

Editorial note

Alexander Sidorkin's article *Pragmatic Liberalism and Modernization of Character Education* is written in an extraordinary form. As an attentive reader may notice, the paper contains scholarly analysis as well as elements of opinion and journalism. The author is not trying to conceal his involvement, observations, or his personal point of view; neither is he trying to show scholarly detachment. It is this style and the distinct author's position different from what is generally accepted that provoke a polemic response. The editorial board regards such provocative method of discussion effective. We have found it helpful to publish one of the earliest responses, representing an alternative opinion, as a commentary to the article.

Pragmatic Liberalism and Modernization of Character Education

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Abstract. Upbringing is regarded as a purposeful training to teach human values. By definition, upbringing engages the deep-lying moral attitudes of people, the moral and cultural values that have always been disputed by the society. Upbringing inevitably involves conflicts; moreover, its social utility is hard to measure. These two factors combined, without active interference of the State, may gradually kill the upbringing practices, which is far not the best possible option for the national policy. First, in this case general education school would stop existing as a social organization. Schools with stronger educational components are more stable. Second, upbringing only forms a part of human capital. Beside cognitive skills, human capital also includes social capital and creative capital, which are the real key players in post-industrial economies. If the upbringing component of

the national education system is lost, it may degrade the quality of human capital required at the next stage of national economic development. Third, Russian upbringing practices are based on a significant experience of global importance; a lot of funds have been invested to organizational and financial structure of upbringing throughout many decades. To modernize upbringing, we should tie it closely to economic and social development needs of the country. Governmental or nonprofit grants could be provided to fund a number of projects to be implemented by regional teacher associations. The *Creative Leader* program, for example, consists in creating reliable instruments to measure creative and cooperation skills, developing reasonable standards to determine what creative and cooperation skills children must have and use at each age, reconciling these standards with those of general education, introducing a competitive program to create specific forms of working designed exclusively for contemporary children, and discarding without mercy everything that worked with previous generations only.

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All democratic societies sooner or later face the problem of values in education. The classical liberal theory grounded in writings of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacque Rousseau argues that every citizen or group of citizens may pursue moral values or lifestyles on

**Pragmatic
Liberalism**



their own to the extent that rights of other citizens are not violated. The state's role is restricted to ensuring personal and civic liberty, as well as property rights. In other words, the state is a social contract about a relatively small range of property and legal issues. Everything that is out of this range is private, regulated by family or civic associations, outside of the state's control. John Rawls, his supporters and followers develop this perspective in the contemporary political philosophy.

Political theory of classical liberalism has been challenged much, most notably by the so-called communitarians: Michael Walzer, Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre. They argue that values are developed within a community rather than by an individual mind, and thus a contemporary State has to take into account the social context of values. For example, Taylor insists that government support for the French language (and, consequently, limited use of English) in Quebec is justified, because otherwise ethnic identity of French-speaking Canadians would be disrupted. He suggests differentiating between two models: liberalism-1 and liberalism-2. In the latter version, the state does not always remain neutral, protecting certain values, for instance, with a view to preserve the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities [Taylor, 1992].

Feminist, neo-Marxist and postmodernist critiques of liberalism go even further, problematizing the very distinction between private domain, like family relations, and political relationship. From this point of view, excluding the private from the political may often have political consequences, such as maintaining inequality for women or diverse ethnic, class or gender minorities. State institutions are never neutral; they always grant some privileges to specific groups and tacitly discriminating against others. Although such critiques are often persuasive and insightful, they rarely offer a positive political philosophy.

Irrespectively of all the philosophical differences, there is a broad *pragmatic* consensus that a contemporary secular democracy is considerably limited in its right to tell citizens which books to read, whom and how to love, or what gods to worship. Despite significant differences between democratic societies, there is a uniform rejection of state attempts to intrude into value orientations. Contemporary societies are irreconcilable with totalitarianism, i. e. with political systems trying to control private lives.

In reality, however, political parties in contemporary democratic countries often use value differences in their bids to attract votes. The so-called cultural wars in Western countries have become an integral part of political life (see, e. g., [Hunter, 1992]). One shouldn't look for coherence in ideologies of different political parties, as they often define themselves through contrast with each other. For example, why would members of one U.S. political party advocate the right to bear arms, death penalty and restriction of immigration, but at the same



time stand against abortions, welfare, and deny the anthropogenic reasons for global warming? Simply because all of these individual issues within the society help them attract more voters from specific value-based niches. Voters are often care about a single issue that is important to them, thus forming broad coalitions of “conservatives” and “liberals”, often against their own economic and political interests, and sometimes defying logic. It would seem that abortion opponents should believe in inherent value of each human life, but many of them also vote for death penalty and interventionism, i. e. for the state’s right to kill. People who strongly oppose state intervention in economic life support interference in private lives of citizens, for instance, in their sexual preferences. (As liberals like to quip, conservatives want the state out of boardrooms, but in bedrooms.) Political parties everywhere rely on social groups with specific cultural patterns and try to exploit value differences for their own political gain.

Liberalism of values is more a pragmatic notion than a philosophical one, both in the oldest (the U.S.) and in the youngest (Eastern Europe and Russia) secular democracies. Since political parties and related cultural cohorts often coexist or even take turns being in charge, none of them can hope for total value domination. It is not because they don’t actually don’t want it but because they can’t achieve it without destroying the democratic state as such. Why is that? There’s a good historic example. Church was separated from state in the U.S. not because there were too many atheists among 18th-century Americans or because religious communities questioned authenticity of their versions of faith. It is just that the separation was the only way to avoid endless bloodshed caused by religious disagreements. Since religion is impossible to agree upon, it is specifically excluded from the social contract. Eventually, other value conflicts are also thrown outside political life as insoluble. Let’s define such situation of peaceful public coexistence as pragmatic liberalism. In classical liberalism, social contract covers a limited number of issues. In real life, issues that become stumbling blocks are *gradually* removed from the contract.

Only totalitarian, authoritarian or theocratic societies with powerful surveillance and repression mechanisms can achieve a seeming uniformity of values. Contemporary pluralist societies should learn to live with a whole lot of irreconcilable disagreements. Those who call for unity of moral values in a whole country either don’t understand that personal and civil liberties are incompatible with consensus of opinion or consciously seek to reconstruct totalitarianism (which may actually be the case) .

Of course, all democracies share some common values, such as the very idea of democracy, pluralism, civil liberties, or a pretty generalized notion of patriotism. This is where communitarians are partly right. However, such zones of shared values never cover more specific, individual values which remain within the private domains. The



abstract patriotism serves to provide for a citizen mobilization in case of an external threat. Meanwhile, details of national history almost always arouse discord. The public finds itself divided into a multitude of conflicting fragments. Some may dislike the idea of a fragmented society, but only until they consider the real alternatives. It is only through violence that the unity of values (national unity) can be achieved. A much more acceptable option is to agree that a unity like that is impossible and, in fact, unwanted.

Although slowly and with regressive episodes, Russia develops a normal political life with its fundamental collision: on the one hand, political forces start using value issues in electoral politics; on the other hand, the public has to gradually come to terms with irreconcilability of its numerous groups about values. The failure of the dream about unity is one of the greatest disappointments democracy has brought to peoples in transitioning countries. Citizens of post-totalitarian states are taken aback at being separated not only by ethno-religious differences but also by deep disagreements about moral values. Nevertheless, we have to live somehow with all those differences, preferably in a civil peace and with no political repression or the vice squad.

**Issues with
Character
Education**

The same limits of pragmatic liberalism apply to public education, and even to a greater extent. Schools cannot work without certain isolation from politics for purely pragmatic reasons. Any explicit activities in public education associated with political values immediately arouse criticism from some political party or cultural groups: public education is funded by all taxpayers not to be exploited by interest groups.

For these reasons, national character education policy is a subject of especially close attention. We understand character education as purposeful activities designed to develop human values. By its definition, character education affects moral orientations at a very deep level. Say, what one parent sees as inculcating respect for adults, another parent will see as suppressing the kid's personality. What one group regards as promoting tolerance towards sexual minorities, another group will regard as explicit homosexual propaganda. What one part of population considers as normal manifestation of patriotism, another part will consider as inoculation of harsh national chauvinism. My historic heroes are your national traitors, and vice versa. I like Gluck, you like Glukoza, and there is no supreme judge to decide who is right or wrong. I don't think a contemporary reader needs many more specific examples of similar disagreements.

Cultural wars may also break out in the part of character education which is deeply integrated into the learning process. Teaching history, literature or even natural sciences may sometimes become a point of disagreement. Any sort of character education involves mor-



al and cultural values, assessment of which cannot be ever agreed upon.

Value conflicts in education don't always show up explicitly, in legislative bodies or mass media. Attempts to manipulate character education for political purposes face not only open opposition but also stealth resistance of teachers, students and parents. I would like to stress once again that manipulation attempts and resistance to them are characteristic of both "conservative" and "liberal" sides of the political spectrum. As other countries' experiences show, such attempts will continue; my point is only to show that all of them are ineffective. The education system has lost monopoly on children socialization forever (even if we presume that such a monopoly had ever existed). Information and value space that modern students inhabit is virtually impossible to limit or even to influence much. It is no use selecting teachers by political criteria; and anyway, it takes decades to renew the teaching staff. Besides, cultural and political diversity of teachers alone contributes significantly to resistance to any attempts to ideologize the school.

Frumin [2011] demonstrates convincingly that a simplistic interpretation of moral and character education is self-defeating and unacceptable. I am also rather worried about the recent pretty clumsy attempts to introduce religious ethics as a school subject. First, because it contradicts the principles of pragmatic liberalism and will inevitably aggravate conflicts of values in education. Second, because this is very inefficient use of taxpayers' money. I don't know a single survey proving efficiency of direct teaching of ethics, especially the religious kind (see, e. g., review of surveys [Vessels, Hutt, 2005]). Willaime gives a review of European teaching practices, observing three major trends: 1) integration of religion teaching into general education goals of the school; 2) increasing openness and philosophical pluralism; 3) growing tension and conflict intensity [Willaime, 2006] (see also the rest of the edited volume). Thus, despite the fact that teaching religion has remained or even relaunched in some post-socialist countries, the overall trend is much more consistent with the notion of pragmatic liberalism.

Attempts to develop the document *Fundamentals of National Cultural Policy* appear rather naïve from the viewpoint of cotemporary political thought. Whatever the content of the document, it automatically excludes huge groups of people who do not accept values declared official. Come to think of it, civil rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation cannot exist without the diversity of values, whether accepted or rejected by individuals or groups of population. There is little doubt, however, that the document will be eventually developed and find its way into the school curriculum and teaching practices.

Sure, some of the teachers can be turned into propagandists under administrative pressure, but this propaganda will be extreme-



ly costly and inefficient. That is why all political parties will sooner or later realize that propaganda of their views is much cheaper and safer to spread via mass media or social networking platforms, but not through the education system. One can keep restructuring school standards and programs, reissuing instructions and reediting teacher guides, but effectiveness of such measures is often inversely proportional to their amount. In the long term, laws of pragmatic liberalism are stronger than any attempts to politicize education. Even the Soviet communism with its monopoly media manipulation and political repression of dissidents couldn't overcome the mass-scale passive resistance of teachers, students and their parents. In the end, the Soviet school never succeeded in guaranteeing the national unity of values. So, I still wonder why some of the new Russian conservatives believe they can succeed where everyone else has failed.

Apart from the pragmatics, there is a legal issue with character education. While use of mass media is everyone's own business, participation in secondary education is compulsory. A viewer can always turn off their television to avoid watching an insulting program, but a student cannot leave the class every time when the teacher insults their culture and values, voluntarily or not. Therefore, constitutional courts usually classify public schools as places with limited freedom of speech, especially for teachers. (The same principle of depoliticizing is applied in other places of compulsory attendance, such as prisons, conscript armies, or psychiatric hospitals.) For example, in 1943, i. e. in the thick of war and patriotic feelings, in the *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*¹, the Supreme Court of the United States held that students could not be forced to salute the American flag and to say the Pledge of Allegiance in school. Teachers have no right to use their position to impose openly their personal political or religious views. Perhaps, some Russian readers may agree with this, but try looking at this from a parent and taxpayer's point of view: Why should I pay a teacher to instill into my child views I don't share? Apparently, the same logic applies when a political or cultural force is trying to use teachers in achieving its political goals. Anyway, using public funds in the context of compulsory participation creates significant legal obstacles to character education with specific value orientations.

Education is potentially associated with conflicts in a multicultural, politically fragmented country with a complex, still-recent history of civil violence. Quite naturally, teachers rationally respond by avoiding words or actions that could lead to conflicts with any part of the society. This is a rather predictable self-defensive reaction of educational institutions. No school, summer camp, or activity center wants to deal with parents' complaints or answer calls from authorities or journal-

¹ *West Virginia State Bd. of Educ. v. Barnette*—319 U.S. 624 (1943) <http://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/319/624/case.html>



ists. Moreover, politicians also start trying, after a certain number of scandals, to protect interests of their voters by influencing funding of programs that seem unacceptable to their party. In periods of cyclical budget cuts, programs receiving the least support from all political groups will be the most vulnerable. The very term “character education” may soon become questionable in modern Russia.

We should mention public investments in education. The recent Russian governments, just like most of their counterparts worldwide, believe in the human capital theory, i. e. they have regarded education first of all as a public investment project. Any responsible government, whatever its political orientation, has to care about performance of state investments. However, while efficiency of schooling can be assessed through cognitive skills testing, we still don't have any tools to assess efficiency of character education, whether in the economic or social context (for details see [Sidorkin, 2012]) .

As we can see, not only is character education fraught with conflict, but its social utility is also difficult to measure. With no active state interference, these two factors may progressively kill off character education practices. This is what already happened in the United States and in other developed democracies. Hurn, for instance, points to the catastrophic shrinkage of extracurricular activities in American schools between the 1960s and the 1980s [Hurn 1993, p. 256]. Russia still funds out-of-class activities, following traditions and inertia, but this is not going to last forever.

Yet, the end of character education is far not the most desired outcome from the point of view of national policy.

Let us also some key negative effects of the hypothetical death of character education.

First, general education school will stop functioning successfully as a social organization if it is reduced to the narrow view of school as a purely educational institution. The school as such, in its narrow sense, is a very unstable organization. Students' learning activity, especially that of teenagers, is a weak social glue to keep students in the orbit of school's influence. This was discovered long ago by John Dewey or perhaps even Jesuit teachers of the early 17th century. As Novikova [1978] and her followers (primarily the Selivanova's group in the Russian Academy of Educational Sciences) have demonstrated quite convincingly that a good school keeps children in its orbit by many of strings: some children are interested in learning, some in sport, and some in having access to a peer group, still others like theater or music. Abundance and diversity of activities, ordered by systemic interaction, help schools run despite the absence of hard enforcement authorities.

We rarely think about this: children are not paid for their learning efforts, and we can't force them to learn, so why do they still go to

Issues without Character Education



school, year after year, working six to eight hours per day? The answer may be obvious in authoritarian and traditional patriarchic societies, but it is far from being obvious in such multicultural and politically complex societies as ours. A school must be attractive to children as a community. This theorem can be proved in several ways, but the proof is far beyond the scope of this paper (for more details on analysis of learning as a working process, see [Sidorkin, 2008; 2006]). I will just say here that the process of school decline is much slower in regions where middle class prevails and many times accelerated in regions with high concentration of low-income population. History of American education shows that fixing failed school in impoverished neighborhoods requires huge efforts and funds. In social policy, prevention is many times cheaper than the cure, always. We cannot yet prove empirically the hypothesis that any school may be sustained through a powerful character education component. Yet, as we deal with tremendous risks, let's just assume that if the school loses its character education functions, it will harm stability of school as a social organization and as a consequence, learning may suffer.

By the way, this mechanism largely affects public financing priorities. We should invest more in character education and extracurricular activities closely connected to schools. Accordingly, less should be spent on sustaining simultaneously the system of supplementary education. Schools with a strong character education component prove to be more stable.

Second, what we call learning in the narrow sense is only one part of human capital. Hanushek and Woessman [2008] admit that we don't know the proportion of cognitive skills in overall human capital allowing better educated people to claim for higher salaries. We do know that cognitive skills correlate with performance of a future employee, but we cannot see the exact cause-and-effect relationship. Quite probably, human capital also includes at least two more components: social capital (relational skills) and creative capital (creative thinking skills). We can assess only cognitive skills, and then not really well, especially when it comes to complex cognitive skills. As for social and creative skills, there are no reliable and cost-effective tools to assess them. Therefore, they become invisible and unimportant in the education system.

This does not mean, however, that such assessment is impossible. On the contrary, education researchers should strive to discover reliable tools to assess effectiveness of character education from the perspective of its contribution to human capital. For example, the OECD has the *Education and Social Progress* program prioritizing assessment of non-cognitive skills². One must keep in mind that lawmakers

² For more details, see <http://www.oecd.org/edu/cei/educationandsocialprogress.htm>



will eventually reduce or abandon funding educational programs with unproven effect. Many Russian researchers study education; it would be great to draw their attention to the most essential problem of assessing the economic effect of character education.

Nevertheless, we still dangerously disregard poorly assessable components of human capital. There is every reason to believe that social and creative capitals are growing more and more important in postindustrial economies. Simple cognitive operations assessable with tests are more and more delegated to computers. The role of routine cognitive skills in economics is decreasing, although not so fast as that of physical labor. We assess what declines in importance and leave behind what becomes ever more crucial.

In the United States, for instance, these components of human capital have been named (rather unfortunately) “21st century skills” (www.p21.org). Department of Education is funding a large-scale (appr. 1 bln/year) federal program *21st Century Community Learning Centers*³. In Russia, such non-cognitive skills are associated with the notion of character education and date back to the times long before the 21st century. Things children learn in summer camps, activity centers, interest groups, at class parties or gatherings, etc. may be as important as mathematics or reading. Besides, what kids absorb in mathematical classes apart from mathematics may also turn out to be very significant. We don’t know the exact relative weight of cognitive and non-cognitive skills in human capital, but we have to assume that non-cognitive skills do play a specific role, and that proportion of each component may be different. Elimination of the character education component from the national education system may undermine the very quality of human capital required at the next turn of nation’s economic development.

Third, Russian education has accumulated a wealth of experience of international significance. A great number of teachers have been working in this field; much of their experience has been described and included in worldwide teaching practices. There is an interesting theoretical tradition, although it is rather isolated from the international teaching thought. In other words, we know quite a lot about the mechanisms of character education and how they work. This paper doesn’t aim to provide a review of the plenty of theories and conceptions related to character education, which would also be redundant for most readers. Let’s agree, however, that losing traditions, knowledge and appropriate staff in character education is hard to justify. Even if the existing intellectual capital doesn’t fit well in today’s world, it is still much cheaper to upgrade than to destroy and build all over again.

³ 21st Century Community Learning Centers <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/21stcclc>



And the last, but not the least one. Considerable investments have been made to managerial and resource base of supplemental and character education throughout the recent decades. Russia is among a few countries with a developed publicly funded systems of character education and supplementary education, with a broad network of summer camps, activity centers, interest groups, children and youth associations, and a broad array of skilled educators at all levels. Moreover, there are universities to provide degreed character education experts. The United States now face the costly and painful prospect of restoring the extracurricular activities and reconstruction of the whole infrastructure related to it. Russia ought to avoid this mistake and treat character education as a resource which deserves to be consciously preserved and developed.

Modernization of Character Education

Let's get back to the choice faced by teachers, researchers and managers working in the field of character education. How do we reconcile the controversial nature and the immeasurability of character education with the need to preserve it? To start with, we should tie closely the prospects of character education to the needs of economic and social development in the country. Let's admit that various theories and practices related to the concept should be supported not because of their inherent value, and surely not because many of us invested our careers, our reputations, and our lives in it. They only require support in aspects in which economy and society need them. I suggest modifying grounds and pre-requisites for discussing the future of character education. Advocates of character education ought to leave the "conservative Soviet" side, which is against modernization reforms in education, and join the reformist side right away.

What we should also do is readjust our definitions and language. Theorists and practitioners of character education should escape the semantic prison they keep themselves in. Our national tradition makes a convenient differentiation between character education and instruction, which has a certain heuristic objective, just as any such distinction may have. Indeed, one has to break a concept into conventional segments to understand it. However, it may be fraught with risks, as categories may be too broad, include too many heterogeneous elements or describe poorly phenomena that cannot be easily assigned to one category and excluded from another one. Try, for example, to find out how the quality of relationship between the homeroom teacher and students affects student academic achievements. This is one of the central issues in teaching, but it can't be assigned to either the theory of instruction or the theory of character education.

A number of researchers have agreed that differentiating between instruction and character education is artificial. Thus, for instance,



Lerner [1985] defended his idea of character education as a special case of instruction education. About the same time, Liymets [1982] suggested to regard character education as a broader notion (as personal development management) that would include instruction as a special case. This argument is obviously irresolvable, since there is no empirical proof of either version. Pragmatically, I would prefer Lerner's point of view here, even though my own scholarly career started in Novikova's school, which naturally shared Liymets' ideas. Why would I? First, because "character education" is politically more vulnerable; second, because the term *vospitanie* is difficult to translate into English. The latter reason may seem insignificant, but it is not. Education is discussed on an ever more global scale, and Russian teachers will have trouble participating if one of the key categories cannot be expressed appropriately.

Sometimes we must give up minor things to preserve the important ones. In fact, it does not matter how something is called. Educational policies and practices matter much more. Shall we keep the institute of homeroom teachers? Shall teacher training programs prepare for extracurricular pedagogy? Shall we preserve collective education? How do we assess performance of supplementary education institutions? What activities do we provide for children in summer camps? How does a good school work? How should free time be organized for university students? What activities develop creative thinking? How do we teach children teamwork and cooperation with adults? These are the questions that society is really concerned about and that professional associations and scientific communities should learn to answer. Russian public does not care what terms we use in our scholarly or bureaucratic conversations, or what institutions, schools and laboratories we divide ourselves.

Russian educators are not the only ones fond of renaming things. For instance, *mental retardation* in the United States turned into *learning disability*, and *extracurricular activities* were first replaced with *extended learning*, and then with *expanded learning*. The Russian reader may recall a great number of Russia-specific examples. Such renamings may be written off to political correctness or bureaucratic imitation of reforms, but the situation is actually somewhat more nuanced. The thing is that ideas of pragmatic liberalism require certain semiotic flexibility. Of course, people who had dealt with *mental retardation* for all their lives could have refused and stood to the end for the terms they were used to. However, they preferred to retain public grants, workplaces and favorable attitude of the public at the expense of simply changing the terms. Yes, a racial group in America called themselves *Negroes*, then *Colored*, then *Black*, and now they refer to themselves as *African-American*. Others just had to get used to all of those transformations. So what? The price of renaming and getting used is negligible, while importance of civic peace is impossible to overestimate.



As soon as we stop looking at the whole of practices and theories through the uniform prism of the half-mythical notion of “character education”, scales will fall from our eyes. We will immediately discover an abundance of treasures next to the piles of accumulated garbage. The next step will consist of rethinking the potential of “character education” with respect to the aims of economic and social development of the country. The question is blatantly simple: what are the needs of economy, civil society and national culture, and what program, theory or social movement can we offer?

Let us consider a single illustration here. My mission in this paper is not to solve a specific problem but only to show a direction for thinking about character education without character education. Innovative economy needs employees capable of cooperating with each other and of thinking unconventionally at the same time. Now, let’s break general competencies into smaller components: a skilled employee should be an efficient leader and a good follower. They should know how to collaborate with team members, to explain their ideas, to plan work together, to accept and give criticism, etc. It is not that obvious with creative thinking, but we can identify smaller components even here: ability to see unmanifest relations, to resolve whole into parts, to integrate parts into whole, to identify and support unusual solutions, etc. Now, look at the problem from the viewpoint of state policy: what assets, tangible or intangible, do we possess? No deep analysis is needed to conclude that we have an experience of problem-based and cooperative learning (as you can see, outside what we call character education). We also have a tradition of “the collective creative activity” with a vast array of patterns and tens of thousands of teachers able to use it in practice. We have the collective theory, theories of character education systems and the “collaborative pedagogy.” We can also search outside the field of education as such and add, for example, TRIZ (the theory of inventive problem solving) and the organizational activity games.

Let’s stop setting conservative goals, like preserving all those respected traditions. Instead, let’s use them to create something new. For instance, a *Creative Leader* program. We start from developing reliable instruments to assess the ability to think creatively and to cooperate. We develop sensible standards to determine roughly what creative and cooperation knowledge and skills a child should have at each age. Ideally, these standards should correlate somehow with those of general education and merge with them in the long term.

At the next stage, we launch a competition, so that specific forms would be developed on a competitive basis, as crowdsourcing is always more productive than centralized creative activity, even that of most talented people. We collect the patterns that work the best for contemporary children, discarding without mercy everything that only worked with previous generations. We create decent teacher guides,



develop interactive websites, create assistant computer games and set up competitions.

Using the best and tested material, we develop a program with similar elements for four areas of application: classroom, extracurricular activities, activity centers, and recreation camps. We start collecting feedback on children development from educational institutions of each type, bit by bit. Apart from how many participated and how fun it was, this feedback should also include specific measurable results of children's social development. Not for the purpose of punishing the losers, but rather with a view to develop a culture of professional discussion with colleagues, with actual numbers on hand. Finally, we agree to make annual amendments to the tools and standards based on what we've learned, since reality across Russia is always much more complicated than ideas conceived in Moscow.

Here is one more example. Let us identify empirically how schools with stronger extracurricular activity components enhance human and social capital of their graduates. We can compare graduates of Karakovskiy School⁴ with their counterparts who graduated from a neighboring school in Kuzminki, using several criteria: life satisfaction, income level, crime rate, etc. In case we do find statistically significant differences, we will repeat the survey for other experimental schools. Next, we will compare non-selective, though good schools with strong character education components to their demographic counterparts, thus controlling for the impact of a charismatic leader. If we reveal that schools with strong extracurricular activity components are more efficient than regular ones, we will be enabled to develop a program of school enhancement, to single out the most efficient techniques of organizing child-adult communities, and to request public funds for implementation—on reasonable grounds, by the way! Indeed, investments in human capital are incredibly productive. Even an insignificant advantage in the very beginning of an individual life is accumulated through years to become a tangible gain in the earnings and, hence, in labor productivity. It is one thing when you ask money for continuing the glorious traditions, but it is another thing when you ask it for investments in human capital that have proved successful.

So, what will happen to moral character education and values? I will refer again to the article by Frumin [2011] who believes that values are formed automatically in the process of joint learning, altruistic and creative activities. He defines it as environmental approach to character education⁵. One has to agree with him, and the most demonstrative foreign experience proves just the same. One char-

⁴ <http://sch825.ru>

⁵ Not to be confused with the theory of environmental approach that has been developed for many years by Yuri Manuylov [2002] .



ity event is way better than hundred hours of ethics courses. Besides, we should exclude the most controversial elements from character education and forget about the direct inculcation of moral and spiritual values.

I gave you only two examples above. And now imagine a dozen, two dozens of projects like these, funded by public or charitable grants but implemented by regional teacher associations. They would help modernize character education, save it and put an end to it, all at the same time. Character education is dead, long live character education!

In conclusion, I would like to encourage practitioners and researchers in character education to avoid the chokehold of those who try to use character education for political gain. Today it is neo-conservatives, tomorrow it may be liberals or the left wing. These attempts are doomed to failure, each and all, but who knows how many times they should fail to realize it? As for us, we must now think about the successful and tolerant future of our education and the professional integrity of our occupation.

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**Commentary of
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The author doesn't give any definition of "character education" as such, that's why it remains unclear what he is talking about. One can suspect that he calls character education everything that is not learning. One can also read between the lines that the author associates instruction with development of cognitive skills, and character education with development of non-cognitive skills. Besides, the text makes an unmanifest assumption that character education belongs largely to the extracurricular segment of education:

In Russia <...> non-cognitive skills are associated with the notion of character education <...> Things children learn in recreation camps, activity centers, interest groups, at class parties or gatherings, etc. may be as important as mathematics or reading.

For me, the so-called character education belongs to the sphere of cultural production of meanings and values and represents a vital organ of any human activity including learning. For example, when a teacher of mathematics does not communicate knowledge in digestible form, but sets some goals instead and asks their students every day, year after year: "Who agrees with James, and who thinks otherwise?" or "What other perspectives are possible?"—encouraging well-reasoned discussions, they nurture the following attitudes:

- understanding different points of view;
- seeing value in diversity of opinions;
- realizing that a decent person should have their own, well-founded opinion, while at the same time taking into account opinions of other people.

A teacher like that may turn out to be a much more efficient "upbringer" of people capable of cooperating and tolerating discrepancies than a teacher who implements interesting projects on fighting discrimination based on race, nationality, gender, or religion. And that will be the "character education without character education" the author is calling for.

However, if a teacher of mathematics (history, literature) cuts off discussions and insists on delivering the textbook perspective, they inculcate a totally different attitude towards discrepancies and official opinions.

In other words, character education as a process of generating meanings and values is inevitable—anytime, in more or less conscious and refined forms. In this context, talking about the "end of character education" is pointless:



Yet, the end of character education is far not the most desired outcome from the point of view of national policy;

Elimination of the character education component from the national education system may undermine the very quality of human capital required at the next turn of national economic development.

Since we link the notions of “character education” and “liberalism”, it would be reasonable to discuss first of all the values that contemporary adults, born in the previous millennium, want to pass to the next generations. However, it would be a dead-end discussion, at least in this decade and in this country. Let’s leave it for those who are not yet sick of talking about nurturing patriotism as the paramount objective of the Russian school.

The author concludes with an appeal:

Let’s stop setting conservative goals. <...> Instead, let’s use them to create something new. For instance, a Creative Leader program.

We’ll collect the patterns that work the best for contemporary children, discarding without mercy everything that only worked with previous generations. We’ll create decent teacher guides, develop interactive websites, create assistant computer games and set up competitions.

I would like to encourage people working in the field of education to tackle more pragmatic problems: to teach mathematics while inculcating the culture of polemics and sensitivity to discrepancies in arguments; teach natural sciences while inculcating the culture of describing the pieces of evidence (telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth), etc.

As for activity centers, hobby groups, good computer games and other “character education” forms suggested by the author, let them be as abundant, diverse and clever as possible.

P. S.

The teacher has no right to use their position to propagate openly their personal political or religious values.

A perfect argument for those supporting the idea of a uniform history textbook.