Teachers' Plight and Trainees' Flight:
Perceived, Lived, and Conceived Spaces of Schools

Elena Aydarova

Aydarova Elena
PhD, Postdoctoral Scholar, Arizona State University. Address: 1120 S Cady Mall, Interdisciplinary Building B, Suite 353, Tempe, AZ 85287–1811. E-mail: olena.aydarova@asu.edu

Abstract. Teacher recruitment and retention are often examined as technical problems that can be solved by providing teachers with incentives, evaluations, or more practical initial preparation. This paper proposes a reconceptualization of pre-service teachers' flight from the profession. By applying Lefebvre's (1991) theory of space to the analysis of ethnographic data collected in the Russian Federation between 2011 and 2014, this paper highlights how the teachers' plight in schools and in society at large shapes student teachers' career aspirations. Based on classroom observations and focus group data, as well as media artifacts, I show that the perceived, lived, and conceived spaces of schooling hold little promise for students in teacher education programs. Teachers' pay, their work structures, and students' attitudes towards teachers reveal that schools have come to occupy a peripheral position in Russian society. Teachers' experiences in schools, as managed professionals burdened with bureaucratic responsibilities and undergoing significant amounts of stress, make teaching a precarious occupation. Representations of schools and teachers' work in the media and public service announcements portray schools as irrelevant and immoral spaces where only "losers" go to work. In this situation, meaningful educational change would require both a reimagining of the spaces of schooling and a collective dialogue on the role education should play in Russian society.

Keywords: teacher recruitment, teacher retention, teacher education, foreign language teacher preparation, educational reform, critical theory of space, ethnography

During an interview, a Ministry of Education official in Ognensk[1]—a former teacher and a pedagogical university graduate—raised the question of graduate employment. "What difference does it make that we have a great pedagogical university in our city when most students

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[1] All geographic and personal names used in this paper are pseudonyms created to protect participants' identity and ensure confidentiality.

don't go to work in schools?" he complained to me (Interview № 5; November, 2013). I asked if there were data that the ministry was collecting on that matter. Several days later, he forwarded to me a letter from the pedagogical university which stated that six out of several hundred of its graduates found employment in schools. It was not clear whether this letter reflected the actual number of graduates that were recently newly employed by schools or just the number that the university was able to procure. Yet, as I was researching teacher education reforms in the Russian Federation between 2011 and 2014, I often came across this framing of the problem: young teachers don't go to work in schools because pedagogical universities do not prepare them well for the practical work of teaching [Bolotov, 2014; Kasparzhak, 2013]. To address this problem along with several others, the Ministry of Education has supported efforts to modernize pedagogical education.

The problem of teacher attrition or turnover is not unique to Russia alone. A number of studies demonstrated that identity, professional preparation, time pressures, and leadership in schools affect teacher recruitment and retention [Darling-Hammond, Berry, Haselkorn, Fideler, 1999; Day, 2002; Kyriacou, Kunc, 2007; Müller, Alliata, Benninghoff, 2009]. Among university students considering teaching as a future career, teachers' pay, working conditions, the attitude of the general public towards the teaching profession, as well as the desire to help students learn, each play an important role [Stokes, 2007; Johnson, Kardos, 2008].

Despite these observations, international organizations have focused on the technical aspects of attracting and retaining teachers: competitive entry, incentives for teaching in high-need areas, teacher evaluations, and "useful" practical preparation [OECD, 2005; World Bank, 2012]. Across a variety of international contexts, reformers argue that young teachers choose not to go into or leave teaching because their preparation programs are too theoretical and do not prepare them for the practical work of teaching in schools [Furlong, Cochran-Smith, Brennan, 2013]. Thus, teacher preparation is increasingly moved to schools, particularly in the UK and the US.

The goal of this paper is to shift the focus from the education system's failure to prepare student teachers for working in schools on to how student teachers perceive schools and teachers' work. Instead of treating the problem of teacher recruitment and retention as a technical problem, i. e. insufficient preparation, I examine how university students' observations of the teachers' plight in schools contribute to their flight from the teaching profession. The reason for this shift is simple: if schools are not attractive places to work, if teaching as a profession holds little promise for young people to realize their potential, if continuous reforms turn work in schools into a high-stress occupation, then reforming pedagogical education without stabilizing school environments is unlikely to bring forth the desired change.

My paper is based on the premise that treating teacher recruitment and retention as a technical problem makes certain aspects of students' and graduates' decision-making invisible. To address this invisibility, I reconceptualize this problem by drawing on Lefebvre's [1991] theory of space and ethnographically examine how pre-service teachers experience and narrate the constructions of schooling spaces and affiliations with them. My analysis shows that when pre-service teachers experience spaces of schooling as sites of low status, limited safety, bureaucratic control, and stress-related burnout, increased practical preparation may be of little help to bring about educational change. This focus leads me to suggest that if policymakers seek meaningful change in the teaching profession, they should start not with teacher preparation, but rather with the space of schooling.

1. Theoretical Framework

In my analysis I draw on Lefebvre's [1991] theory of space where space is not approached as a given category, but rather as a social product. Lefebvre emphasizes the need to examine ways in which space is perceived, lived, and conceived [Elden, 2004]. *Perceived* space is the space imbued with meanings and interpretations, whereas the *lived* space is the space filled with human activity performed by human bodies. *Conceived*—also referred to as "representations of space"—is the space planned, engineered or reproduced through maps, designs, texts or images. These distinctions are helpful when thinking about multiple dimensions of the schooling spaces: as they are narrated or imagined by pre-service teachers, as they are experienced by practicing teachers, or as they are represented on TV or in public service announcements. Lefebvre's work, however, is an important reminder that space is replete with politics and represents power struggles or social inequalities that constitute the life of a capitalist society. Read through this lens, space can reveal how professionals whose activities are associated with schools can become stigmatized, marginalized or disempowered. Multiple readings of space are helpful for thinking about ways in which pre-service teachers come to understand schooling and the teaching profession. What comes to matter are not abstract constructions of schools, but the multiple meanings that spaces of schooling are imbued with by various actors associated with them.

2. Methodology

This paper is based on a multi-sited critical ethnographic study that I conducted in the Russian Federation during a series of trips: Dobrolyubov (June 2011; June 2012; March—June 2014), Ognensk (May 2012; September—December 2013), and Lyutvino (January 2014—March 2014). The study was conducted primarily at two pedagogical universities, but also followed "multiply produced logic" [Marcus, 1995] in the educational community outside these universities through interviews with teachers, educational researchers and ministry offi-

cials. At the pedagogical universities, I conducted regular classroom observations, participated in the foreign language departments' daily lives, and regularly interacted with both the faculty and the students. My continual presence in classes and department events allowed me to establish rapport and develop relationships with many participants in my study.

The two universities were selected based on their different geographic positions in the country. Ognensk State Pedagogical University (OSPU) occupies a more prominent position in the educational community and enjoys greater prestige than Dobroyubov State Pedagogical University (DSPU). Located away from Russia's decision-making centers, DSPU has average rankings nationally. Both are public universities that primarily serve to prepare teachers, but similar to other narrowly-specialized institutions of higher learning in Russia, they prepare students for a variety of professions, including economics, law and management.

The primary data for this paper comes from 15 student focus groups conducted in Russian at these sites over the span of this study. The size of the focus groups varied from three to twelve participants. To allow for maximum variability in data, I conducted focus groups with students in different stages of their programs (from the first year to the fourth) and in different majors. While this allowed for a range of perspectives to be elicited, the study focused primarily on foreign language departments. My choice of these departments was intentional—foreign languages tend to maintain their prestige and often have competitive entry into the program when other programs do not. Even though such a narrow focus poses some limitations for the study findings, students in other majors that I interacted with expressed similar sentiments to the ones presented in this paper.

As this study is based on the principles of humanistic anthropology [Johnson, 1976], I employ a narrative style and incorporate visuals that illustrate the key points of my argument. I present accounts of the perceived spaces of schooling as narrated by pre-service teachers, lived spaces of schooling based on a teachers' accounts, and conceived spaces of schooling as portrayed by the media. Together these portrayals capture how unattractive and undesirable spaces of schooling can become for future teachers. Returning back to Lefebvre's account, I suggest that in order to introduce meaningful educational change, it is important to change how the spaces of schooling are constructed.

3. "A double no, a double blow"

At OSPU, during my observation of a methods class for third year students, Irina Borisovna—the faculty member teaching the course—quite surprisingly invited me to participate in the class discussion. Gradually, the conversation switched to teachers' low sala-

ries in Russian schools. Irina Borisovna disagreed with the students on this point.

> "There is money in schools,"—she explained to them. "You can find meaningful work there. Listen, it feels better to be a teacher than to be a secretary. And you can always get students to tutor for extra pay. I was on a vacation and this one woman asked me about my job. I told her I was a teacher. She could not believe it: 'You must have a really rich husband' And I said to her, 'Why would you say that?' Anyway. I think teaching can be a good job."
>
> Katya turned to me, "Can I ask you a question? How are teachers treated in the United States?"
>
> "Are you asking about the social status?" the faculty tried to clarify her question for me.
>
> Vika chimed in, "Yeah, you see, here, a teacher… That means you get a lot of contempt."
>
> The room got filled with yes's and sighs. I faked naiveté, "What do you mean?
>
> Irina Borisovna decided to help us out, "Here, in Russia, teachers are treated very poorly. There is what is called a system of 'double no.'"
>
> One of the students in the room turned to her neighbor and whispered, "A system of double blow." They both giggled.
>
> "Yes, a double no. In society. There was an old article about it. Those who have been rejected everywhere else go to a pedagogical university," Irina Borisovna was looking at me, as she was explaining this.
>
> Katya interrupted, beating her fists on the desk, "No! That is simply not true."
>
> Irina Borisovna looking intently at me continued, "And those who cannot get any jobs anywhere else end up working in schools. Of course, it is not true." She turned to the students. "But what can you do? That's where such treatment comes from: no, no, you are an absolute loser."
>
> Katya looked up from her notebook, "It feels awful to be treated like an idiot" (OSPU; Field Notes, October, 2013).

I walked away from that conversation very impressed with the students—they were sharp, curious, and thoughtful. The exchange about the negative conceptions of teachers' work stuck with me. Even though Irina Borisovna had changed the wording slightly, she was speaking about "double negative selection" (Rus. *dvoynoy negativny otbor*)—the idea that only the weakest students enter pedagogical universities and the weakest graduates go to work in schools (Kasparzhak, 2013). Several weeks later, when I conducted the focus group interview with these students, Katya told me that she came from another city, got accepted both by the economics department at one

of the top universities in the country and by the pedagogical university in Ognensk. She chose to come to the pedagogical university because she loved foreign languages. It is true that she did not want to be a teacher. She dreamt of being an interpreter but someone in the department's admissions committee said that her scores were not high enough to be admitted to the interpreter's specialization. So, she switched. A year later she found out that her scores were high enough and the person on the admissions committee was not truthful but it was too late. She was thinking of doing a Master's degree in translation studies next. Katya was a perceptive and thoughtful young woman who, similar to many others on her program, did not fit the paradigm of "double-negative selection."

This interaction reveals the moves that the faculty and the students make as they construct narratives of school spaces and teachers' work. The policy push to hold pedagogical universities accountable for their graduates' employment in schools placed a burden on many teacher educators to encourage graduates to work in schools. I often observed how instructors extolled work in schools during methods, pedagogy, and even general language classes. To ensure greater connections between schools and the university-based teacher preparation, some faculties designed tasks that relied heavily on artifacts and activities that students brought from their school placements. Advertisements about vacancies in schools hanging on university bulletin boards or displayed on TV monitors by the entrance informed students of available positions. For students, these reminders seemed excessive: some of them complained that they were "fed-up" with being told to work in schools by way of their faculties' "constant nagging" (Rus. *postoyanno na mozgi kapayut*).

In the exchange above, the faculty's attempt to present schools as potentially desirable spaces of employment rests on two elements: one is opportunities for financial gain ("there is money in schools) and another one is a degree of autonomy that a teacher can enjoy ("it is better to be a teacher than a secretary"). This attempt is counteracted by students' skepticism which pushes the faculty to provide an alternative explanation for how the problematic space of schooling is constructed. Irina Borisovna shared the narrative of the conceived spaces of pedagogical universities and schools that educational policies present to the public—as the spaces where only "losers" go.

The students' response to this narrative is indicative of how they experience the conundrums and contradictions of having chosen to be associated with the teaching profession as "a double blow." On the one hand, many of them reported how much disdain they received for having chosen to enter a pedagogical university. As one of them explained to me, "If you say that you are a student at a pedagogical university, people look at you and think that you are deficient or something." Others added that their families, relatives, friends, and even their school teachers strongly discouraged them from choos-

ing teaching in schools as a potential career. What this exchange reveals is that despite a faculty's efforts to encourage students to view schools in a positive light, students perceive schools as problematic spaces and teachers' work as the one that draws a lot of contempt from society.

4. Perceived Spaces of Schools: Pre-service Teachers' Narratives

4.1. Before and After Practicum

Through the focus groups, interviews, and informal chats with students in Ognensk and Dobrolyubov, I noticed a pattern in the students' responses to work in schools: among first year students there were significantly more students who wanted to become teachers. Similar patterns have been observed by other studies conducted in Russia [Sobkin, Tkachenko, 2007]. Unlike those studies, however, I noticed that it was students' practicum experiences in schools that had the most significant influence on deterring them from choosing work in schools as a viable option. Those temporal boundaries played out most clearly during the focus group interviews. For instance, focus group 2 was conducted in 2011 and comprised third-year students. At that time, the university followed the second generation of state standards that required only one practicum placement in the fourth year of studies. Thus, third year students lived in anticipation of their practicum placements:

R: Are you planning on working according to your specialization? Are you going to become teachers?

S2: Everything will depend on the practicum.

S1: Yes, we are waiting for the practicum. We have not had the practicum.

S2: We are waiting and we are scared of the practicum.

S1: We don't know what it is like, only in theory; methods classes just started and we are getting familiar with something. But for now, we don't know. (DSPU; Focus Group 2, Year 3 students, 2011)

In contrast, focus group 4 was carried out with students in their fourth year at the end of the spring semester, after they had gone to schools on a practicum:

R: How many of you want to become teachers?

S1: No one.

R: Why?

S1: We tried it this year and we did not like it.

R: During the practicum?

S1: Yeah.

R: Why didn't you like it?

S1: It was interesting but...

S2: It is a stressful profession. We waste our nerves for nothing.

S4: When I entered the university, I was 18 years old. It was very difficult to imagine what the teaching profession means. After 4 years at the university, I realize how difficult it is and I do not want to become a teacher. (DSPU; Focus Group 4, 2011)

Among the 12 students who participated in focus group 4, no one wanted to work as a school teacher after the practicum. Even if a few students did not object to the possibility of becoming a teacher when they applied to the university, a practicum experience in a school made them re-consider those aspirations.

What is commonly discussed in literature is that students choose not to work in schools because they lack preparation [Bolotov, 2014]. While some students mentioned it as an area of concern, many felt that the knowledge they were receiving at the university was adequate for work in schools. For example, in discussing their knowledge of English, students shared that they were disappointed that it was not stronger. But eventually, they admitted, "For us it is necessary to know how to teach. Our schools don't have such a strong level, so they prepare us for school and that is enough" (DSPU; Focus Group 3, 2011). In other conversations, I heard students mention that they would prefer to have more practice. The new standards issued in 2009 and implemented in pedagogical universities in 2011, in fact, require that students have three practica in schools during their studies. Students who followed the new curriculum rarely brought up the desire for more practica. Instead, they more often discussed how they did not want to become teachers after graduation—after each new placement in schools, the number of those who still perceived teaching as a viable career declined.

Not everyone goes through such dramatic transformations after they are placed in schools and some still considered becoming teachers afterwards. An important factor in their decision-making was the type of school. Students shared with me during the focus groups that "schools can be quite different" (Rus. *shkola shkole rozn'*) (OSPU; Focus Group 7, 2013). Gymnasiums or lyceums[2] were often kept as viable options for future employment. Private language schools or language courses were perceived as desirable places to work. To

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[2] Gymnasiums and lyceums represent schools that can specialize in particular disciplines and can be more selective about the students they admit. The new educational law has eliminated legal differences between different types of schools but the practices of selectivity and higher expectations remain.

accommodate students' desires for a variety of professional experiences, the department in Dobrolyubov allowed some of them to do their practice teaching in language schools. From the students' perspective, the only downside of those schools in comparison to state schools was "the social package"—the insurance and other forms of social support that have recently become available for school teachers in Russia. Overall, however, conversations with students showed that in making professional choices they drew careful distinctions between the types of spaces schools represented: private schools were seen as relatively desirable options, schools with special status (such as gymnasiums or lyceums) were seen as possibilities, whereas state schools (often called "regular schools" (Rus. *obychnye shkoly*)) were only regarded as viable opportunities if students had studied at those schools themselves or had a good experience during the practicum placement. For example, a fourth-year student preparing for graduation that year shared with me during an informal chat:

> I am not going to work at a school! Who needs that? With all of their sanitary norms and desks screwed to the floors, so that there is nothing you can do with them! I want a job that would allow creativity. I won't be able to survive in a school. I tried working at a private Jewish school. I liked that. Feel free to do whatever you want. I would consider that type of a school. But I am not going to work in a regular school. (OSPU; Field Notes, October, 2013)
>
> This quote illustrates the distinctions in the constructions of space of schooling: drawing on her practicum experiences, Alla emphasized how the desks screwed to the floors, even if only metaphorically, constrain creativity in state schools, which compels her to seek employment elsewhere. Excessive regulation and bureaucratic control over the spaces of state schools make teaching there an undesirable path. Only the freedom provided by the private establishment keeps teaching a viable career trajectory. This quote demonstrates that the construction of the perceived space of state schools deserves more attention.

4.2. Perceived Spaces of State Schools

Throughout the focus groups and informal interviews, pre-service teachers shared their narratives of perceived spaces of state schooling by drawing on their experiences in schools as students and as trainees on practica. Most students were terrified by exhausted teachers, disrespectful students, inordinate amounts of paperwork, and the oppressive atmosphere of the workplace that they witnessed during their teaching placements.

One of the most commonly expressed perceptions that many students had about schools was that they were places where teachers' salaries were low. As one student commented, "It might be possible to go to work in school. Maybe a miracle would happen and teachers' salaries would be raised" (DSPU; Focus Group 5, 2012). Many pre-ser-

vice teachers worked as private tutors and knew that their teachers often generated supplementary income through private tutoring as well. But those considerations rarely factored into their perceptions of school spaces. Those were still based on the assumption of "bad salaries," "low income," and "little money." These perceptions suggested that being associated with a school was akin to being submersed in poverty, even after teachers' salaries were raised in 2013.

Focusing on the reforms and changes in society, some students described schools as conservative spaces where teachers' capacity for creativity and autonomy was hampered either by established rules or by a general anti-change attitude. A conversation with a group of third-year students, for example, demonstrates a contrast between the spaces of university preparation and the spaces of state schooling:

> S1: Young people are afraid, afraid to lose their skills, because school puts you in a box (Rus. *stavit v ramki*). Here, they teach us differently, broader than in school. In schools, judging by our teachers, all of this gets wiped out and only the minimum remains.
>
> S2: yes, yes...
>
> S1: And everything that they taught us in pedagogy classes, we don't see, from our personal experience.
>
> S2: Teachers, not college instructors. In methods, you could say. Where are all these methods that they are teaching us? [laughs]
>
> S1: We are just sitting there and thinking: we were taught differently in schools. Everything was different. What we are being taught now and what we had in school, two different sides, two different processes.
>
> I: How are they different?
>
> S2: Probably in conservatism... Old paradigm, it is called. Old paradigm of education.
>
> S1: They tell us about students' freedom of speech...
>
> S2: Humane attitude towards students...
>
> S1: Humane attitude...
>
> S2: Personally-relevant approach...
>
> S1: And even simple variety at school, of subjects, games. In reality, all of this is just a quarter of the truth, of what goes on in schools, of what they talk about. We had freedom of speech, but all of it was voluntarily-forcefully (Rus. *dobrovol'no-prinuditel'no*). You have freedom, but you don't have it.
>
> S3: It does not depend on teachers alone though.

Ss: Of course.

S3: Lack of time, very little, forty-five minutes. For students, it is not little, but in principle to deliver the program (Rus. *dat' programmu*), so that each student answers, it is not enough. That's why it is all done this way: the one who is more active, he answers, but the others, oh well.

S2: And there are not that many hours in a regular school. In special schools yes, but in a regular school, no.

I: So, what turns out, what you are being taught at pedagogy classes, the new modern methods, and they are not practiced in schools...

S3: Not everywhere, only by young teachers. They try but then they lose the desire.

S2: If they let them do it.

S1: Yes, they come with new ideas, with innovations, with a desire to change something, to do something new, but with time they lose interest in all of it and simply judging by our own teachers who came young, enthusiastic and everything, the work is bubbling, and then they wither, and it becomes usual, can't say interesting, used to be more interesting... [...]

I: What is your attitude to conservatism and modernization? Where do you see yourself?

S2: Closer to modernization, it seems.

I: Got it, you all [see yourself closer] to modernization...

S2: Yes, because that is how they are bringing us up.

S1: That is how they are teaching us here, in the university (DSPU; Focus Group 2, Year 3 students, 2011)

Similarly to other students, these students described how conservative state schools can be, and contrasted that conservatism with the instruction they receive at the university where they are encouraged to learn more innovative approaches to teaching. In constructing this perceived space of schooling, these students drew on their own memories as students and described how different young teachers were when they tried to use new methods and new approaches. Important in their narrative is the hidden conflict between young teachers who try to introduce change and "they" that may not let them engage in more innovative teaching. For these students, forces of conservatism can be embodied in other older teachers or school administrators that may discourage young teachers from consistently using new approaches.

For other students who discussed school conservatism during our interviews, the structure of teachers' work in state schools (also brought up in this conversation) was a more pronounced concern. Having spent one or two months in schools on practica, students quickly learned that powerpoints with numerous images or lessons full of hands-on activities take a significant amount of time to prepare. Some students that I interacted with during their school placements described to me how fortunate they felt to have the time to look for pictures online or to cut up strips of paper for games in class. These students no longer blamed school teachers for a lack of desire to modernize their teaching. Rather they saw conservatism in teaching as an outcome of the exigencies of the context. With four or five classes every day, little time set aside for planning, and a heavy load of checking students' work, most teachers could only afford to rely heavily on the textbook.

Furthermore, many of the foreign language teachers in state schools also had to be ready for inspections that checked whether they were using textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education. This meant that textbooks published by international publishing houses perceived to be more engaging for learners were borderline illegal; only national textbooks that followed a more traditional paradigm of education were allowed to be used in the classroom. Together these constraints made students feel that they were being set up for failure: reformed teaching was advocated for at the university and at the policy level, but not supported in schools. They saw very few opportunities to deliver the type of teaching they were hoping to do and opted for pursuing ways to realize their potential elsewhere.

Furthermore pre-service teachers perceived schools as spaces of disrespect and having a lack of safety for teachers. In focus groups, in informal conversations, and in class activities, pre-service teachers lamented the fact that state schools became sites where teachers were no longer respected. The excerpt below illustrates how students perceived potential relationships that school sites could afford them.

S2: Nowadays, the new generation is different from the previous ones. The children are naughty, noisy...

S1: And lazy...

S2: And they don't want to obey and it is difficult to manage them.

S3: In the past, no one complained to the director.

S1: Children cannot care less about their studies now. They cannot care less about anything... [...]

R: Do schools have a lot of old teachers?

S2: Yes, very few young people become teachers now. There have been so many TV programs about how poorly teachers are treated. Parents beat them up. Teachers are afraid to go to school.

R: Why is it that kids couldn't care less about studies?

S3: Upbringing. Values have changed.

S4: Values. It is easy for them to come home from school and sit down in front of the computer instead of doing homework.

S1: Enter Vkontakte.[3]

S: Parents used to be stricter in how they brought up children. Now they are much more lax.

R: Values, what does the society value now?

S4: Materialism.

R: What influences the changes in the upbringing?

S2: The mass media.

S3: Money.

S1: And parents themselves bring children up this way.

S3: Or do not bring up at all. Parents are at work. Children are left to their own devices, they do whatever they want.

S2: And they work because they need money. Everything comes down to money. (DSPU; Focus Group 4, 2011)

This exchange reveals that the spaces of state schooling represent relational webs in which a teacher occupies a contradictory position: on the one hand, the teacher is responsible for educating children against their will because children themselves do not care about education. On the other hand, teachers receive little support for this hard work and may find themselves in danger at the hand of the parents or students. While in this focus group students discussed what they learned about the dangers of teaching from TV shows that they watched, one of the graduates that I kept in touch with after she started working in a school shared how one of the parents beat up a PE teacher for a low grade that his son had received. In February 2014, a high school student shot his Geography teacher[4] because he had received a lower grade than he expected. Reporting on that story, the media focused on the student's psychological state whereas many educators and educational researchers that I interacted with at that time felt that the incident revealed well-hidden sores of Russian schools. While together these cases might be few and far between, the stories about them contribute significantly to the construction of state schools as

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[3] VKontakte is a Russian social network website.

[4] http://www.bbc.com/russian/russia/2014/02/140203_moscow_school_hostages

spaces of limited safety and even a threat to those who choose to become teachers.

Most importantly, however, the excerpt above and the instances when teachers are hurt by parents or students reveal that the transition to the capitalist mode of production placed schools on the periphery of social relations: when education holds no promise of collective progress or individual advancement, schools become sites of irrelevance and obstruction. As a result of this change, teachers who work there become scapegoats for social ills, rather than heroes of social progress. Quite often pre-service teachers along with the faculty themselves explained how little interest modern children had in education: those who came from well-off families knew that their parents' wealth will help them get ahead in life; those who came from struggling backgrounds knew that no matter how hard they tried, they would not be able to escape the poverty they found themselves in. In themselves, these explanations are not new as they echo an extensive body of research conducted in the US and the UK [MacLeod, 2009; Willis, 1981]. But for postsocialist Russia, these explanations constitute a departure from the imagined spaces of socialist schooling—spaces where hard work was presumably valued and where teachers were allegedly held in high regard. This departure is most strongly visible in representations of teachers and schools in public spaces and in the media. Before I turn to those representations, however, I will explore the lived spaces of schooling from teachers' own personal accounts.

5. Lived Spaces of Schools: A Teacher's Story

One particular teacher's account helped me see ways in which spaces of schooling became sites of disorderly reform activity, in which teachers' voices and well-being and students' learning were of little consequence. Anna Vladimirovna—an elementary school teacher working for a gymnasium in a residential part (Rus. *spal'ny rayon*) of Ognensk—scheduled the meeting with me for 7 pm on a Friday night. Herself a graduate of OSPU, she had taught in schools for over twenty years. She had to stay at the school that night to finish entering students' grades into her electronic records book. She indicated that it was customary for her to stay at the school until 9 or 10 pm to catch up on all the paperwork that she had to keep. During the interview, Anna Vladimirovna showed the new curricula guides and the quarterly, weekly, and daily plans that the teachers were "forced" to design because of the introduction of new school standards (Figure 1). This introduction was accompanied by the adoption of new textbooks that, from Anna Vladimirovna's perspective, happened for dubious reasons which seemed have less to do with children's learning and more to do with the authors' alleged connections at the Ministry of Education. The problem with these new guides was that teachers did not use them in their daily teaching but they still had to be designed every year. The

process of introducing new school standards made the teachers' labor on these papers a "waste to be thrown away" and teachers themselves "pawns that have to carry out someone else's orders." The pressure to follow the standards, however, made it hard to meet the needs of individual children. She saw that some of the students could not keep up with the pace, but she could not slow down to accommodate their needs because of the pressures from above.

There were other changes happening as well. Traditionally teachers had to keep two forms of record-keeping—a class record book (Rus. *klassny zhurnal*) that was stored at the school and a student's record book (Rus. *dnevnik*) that students took home to show to their parents. Both of these were required to be hand-written. Now the record-keeping doubled: in addition to the hand-written records, teachers were required to keep an electronic record of students' performance that both administrators and parents could access. All records kept on paper had to perfectly match those which were stored in the electronic system. The problem was not that the new system was introduced; the problem was that the old system was not done away with. This doubled her paperwork load for the week without a corresponding increase in pay. As Anna Vladimirovna explained, "If I was making 50,000 rubles a month, I could sit here peacefully and entertain myself with all these papers. But I have to work three jobs to survive. To earn the 50,000, I have to work from the early morning until late at night. Where am I supposed to find time for this?" This conversation happened after the widely discussed presidential decree from May 2012 which allegedly brought teachers' salaries in line with regional averages. Collectively, these changes left no time for teachers to engage in activities that would help them improve their teaching or engage in "creative work." Instead, they left teachers feeling insecure and frustrated, as the quotes below demonstrates.

> They constantly make up new things up there (Rus. *naverkhu*). We have no stability at all. All of us teachers constantly feel that we are just hanging in the air (Rus. *nakhodimsya v podveshennom sostoyanii*). We have this feeling that someone is constantly experimenting on us and we are just guinea pigs, "What else are they going come up with? What other surprise are they going to dump on us?" We have absolutely no security and no protections. (Interview 40, December 2013)

Explaining all the unreasonable expectations placed on her, Anna Vladimirovna noted that she was under a lot of stress. She showed her arms and neck covered with a red rash and said, "With all the stress, I had to be hospitalized several times this year. I can't do this anymore." Several minutes later, I asked her if young teachers came to work in schools.

I don't know. Last year we had a young teacher join the school. She started all bright and shiny. Smiled all the time. This year, in the middle of the year, she resigned. She was going around darker than a storm cloud. As a young person, she could not understand what was happening. There was no way she could survive it. (Interview 40, December 2013)

In the midst of our chat, Anna Vladimirovna's colleague popped in to say good bye to her. She also stayed on late at the school, working extra hours to catch up with her paperwork. She was too exhausted to continue and was heading home. After her colleague left, Anna Vladimirovna pensively commented, "I am forty-three, my colleague is forty. We are the youngest ones at this school." She described herself as an enthusiastic teacher who always enjoyed doing activities with children and engaging in creative work. Yet the constant pace of reform, the pressures of daily work, and the powerlessness in the face of bureaucratic control made the wait for retirement appear unbearable.

I met Anna Vladimirovna at a protest against the new educational reforms organized by the alternative teachers' union called "Teacher" (Rus. *Uchitel'*) and by several other activist groups in higher education. Anna Vladimirovna was one among several other teachers who had joined the protest because they were so fed up with what was happening in their schools that they could no longer keep silent. This was also a part of the reason why she agreed to an interview with me. Another colleague of hers also agreed to an interview but it never took place because she was going through stress-related mental health problems.

It is possible that I might have stumbled into a few disgruntled teachers while I was conducting my ethnographic study. Indeed, other teachers that I met during my research did not always complain about being covered in a red stress-induced rash or failed to participate in an interview because of a mental breakdown. Yet, Anna Vladimirovna's account was not that unusual and echoed many of the stories I heard from other people about stress-related health issues, about young teachers leaving after major burn-outs, and about a pace of reform that left teachers powerless and insecure. But the troubles within schools were not the only pressures that constituted the teachers' plights. The representations of school spaces and of teachers' work in public spaces and in mass media only further exacerbated the situation.

6. Conceived Spaces of Schools: Representations of Teachers' Work and Schooling in Society at Large

Students' career aspirations were affected not only by their interactions with schools, but also by societal perceptions of what teaching as a profession has become. During my time in Ognensk, I incorporated into my focus group interviews the image of billboards that read, "It is prestigious to be a teacher. Happy Teachers' Day to all pedagogues!" (Figure 4). Those were put up along city roads to commemorate International Teachers' Day on October 5.

Figure 2. **"It is prestigious to be a teacher."**

In the focus groups, some students felt that it was a good idea for the government to use such "propaganda" to improve teachers' status, but most perceived this billboard as yet another "declaration" and "empty words." For example, one group of students shared their feelings about how "unnatural" and "fake" the billboard message felt. When I asked, what their reaction towards the billboard was, Vika answered first:

S1: Laughter.

R: Laughter? Why? [*no one is laughing*]

S1: There is something fake about this (Rus. *naigrannoye*)…

S2: There is no such perception (Rus. *obraz*) in the society that it is prestigious to be a teacher.

S2 and S1: This [image] is not true.

S1: It is not even that it is not prestigious…

S2: There is no such opinion at all.

S1: There are no ads that say, 'It is prestigious to be a lawyer.' [*I laugh—she is right about that*]. And then you think, 'Hmm…' Everyone knows the truth… (OSPU; Focus Group 3, November, 2013).
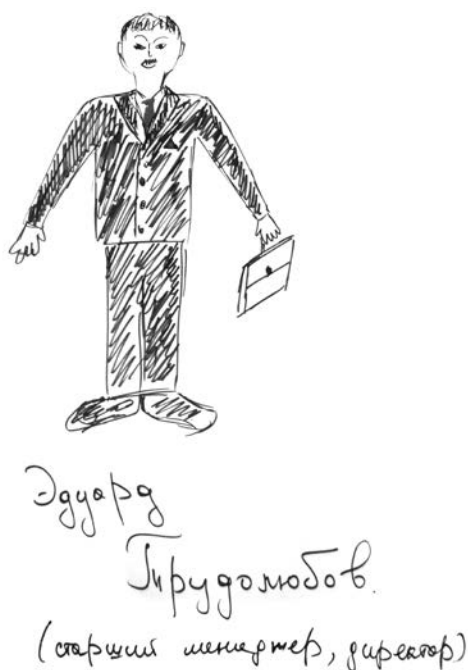
Students read the sign as a performance that by its very presence undermines its own message: why say that teaching is prestigious, if it

really were so? Other groups in discussing this billboard lamented a lack of respect afforded to a teacher, a teacher's diminished authority, and a teacher's low social status. Many students agreed that when they told their own teachers that they had entered a pedagogical university, their teachers were terrified and tried to talk them out of pursuing their degrees there. "Do you want to be like me?" they asked. In a society that used to hold teachers in high regard and in the nation where the state promoted teachers as its heroes (Counts 1961; Ewing 2004), this question reveals a dramatic change that is rarely acknowledged in policy texts or educational reform proposals.

Negative attention paid to teachers and schools on TV reflects broader social trends that affect students' choices. The scandalous TV series "Shkola" (Eng. *school*) that focused on teenagers' pursuit of sex, drugs and alcohol in schools, portrayed teachers as angry, incompetent and sex-craving losers. "The Geography Teacher Drank Away the Globe" both as a book and as a movie depicts the story of an alcoholic who aimlessly meanders into the school, fails as a teacher, takes a group of students on a highly dangerous trip, nearly seduces one of the female students, and gets fired afterwards. In these movies, spaces of schooling are represented as sites of moral decay and irrelevance. The bodies that occupy those spaces are there involuntarily; the minds take flight away from those spaces at every opportune moment.

The problem with these movies is that they were rarely approached as fiction. Guy Germanica's TV series "Shkola" make it impossible to imagine schools otherwise. Shot in the style of a documentary where the camera seems to follow naturally occurring events, it leaves little room for the viewer to contest the presented construction and conjure alternative images of schooling. Faculty teaching courses in pedagogy at pedagogical universities had to remind students that "not all schools are like the one in 'Shkola'" (OSPU; Field Notes, September, 2013). In policymaking circles, many treated those as accurate depictions of how much school changed and who teachers were—references to these movies were often used to underscore the importance of reforms.

Pre-service teachers are not impervious to the discourses of teachers as losers and schools as spaces that contain them. A moment of rupture during the Pedagogical Olympiad in Lyutvino revealed this tension to me. Students were asked to create a poster for any profession: one group drew a manager (Figure 3) and another one a Biology teacher (Figure 4). After the presentation, to the pedagogy professor's chagrin, students added glasses to the picture of the teacher and added details to her wardrobe that made her come across as "a bluestocking"—an unsuccessful angry woman. Underneath the picture, they also wrote, "I am walking all so …" (from a song by a Ukrainian cross-dresser Verka Serdyuchka—Verka "the Angry One"). The picture of the manager remained cheerful and positive, with his last

Figure 3. **Poster of a manager.**   Figure 4. **Poster of a Biology teacher.**

name "Trudolyubov"—"the one who loves work"—and the title of his job "senior manager, director" carefully scribbled underneath his picture.

The contrast of how these two occupations were presented and treated by students was particularly striking because it happened during the Pedagogical Olympiad created by one of the country's leading universities to support new generations of teachers and educators. If those who participate in the Olympiad reproduce the discourses of a teacher as a failure and, by extension, schools as sites where "losers" work, the problem of graduate employment in schools is not likely to be solved by reforming pedagogical universities. The constructions of perceived, lived, and conceived spaces of state schooling suggest that the problem of Russian education lies elsewhere and may require a wider collective effort on the part of Russian society to determine what role it will allow education to play and what place schools should occupy in its social life.

7. Conclusion   In this paper, I presented an analysis of how lived, perceived, and conceived spaces of schooling are connected with pre-service teachers' flight from the profession. After they see the teachers' plight in schools, pre-service teachers more often than not seek alternatives to state school employment. Even though my analysis is based on data

collected in the Russian Federation, it is relevant to other contexts as well as more countries seek new solutions for teacher recruitment and retention problems. I have argued throughout this piece, however, that the focus on spaces of schooling as they are constructed and represented is helpful for re-framing these problems. It helps us to see that any technical solutions of reformed teacher preparation are unlikely to change pre-service teachers' aspirations if schools do not change so as to become more welcoming and healthy spaces. Lefebvre's call to transform the space if one desires to see change is particularly important here. Yet this change is not about more reforms that may at times contradict each other or even further overwhelm teachers with more work. Rather this change is about providing teachers with support, autonomy, freedom, and room for creativity as well as about making school spaces appealing for bodies and minds. After all, for creative and productive activity to occur, the space has to be conducive to it.

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