life'.⁷¹ And the school is a part of this culture; indeed sometimes it even promotes it, introducing all kinds of economic games and presenting the image of a manager or an entrepreneur as the new ideal.

Recently, some schools have been taking a more active position regarding socialization of the young generation. The notion has emerged of using students' extracurricular activities as a means of acquiring social experience in a democratic society. The aim of such a programme is 'to help younger schoolchildren adapt to their environment in the least painful way; and to do so not by a process of trial and error, associated with hardship, but by acquiring the necessary knowledge and social experience in a timely fashion'.⁷² One can readily identify here a vivid expression of the ideology of adaptational, non-conflictual pedagogy.

The above approach speaks to the notion that specially organized classes can substitute for real-life experience. However, nothing is said about conditions needed for the reinforcement and application of acquired abilities in other spheres. As a consequence, the educational achievements of this programme are best characterized as 'they know how, they understand, they imagine'. Personal experience as a category is ignored. As some commentators have noted, such programmes have not discussed ways of genuinely including schoolchildren in social activity.⁷³ Less ambitious, but perhaps more meaningful, are the rare programmes for schoolchildren where they actually go through internships. The schools of A.N. Tubel'skii and A.G. Kasprzhak offer their students such programmes.⁷⁴

Often inspired by the best of motives but lacking models for imitation, many pedagogical teams turned once again to the methodology of direct political socialization provided by the Soviet school. Thus Krasnoiarsk School No. 100 recreated a school-wide Pioneer organization under the slogan 'Be prepared to fight for the good of the homeland!' A number of other schools formed analogous youth organizations. 'Fresh' dissertations on the subject have appeared, stating with the old fervour that

under conditions of a multiparty system, a lack of control, and the sudden appearance of various 'schools' and sects and other forms of the alienation and corruption of our young people, it is necessary to have [in place] a unidirectional programme for the formation of the individual and of the individual's political culture. Overall state policy

should be directed towards the inculcation of scientific ideology in the consciousness of the masses and in the young people in particular and towards the upbringing of a consciously active individual.⁷⁵

Gazman has noted critically of many teachers:

They share at least two features – responsiveness to the government's educational agenda, i.e., an eagerness to receive firm directives about what kind of person to bring up; and the desire to recreate the traditional normative model of education, operative in a society where established values, customs and traditions are passed on from generation to generation once and for all.⁷⁶

Therefore, today we need practical examples of and also theoretical work on pedagogical mechanisms and conditions for socialization 'in which a person acquires not only passive-adaptive, but also active-adaptive capabilities for dealing with the socio-political environment'.⁷⁷

From disappointment to hope?

It would be wrong to conclude that the difficulties and drawbacks described above signify complete failure of the reform of Russian education. Irreversible changes have taken place in the Russian school, securing its radical departure from the totalitarian Soviet school. However, even if not strictly totalitarian now, the Russian school has failed to become a system of joint public-state education for a democratic society. The former reformist minister Edward Dneprov writes:

The generally technocratic character of Russian reforms and the new realities of the transitional period have resulted in the dwindling of these strategic priorities [of democratization] as well as of educational policy itself. Of the (reformist) educational policy only declarations [of intent] remain. Policy turned conservative and has been reduced to bureaucratic manoeuvre.⁷⁸

It is not surprising, therefore, to see among educators, school directors and officials, a profound disillusionment with democratic slogans. For many of them, the word 'democracy' (as well as 'humanism') has become almost an empty catchphrase. Scholarly works calling for a return to the legacy of the Soviet school and criticizing democratization for its excessive individualism have re-emerged.⁷⁹ The early 1990s featured a wave of research by young scholars on democratization, but recently this topic has become unfashionable and even unsavoury, testimony to the change in mood among educationalists. Some scholars have sought to resurrect the old 'inventory-oriented com-

prehensive' taxonomy of school goals and to combine uncritically hackneyed democratic slogans with traditional (Soviet) notions of the 'good' citizen. Of particular theoretical interest are trends seeking to create a 'patriotic state ideology aimed at the upbringing of a patriotic citizen of Russian society'.⁸⁰ However, a radical rethinking of the former notions of patriotism, rather than a return to them, is needed. There are, for example, numerous sociological surveys that demonstrate the unpatriotic inclinations of young people who do not select patriotism as an important quality when polled. Yet in the same questionnaire they often respond that they would like a meaningful life for themselves and for their loved ones, and that they would like to live in a well-organized society. Is this not a new formulation of patriotism when a person wants happiness, not for the homeland, but for himself and his loved ones in this homeland?

It is not so much ideological disagreements (since everybody uses words such as 'democracy', 'citizenship' and 'humanistic values') but, rather, methodological differences that matter here. Therefore, when we speak of a conservative reaction, we are referring not so much to the return of former slogans and guidelines as to ineffective methods. One can certainly agree with critical reports that point to bewilderment and the atrophy of the psychological, pedagogical and moral orientation of a considerable number of educators.⁸¹ What are the methodological guidelines for a way out of this situation? Should we believe, as does B.T. Likhachev, for example, that controversial information which students receive is harmful and dangerous?⁸² Can we accept today, as part of basic educational reasoning, the notion that 'as a part of the state the school cannot turn away from its destiny to exercise educational control over the younger generation'.⁸³ These opinions demonstrate how earlier methodological notions bind innovative practices hand and foot, hindering their understanding in new institutional settings or in conjunction with other, even older, but revised ideas.

Disillusionment with democratic slogans has led to a conservative reaction not only in theory but also in educational practice. A new version of the Russian Federation's law, On Education, for example, has substantially curbed the rights of school councils and eliminated the election of directors. Many specialists and public figures agree that this change was a pragmatic move but clearly anti-democratic and centralizing, if not openly anti-reform.⁸⁴ All mention of councils has virtually disappeared from directives and decrees at both the federal and local levels. With the help of new normative documents, education by choice, proclaimed as the major achievement of reform, has become a fiction for schools and even more so for the individual child.

Sceptical voices about new approaches can increasingly be heard at the federal level and especially among regional and municipal departments of education. Innovators are now accused of being overly adventurous pipedreamers. Under the guise of talk about sober decisions and restoration of order, we see a profanation of such reformist ideas as joint public-state governance of education and

the democratization of the educational process. This state of affairs is a consequence not just of nostalgia for the administrative-command system but of a blatant lack of clarity in conceptual frameworks for reform. We constantly encounter questions about the public-state system of governance: 'Who is this representative public? Who elected it?'. Obviously, such questions stem from simplistic notions of democracy. They would be out of place in a thriving participatory democracy.

The growing conservative reaction in education is vividly apparent in the area of educational standards. Standards are in fact being viewed in the framework of the former ideology both administratively, as a means of exercising total control over schools, and in terms of educational content, as a means of retaining the informational, skills-oriented character of instructional material and the dogmatic nature of education. The cutting edge of the new-old policy of standardization is directed against democratization, a sentiment reflected in the following remark: 'The process of democratization of education cannot go unregulated, since processes that are generally positive can easily develop into something quite the opposite.'⁸⁵

At the regional level, standards were immediately embraced as a means to make schools part of a unified system and as an opportunity to resurrect school inspections. As surveys of the directors of innovative and experimental schools show, many schools have 'fallen prey' to this fresh appetite for inspections. Despite reformist rhetoric, inspectors, as in the good old days, assess all schools with the same measuring stick. Innovation has become the privilege of selected schools, and this, naturally, closes the door to creativity for young, struggling *kollektiv*y.

Growing conservative tendencies among parents are especially alarming. If, according to our 1991 survey, more than 70 per cent of parents wanted their children to study in experimental programmes, in 1996 this indicator had fallen to 35 per cent.

The innovative spirit has abated among teachers as well. Numerous publications on the 'pedagogy of cooperation', for example, point to an exhaustion of the already meagre supply of creative teachers. A survey of young teachers found that they are more inclined to work according to the old clichés, believing that order in the classroom is more important than a creative atmosphere. Certainly the state's neglect of education, the chronic deficit in school financing, and arrears in teachers' pay have not helped to promote democratic ideas among educators.

One can agree that in a 'considerably de-ideologized, somewhat humanized and slightly bureaucratized school' educational philosophy has remained the same.⁸⁶

The old, superficially touched-up paradigm of the 'ordinary school', although cosmetically altered, still remains the dominant one. Authors of attempts to genuinely renew the school, while numerous and differ-

ent in scale, have not yet become aware of their own commonalities, joined forces, or found a unifying framework.'⁸⁷

As P. Shchedrovitskii has argued, 'the reform of education has a reactive rather than proactive character. There is no reform of education as of yet but only general social and cultural transformations which some people try to present as a reform of the structure of professional pedagogical activity or of the socio-cultural institutions that support it'.⁸⁸

Are the disappointment and conservative reaction irreversible? Is it true that schools are moving backwards? Such a conclusion would be quite premature. The school cannot go backwards if society is not doing so. We tend to interpret what others consider as backward movement more as a slowing down of very turbulent change. Similar setbacks, and even reversals in educational reforms have been observed in other countries.⁸⁹ As far as Russian reform is concerned, one can agree with Dneprov that 'delays and partial setbacks in reforms are as natural at certain times as "jumping ahead" would be. Therefore one should not over-dramatize this phenomenon, but work with it.'⁹⁰ Nevertheless, this slowdown is not a good sign. Contrary to Dneprov's opinion, we link it not so much to 'the [waning] political will of reformers' as to the insufficient renewal of the school, to the inadequate theoretical underpinnings of reform efforts. Once again the school has lost its independent position in the process of change (i.e., its transformative quality), and become hostage to and a reflection of the state's charge to education and of the moods prevalent in society.

Global experience shows that in a variety of ways democratization of the educational system is a rather permanent tendency. Moreover, sociologists and philosophers of education have demonstrated that democratization of education augments its effectiveness. This means that conservative tendencies in Russian education must be overcome: first of all, by exposing the causes of the difficulties and failures encountered by reform and by demonstrating its new possibilities. Unlike critics who see only catastrophes, we suggest that the reason for many negative phenomena in Russian education is not that there is too much democracy but that democracy is inadequately understood.

Notes

- 1 This chapter is adapted from Isak D. Frumin, *Vvedenie v teoriu i praktiku demokraticeskogo obrazovaniia* (Krasnoiarsk, 1998), Ch. 4.
- 2 John Dunstan, *Paths to Excellence and the Soviet School* (NFER, 1978); Izaak Wirszup, 'The Soviet Challenge', *Educational Leadership* 5 (38), (1981); Iris Rotberg, 'Some Observations on the Reported Gap between American and Soviet Educational Standards', *American Education* 1 (19), (1983).
- 3 The author identifies choice as the core of liberal ideology and expresses the view that equity as well as participation are central to genuinely democratic school reform in his book *Vvedenie v teoriu i praktiku demokraticeskogo obrazovaniia*, pp. 18-76.

- 4 P.T. Frolov, *Demokratizatsiia upravleniia shkoly* (Belgorod, 1972), p. 7.
- 5 V.V. Gripich, 'Organizatsiia raboty soveta shkoly po demokratizatsii vnutrishkol'nogo upravleniia', PhD dissertation, Leningrad, 1991, p. 103.
- 6 *Demokratizatsiia narodnogo obrazovaniia: Opyt, problemy* (Voronezh, 1990).
- 7 T.G. Veremeenko, 'Demokratizatsiia i gumanizatsiia vnutrennego shkol'nogo upravleniia', *Demokratizatsiia i gumanizatsiia uchebno-vospitatel'nogo protsesssa v shkolakh* (Krasnoiarsk, 1991).
- 8 *Demokratizatsiia narodnogo obrazovaniia*.
- 9 V.I. Bochkarev, 'Uchenicheskoe samoupravlenie – vazhnoe sredstvo preduprezhdeniia i preodoleniia otklonenii v povedenii podrostkov', *Vospitanie shkol'nikov* 4 (1988).
- 10 V. Iu. Krichevskii, *Demokratizatsiia shkol'noi zhizni* (Moscow, 1991), p. 8.
- 11 The author was principal of the Univers experimental school in Krasnoiarsk from 1987 until 1999. The first university laboratory school in Russia (affiliated with Krasnoiarsk State University), the Univers school worked on development of democratic governance and on curriculum development based on the theories of Vygotskii.
- 12 S.M. Iusfin, 'Dogovor kak sredstvo gumanizatsii otnoshenii v protsesse pedagogicheskoi podderzhki rebenka', dissertation, Moscow, 1996, p. 126.
- 13 Gripich, *Organizatsiia raboty soveta shkoly*, p. 6.
- 14 V.I. Bochkarev, 'Sto zabol shkol'nogo soveta', *Narodnoe obrazovanie* 3–4 (1992).
- 15 V.I. Bochkarev and V. Opalikhin, 'Shkol'noe samoupravlenie v voprosakh i otkhakh', *Vospitanie shkol'nikov* 4 (1988), p. 22.
- 16 Krichevskii, *Demokratizatsiia shkol'noi zhizni*, p. 31.
- 17 E.D. Dneprov, *Chetvertaia shkol'naia reforma v Rossii* (Moscow, 1994).
- 18 E.D. Dneprov, *Shkol'naia reforma mezhdru 'vchera' i 'zavtra'* (Moscow, 1996), p. 84.
- 19 Dneprov, *Shkol'naia reforma*, p. 383.
- 20 D. Zaida, 'Shkol'nye reformy v postkommunisticheskoi Rossii i vospitanie novykh tsennostei', *Magister* 3 (1994), p. 46.
- 21 T.L. Kul'pina, 'Osobennosti upravleniia shkoly v usloviiakh ee perekhoda k innovatsionnomu tipu', *Innovatsionnaia shkola* 2 (1995), p. 47.
- 22 Iu. Gromyko and V. Davydov, 'Obrazovanie kak sredstvo formirovaniia i vyrashchivaniia praktiki obshchestvenno-regional'nogo razvitiia', *Rossia 2010* 2 (1994); S. Krasnov, 'Upravlenie razvitiem obrazovatel'nykh sistem na osnove samoopredeleniia neformal'nykh grupp', *Novye tsennosti obrazovaniia* 5 (1996).
- 23 N.P. Karpliuk, 'Printsip demokratizatsii obshcheobrazovatel'noi shkoly i protsess ego osushchestvleniia na sovremennom etape', dissertation abstract, Moscow, 1992.
- 24 I.D. Frumin and B.L. Khasan, "Epifenomeny" psikhologo-pedagogicheskogo eksperimenta kak predmet spetsial'nogo issledovaniia', in *Deiatel'nostnyi podkhod v obuchenii i formirovanii tvorcheskoi lichnosti* (Ufa-Moscow, 1990).
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DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE AND THE FATE OF RUSSIA'S SCHOOLS

The impact of population shifts on
educational practice and policy¹

Stephen T. Kerr

Introduction

As a social institution, schooling is remarkably resilient, yet in many ways quite conservative. In Russia, its resiliency has been demonstrated over the past 15 years under repeated attempts at reform of the system itself, its curriculum, its materials, the ways its teachers work, and its cost. In spite of these multiple reform efforts, what still happens from day to day in many Russian schools looks quite similar to what happened in Soviet schools a generation ago – the system has managed to preserve many aspects of its operation in a form remarkably consistent with the patterns laid down and carefully prescribed by Stalin's Ministry of Education. Now, forces may be arrayed that have the power to shake a system that the best efforts of reformers, ministers, and international consultants could not.

In 1993, on an extended trip to Russia to visit new types of educational institutions that were then emerging in the early post-Soviet era, I visited Ekaterinburg. There, on a late October morning, I attended a special meeting that had been called by a city administrator responsible for education. Those invited included representatives of all the city agencies responsible for aspects of the development and education of young children – teachers and school directors, but also psychologists, social workers, and representatives of the medical profession. One incident at the meeting stands out in sharp relief in my memory of the event: The city official who had called the meeting asked each of those present to estimate the percentage of children unable to make regular and reasonable progress in school owing to incapacitating physical, mental, or other conditions. Accustomed to US educational statistics which suggest that somewhere between 5 per cent and 20 per cent of children would