

Subjective Innovations: Pedagogical Movement in the Context of Radical Social Change

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Abstract. The innovative pedagogical movement that boomed in the second half of the 1980s exhausted itself relatively early on and never became a sustainable factor of institutional development in Russia. In this article, we investigate the reasons behind this phenomenon using

interviews with participants and narrative analysis of periodicals and archival materials. By doing so, we justify the point that the goal of promoting subjective emancipation and adopting the culture of freedom dominated the goals of organizational project management. We show that the pedagogical movement was dependent on the institutional patterns ingrained in the social order of the late Soviet era. Innovations developed within the framework of a specific situation: individual communities emerging around individual authors were capable of establishing the “new” as a subjective legacy, but they were unable to develop or even retain it in existing institutionalized forms.

Keywords: history of education, innovation pedagogical movement, subjective emancipation, subjectification of innovations.

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Problem exposition and research methods

In this article, we try to explain why the powerful innovation movement in pedagogy that boomed in the second half of the 1980s exhausted itself relatively early and had virtually no effect on the institutional development of the Russian higher education system. We believe that the specific features of the late Soviet society, which gave rise to the pedagogical movement, require a special theoretical perspective to analyze the innovation processes. The most widespread approaches to the study of innovations [Christensen, 1997; Fenn, Raskino, 2008; Rogers, 2003] are based on the linear-time model. In this case, the distribution of innovations is plotted on the axis of time as a series of consecutive stages. Thereby, innovations are objectified and regarded as a product or technology distanced from its creator.

However, modern sociology of innovations favors more and more the idea that production of something new is closely related to the openness of the system and its overall tolerance for uncertainty [Stark, 2011]. Unlike the capitalist society built around institutional pluralism, Soviet society was largely homogeneous at the level of public representations. Consequently, emergence of the new implied providing a subjective emancipation of teachers against the homogeneous background of formal rhetoric and educational practices and an exercise of personal liberties by school principals, teachers and students [Dneprov, 2006:79; Pinsky, 2007; Shchedrovitsky, 1993]. In a situation like that, a linear progression from idea to product and/or technology becomes rather troublesome, as distribution of a specific product is replaced by cultivating the value of the individual. Identifying one's activities as innovative in the context of the pedagogical movement in the late Soviet Union and Russia of the 1990s thus became inseparable from representing these activities as unique, documenting authorship [Nemtsev, 2006] and opposing the social world to the "philosophical idealism" attitude vigorously [Shchedrovitsky, 1993]. As a result, the leading innovational practice was the "practice of self", i. e. that of building one's own free personality.

We believe that the movement faded away soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union because although some of the creative solutions were very refined, the relevance of innovative pedagogical subjectiveness was provided externally, through the political and economic infrastructure of the socialist state. Following the dissolution of this structure, the innovation movement broke up and moved in separate directions mostly developed around individual charismatic authors [Bolotov, 2009]. As long as innovations are born through critical thinking and cultivating of personal liberty, they turn out to be isolated from the issues associated with reforming the social structure and its institutional forms by means of a civil action. In this article, we would like to disclose the process of innovation subjectification. We are not asking ourselves whether the new was actually new, thus leaving aside the genealogy of specific ideas. Neither are we regarding the new as something that appears to replace the old. A new history begins where declarations about creating the new are especially abundant. In the late Soviet Union, a concentration of such declarations was observed in school and, more broadly, in the pedagogical movement. Teacher innovativeness developed as a special kind of practice within the discussion on the challenges of secondary education and within the institutional forms.

The focus on meanings generated in the subjective field determined our choice of interview as the main research method. In cooperation with the third project participant ArtemKulakov, we conducted 28 in-depth, semi-structured interviews between January 2015 and January 2016. We applied the snowball sampling technique [Babbie, 2001], recruiting our acquaintances among representatives of the in-

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novation movement. In the course of our research, we also sampled a few teachers who worked at educational institutions in different parts of Russia during the period in question but were not in touch with any innovation movement participants. In addition, we talked to our foreign colleagues who had visited the Soviet Union and later Russia on multiple occasions at that time as researchers and/or experts representing international agencies. All of the respondents provided their informed consent to interviews. Some of the interviews were conducted through electronic platforms. Given the procedural nature of subjective generation of the new, we approached the interviews as an extensive discussion or even as a dialogue.

The interviews became the venue of research as such [Kvale, 1996], defining further directions for analysis. To proceed from collecting individual viewpoints to reconstructing the mechanics of the innovation pedagogical movement, we generalize the content of the resulting interviews to find out how the discourse machine in question worked [Silverman, 2013; Yin, 2009]. The active interview, allowing improvisation and direct rhetorical effect on the researcher [Holstein, Gubrium, 1995], results in a number of limitations to such generalization; we will comment on them in the final chapter. Treating history as an open set of acts, which keep being performed where and when a specific story is told again [Zerubavel, 2004], we consider the boundary between facts and their narrative reproduction to be permeable [Brown, 2006]. The perspective of telling a specific story from the past can be made more precise. With this in mind, we compared the interview results with issues of *Uchitelskayagazeta*, other periodicals and monographs, documents from personal files and public archives. Our research of open sources and archives was based on the list of basic categories that was developed after the initial encoding of the interview scripts [Ibid.]. Although informed consent implies the anonymity of all the respondents, we find it possible to disclose the names of some interviewees, provided that their actions have been described in other available sources and their opinions do not jeopardize anyone's safety or reputation (cf. [Walford, 2008]).

Findings In March—April 1987, *Uchitelskaya gazeta* published a series of six articles under the general name of *Zhizn' Ivanova* [The Life of Ivanov] by Simon Soloveychik, the famous journalist specializing in pedagogy. Providing a detailed description of the activities of researcher and pedagogue Igor Ivanov, who developed the theory of collective upbringing of children through organizing shared creative activities [Dimke, 2015], Soloveychik puts forward a hypothesis about the ambivalent social nature of a child whom he believes to be a personality and at the same time “part of a collective, a people, a society [Soloveychik, 1987]. He then analyzes the development of personality, identified as humanization, and learning to be in a collective, identified as socializa-

tion, interpreting the two phenomena as indispensable components of the process of upbringing, “joined together but not dissolved in each other”. The following articles in the series develop this fundamental point. Soloveychik believes that a fully-fledged relationship between humanism and collectivism can be provided by collaborative pedagogy, which thereby “leads the teacher by innovative paths to genuinely communist education relationships”. Making allowance for certain limitations of the expressive means that were available in print at that time, we can still see that Soloveychik does not justify the importance of collaborative pedagogy by opposing it to the history of Soviet school. Rather, he derives some truth that was already ingrained in its structure. For example, Ivanov’s “Marxist-Leninist” ideas become the basis for collaborative pedagogy due to their common focus on creativity. Moreover, in some contexts collaborative pedagogy is regarded as a process “driven by the will of many people and collectives”, comparable to the creative process in its scale [Ibid.]. Identifying collaborative pedagogy with teacher creativity, in its turn, erodes away the boundary between the “Perestroika-minded” initiatives of *Uchitelskaya gazeta* journalists and the school reform that had been launched in 1984 and had already brought the value of initiative and creativity to the fore [Strizhov, 1984]. Meanwhile, the terms *creativity* and *innovation* existed as means of integration with the ideological context, providing a mutual permeability of pedagogical and political contents.

The copresence of ideology and pedagogy produces a “terminological defocusing” effect, where concepts mutate into each other little by little, slipping away from any direct comparison of their meanings. The “new” becomes impossible to locate in time and space, let alone to attribute to a specific author. On the one hand, associating innovations with creativity allowed for rhetorical legitimation of the pedagogical movement [Suddaby, Greenwood, 2005], making it recognizable for the ideological “radars”. On the other hand, it inhibited defining clearly the criteria of innovativeness and identifying proposed solutions as new technologies, giving the impression that the content of teaching was inflexible: “...The teacher’s creative potential has always been the most important thing in our business” (*Skype interview with a teacher of Russian and literature, Krasnodar Krai*). All of the respondents found it difficult to establish the date when the innovation pedagogical movement had been born. As the distance from its epicenters (Moscow, Krasnoyarsk, Izhevsk, Tomsk) increases, teachers have more trouble distinguishing between the innovation discourse and the general advanced training and retraining requirements (*interview with a teacher of Russian and literature, Komi Republic*) or just another rallying cry of “some bureaucratic functionaries” (*interview with a teacher of mathematics, St. Petersburg*).

Given the ambivalence of language clichés used in the late Soviet era [Yurchak, 2016], a special role was played by formal and position-

al characteristics of the rhetoric, i. e. *how, where and by whom* something was said. Thus, having hibernated in the mind of the teaching community for a long time, the idea of innovativeness/creativity was suddenly brought to the fore in 1986–1987 due to wide circulation in the mainstream print media. The “standard” innovation development pattern, from the inception of an idea to its distribution and embodiment, shrinks in this case to squeeze out the embodiment phase. Emphasizing the “special responsibility” imposed on the “journalist teacher” [Tsirulnikov, 1987] only contributed to the situation where the teacher movement’s development was provided by the existing institutions of agitprop nature. The lack of independent civil and professional organizations was especially noticeable to the external observer (*answers of S. Kerr to our written questions*). Vagueness and some habitualness of the initiative, creativity and innovation discourse provided the basis for broad tactical coalitions among members of the teaching community, journalists and employees of party organs and governmental agencies (cf. [Sigman, 2014. P. 387]).

Innovative projects and various pedagogical experiments launched in the second half of the 1980s were often supported by representatives of party and government elites (*interviews with A. Adamsky, V. Shadrikov*), regional Komsomol and/or communist party committees (*interview with V. Lozing*), the management of specific universities (*interviews with V. Bolotov, I. Frumin, B. Khasan*). The very notions of *experiment* and *experimental school* legitimated the innovation movement and limited its development at the same time (cf. [Sigman, 2014. P. 142 et seq.]). Elite patronage definitely emancipated teachers of relevant schools, who had “always felt a little away from the common system” (*interview with a teacher of aesthetic disciplines, Kemerovo Oblast*). However, it was unable to provide a fully-fledged translation of results, which made such institutions largely unprepared for independent existence in case their patrons disappeared. In the “game” (*interview with A. Adamsky*) of groups inside party, government and academic elites of all levels, an innovative initiative often became the tool of providing or supporting a breakthrough, as it happened with the Basic Experimental School under Krasnoyarsk University, for instance (*interviews with B. Khasan, B. Elkonin*). Intensive personal growth that must have had a place at such institutions did not result in creating any stable external forms of collective self-organization or in building an institutional framework to ensure the ability to promote pedagogical experiments in the context of the changing social situation and national education policies. Distancing themselves as much as possible from public activity was in some way a perfect strategy for many innovators after the collapse of the Soviet Union:

Я понимал, что выжить я смогу, если буду сидеть тихо. Я ни у кого ничего не просил. Я никуда не лез. Я старался работать тихой сапой. Поэтому никто мне не предлагал никакой

помощи, но я был счастлив тем, что не мешали. Это было так неожиданно и так здорово!¹ (*interview with B. Bim-Bad*)

Many participants of the innovation movement withdrew themselves demonstratively from the process of institutional construction even after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, when they had an opportunity to influence the national policy (*interview with A. Adamsky, Skype interview with Y. Turchaninova*). Even when self-organization was in place, as when a network of innovative schools was created under the auspices of the Eureka Institute of Educational Policy (*interview with A. Adamsky*), it did not entail the development of any innovation assessment procedures or universal criteria of the positive value of innovations inside the professional community (*interview with V. Bolotov*). Many experiments turned out to be equivalent to the figure of the innovator, the unique author of a specific idea. Being in the gravisphere of a bright figure affected school teachers as well as students, but the effect came to naught with distance from the “celestial body”. This was also true for the innovative teachers who had gone public before Perestroika:

Через ежегодные донецкие семинары эти приемы и опорные сигналы расползались по стране, но дальше надо было работать с этим 24 часа в сутки, как работал Шаталов... часто в абсолютно... крайневраждебном окружении. То есть ты приезжал туда, нахлебывался этого наркотика товарищества, единства, общих целей и обещанных успехов, а потом ты со всем этим приезжал домой. Хорошо, если в Москву и там находилось еще пять—семь бесноватых, а если в Мухосранск, то просто в абсолютно враждебное окружение. И должен был... и, в общем, дальше все развивается по нормальным путям² (*Skype interview with Y. Turchaninova*).

The intensive cultivation of teacher creativity to add to the leader’s bright personality was also reproduced in activities of well-known innovative schools in the 1990s:

¹ I knew I would survive if I kept it low. I was not asking for anything, not messing with anyone, I was just trying to work on the quiet. So no one would offer me any help, but I was happy with being allowed to do my job. It felt so strange and so good!

² These techniques and supportive signals were stalking around the country through annual Donetsk seminars, but then you had to work on it 24/7, as Shatalov did... often in a completely... an extremely hostile environment. So you would come there, get high on this drug of comradeship, unity, common goals and promised success, and then you would bring it all home. You were lucky if you lived in Moscow and there were five of seven more frenetic enthusiasts like you, but if you brought it to a Podunk town, you would find yourself in a totally hostile environment. And you had to... well, it would soon come back to normal then.

Когда я готовила какой-то проект с ребятами по химии, и с этим проектом мы должны были выступить сначала внутри секции, потом вынести это на школу, а потом на район, потом на город. Вот это я только работала с Лозингом. А в остальных школах... ну, были там какие-то кружки... не такого масштаба... Поэтому новаторство, я вам честно говорю, почувствовала в работе с Лозингом. А остальное, ну, знаете, традиционно³ (*teacher of chemistry, Kemerovo Oblast*).

The very fact of copresence in the gravisphere of a specific personality, whose gravitational force filled all available time and space, was the nucleus of the event which was irreproducible in the author's absence. Due to personalized interactions, there were no resilient institutional forms of the established informal collective interaction traditions. Expressly trust-based relationships within the circle brought about distancing from regular school problems, a high specificity of innovation movement results and their inaccessibility for ordinary teachers (cf. [Bolotov, 2009]). Although members of the innovation movement denounced categorically the very term *regular school* [Kasprzhak, 1992] and the reforms launched under the guidance of Eduard Dneprov were explicitly designed to promote diversity of secondary education formats [Dneprov, 2006], regular school remained virtually unchanged [Bolotov, 2009]. The collapse of the Soviet Union, which seemed to have temporally neutralized external political pressure on the professional teacher community, put the innovation movement in a situation where the old institutional channels no longer worked but no alternative form had been developed at that point (*interview with A. Adamsky*). There was a prevailing orientation toward protecting innovative schools from the hostile external environment (*interview with T. Kovaleva; interview with A. Adamsky*).

It appears that, when starting their journey into a socialist system, many representatives of the innovation movement simply could not imagine the existence of school as an economically and politically independent unit. Financial and management issues were moved aside to the periphery of the innovation movement. This "blind spot" in the minds of the innovators, who were liberals with illiberal economic views (cf. [Sigman, 2014. P. 181 et seq., 322–333]) surreptitiously provoked conflicts between the educational and financial authorities of the new Russia as well as mutual distrust between innovative teachers and professional economists (*interview with N. Tipenko; in-*

³ When I prepared a chemistry project with students and then we were supposed to present it within the section, then at the school, regional and municipal levels... This was how I worked for Lozing. As for the rest of the schools... well, they had some kind of study groups... of a smaller scale... So I have to admit I only experienced innovations while working with Lozing. And the rest, well, it was just as usual.

terview with T. Klyachko). The reformatory economics projects of the late 1980s were based on the belief in the rigidity of the socialist economics organization. Apart from private and public production, they also identified the category of collective goods, which included school. Production of collective goods served the interests of companies and was supported by those companies [Saburov, Alexeev, Vavilov, 1988]. The innovation movement in the late Soviet Union had a sort of mosaic, fragmented structure. The mosaic patterns reproduced the distribution of areas of comparatively greater liberty in Soviet ideological (*Uchitelskaya gazeta* as compared to *Pravda* or *Izvestiya*) or education (Krasnoyarsk University as compared to Moscow State University) apparatuses. Feeling the resistance of the professional establishment centralized in the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of the USSR (*interview with Y. Turchaninova; interview with B. Elkonin*), the members of the innovation movement created tactical coalitions outside the pedagogical community. The movement gained wide currency for some time due to the support provided by party and governmental officials of different status and by a large portion of mass media. However, the innovation movement was disoriented by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent dismantling of the established relations of power, leaving the innovators in their disengaged enclaves.

**Research
limitations and
prospects**

We reconstruct the logic of how the innovation process developed in the pedagogical movement inscribed in the event that was undoubtedly perceived as “wreckage” by many people (*interview with M. Klarin*). Combining the approaches of social and cultural anthropology, historical sociology and political science, we use the history of the pedagogical innovation movement to develop a preliminary conception of the innovation process in a specific context of high social turbulence and the lack of established public participation institutions. The main conclusion that we draw based on this analysis is that innovations in the late Soviet era developed within the framework of a specific situation, where it was possible to generate the new as a subjective legacy of individual collectives built around charismatic personalities and at the same time impossible to retain or develop the innovations in institutionalized forms. The desire to avoid the routine procedures that shaped the world of the late Soviet people [Yurchak, 2016] was also transferred to the method of implementing pedagogical innovations, which were based on the exaggerated value of the “transcendental world” of critical thinking [Shchedrovitsky, 1993] on the other side from public discussions. Since direct participation in this transcendental world was available to very few, the value and consciousness of actions performed by most participants of the innovation movement and innovative experiments were directly dependent on personal contact with the key figures, whose importance was justi-

fied performatively, through the “supplement” of faithful admirers and inner-circle employees.

Building on the image of collective and collectivist Soviet school, the pedagogical movement focused on the demand to provide customized education and maximum personal liberties. Our research shows that this emancipation was always somehow limited: it was an improvisation within the limits set by a specific “author” with his or her “own” school, who had an explicit or implicit ambition to impose some reading, writing and routine habits on their followers. Pedagogical innovations had a truly totalitarian nature which, ironically, could only be fully implemented in a totalitarian state. In the absence of the latter, innovation institutions took the defensive position, increasing the self-containment of their practices. Modernization of education launched by pedagogical experiments in the second half of the 1980s continued after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, but only within isolated enclaves. Paradoxically, the former management system would have to be reanimated to restore the influence of those enclaves and the relations among them. Left without the direct patronage of the elite, many innovative experiments reproduced the isolationist attitude towards the national context and fostered the concept of a possessor of unique experience (cf. [Dzhagalov, 2011]).

History exists in myriads of opinions, but some of them have not yet been expressed. Analyzing the history of the innovation movement, we intended to hear out the history of the new. This history exists in verbal actions, so we admit readily that acts of communication prevail in our narrative structure. Focusing on the challenges of producing individual and collective subjectivity, we did not discuss possible correlations between the innovation movement and social effects of education. Researchers still have a lot of work to do in order to assess the role that the booming pedagogical initiatives of the late 1980s played in deepening the inequality in access to high-quality education. Statutory regulation and promotion of pedagogical innovations is yet another avenue for research. What exactly the role of the 1992 education law was and how it was related to other elements of the legal system is also yet to be discussed. We can only say now that the opportunities provided by that law were largely reduced by numerous infrastructure limitations caused—again—by poor institutional organization [De Groof, 1993]. Using the Russian case alone to explore the subject structure of innovations, we did not take to the comparative analysis methods. However, comparing our case to international experience, and the context in Russia to that in post-Soviet republics and the satellite states of the Soviet Union, should become an important area for future research on innovation processes. We have accumulated a relatively small body of data, which makes it difficult to apply quantitative analysis methods. With the increase in the number of sources—interview scripts, processed printed and archival materi-

als—we hope to start using corpus-based methods, a tool successfully applied by linguists.

We are convinced that an insight into the local theory and history of the production of the new has not only an archaeological value. Research on the innovation movement in the late Soviet Union shows how an attempt to initiate changes in education without changing or considering the broader social context exhausts the initial momentum fairly quickly. Personally productive innovations do not always become socially productive. Some of the subjective achievements are never objectified. We find it important to keep developing a theory to explain and predict possible failures in distributing innovations to the broad social context in cases when innovation processes are delegated to individual charismatic leaders and organizational support is provided by the state. It is also necessary to continue differentiating approaches to history-based research on innovations by their opportunities and risks for modernizing education under the existing conditions.

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