

The End of Compulsory Education?

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Abstract. This article is inspired by Francis Fukuyama's book called *The End of History and the Last Man*. Yet, compulsory education is not regarded as a perfect model here. The existing school education system is unable to offer anything else to improve educational outcomes. The study attempts to analyze the conditions under which compulsory education developed as well as its features that impede the improvement of education quality. An alternative education system should

replace compulsory education to reach a higher level of quality. The transition to third-generation education standards may create a situation where a strategic trend for general education in Russia could be finally outlined. The fundamental provisions of the article are mostly expert judgments based on research into official documents, publications at hand, and personal experience. In addition, the article picks up the discussion on the balance between the goals and outcomes of general education initiated in earlier articles published in *Voprosy obrazovaniya* [Lebedev 2005; 2009; 2011; 2013].

Keywords: schools, education system, education system potential, compulsory education, alternative education, system-forming factors, education quality, education standards.

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Why the Soviet School Didn't Solve the Problem of Education Quality

The establishment and evolution of any education system implies solving the problems of education accessibility, quality and effectiveness. When determining the patterns of school education development, it makes sense to assess the potential of the Soviet education system, since its fundamental elements have been inherited by the post-Soviet era.

The major obvious achievement of the Soviet education system consisted in eradicating mass illiteracy of the adult population and providing universal compulsory education for children. According to the census of 1897, literacy of the population aged between 9 and 49 was 28.4%. The literacy rate in the Soviet Union was 87.01% in 1939, increasing to 99.7% in 1970 [Central Statistical Directorate of the USSR 1971:21]. Four-year compulsory primary education was introduced universally in the Soviet Union in 1934. The compulsory education period was extended to seven years in 1950–1956, followed

by eight years in 1958–1962. In the late 1960s, the country began the transition to compulsory secondary education for youth, which resulted in a considerable increase in the literacy rate for the economically active population. In 1987, there were 889 people with higher and secondary (complete or incomplete) education per every 1,000, as compared to 123 in 1939.

Advances in providing accessibility of school education were largely determined by its compulsory nature. Compulsory education as a principle of education system organization implies that the state undertakes to create conditions necessary for the universal education of children and children undertake to study in the conditions created. The focus is sometimes placed on one of these two components in the public perception.

It was a different case with solving the problem of education quality. The quality of any object or phenomenon is understood as the combination of its distinctive characteristics that have specific importance for satisfying the existing demands. Education quality is the combination of capabilities of an educated person acquired as a result of education and sufficient for solving problems of social and personal importance.

Such a definition means that education quality assessment criteria may change together with the understanding of opportunities provided by education and/or essential social and personal problems. Education quality that was considered to be good sometime ago may turn out to be unsatisfactory under new conditions. Discrepancies between new social expectations and existing education outcomes should be identified and resolved in a timely manner to ensure a required level of education quality. This is to say, education quality management may consist not in actually increasing the quality but in achieving a new type of quality, allowing students to develop capabilities for solving new problems emerging in the changing society.

It is rather difficult to give any unambiguous opinion about the quality of Soviet school education due to the absence of precise instruments. Besides, it should be borne in mind that any long-standing education system does solve the problem of quality to some extent, otherwise it wouldn't exist.

The quality of school education in the Soviet Union was consistently evaluated in documents that can be classified as prescriptive. Such documents invariably stressed the important role of school in achieving the missions assigned by the ruling party, while at the same time criticizing the quality of school education over a long period of time.

“The All-Russian Conference states that the quality of student knowledge remains low in most schools of the Republic, which is explained first of all by formalism <...> Formalism manifests itself in students retaining what they learn mechanically, passively, with-

out much comprehension, just memorizing verbal formul as deprived of any specific meaning, being unable to apply knowledge to real life” (All-Russian Conference on People’s Education, 1945).

“A major drawback in school performance is the dissociation between learning and real life, which results in graduates being underprepared for practical activity” (20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 1956).

“The Ministries of Enlightenment (People’s Education) of the Soviet Republics fail to take measures necessary to eliminate the existing in consistence between the education programs and curricula, on the one part, and the modern level of scientific knowledge, on the other part, and to reduce student overload with mandatory classes, all of this affecting the depth and durability of knowledge as well as student health” (Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union on Measures to Further Improve School Performance, 1966).

“School syllabi and textbooks are sometimes overloaded with redundant information of secondary importance, preventing students from developing creative thinking skills” (Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union on Further Improvement of School Education and Preparation of School Students for Working Life, 1977).

“The evolution in education has been slowing down lately, as compared to the international level <...> schools and universities are struggling to make their way out of the cobwebs of instructions, prescriptions and reports of all sorts that were woven around them during the past decades” (Egor Ligachyov’s report at the 1988 Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union).

The assessment of school education in prescriptive documents is quite consistent with the public opinion of that time about the major drawbacks of the Soviet school, which were growing more and more conspicuous.

Based on 150 articles on education issues published in periodicals (*Pravda*, *Komsomolskaya pravda*, *Literaturnaya gazeta*) between 1970 and 1982, the dominating judgments on schooling can be identified: school overreaches itself in attempting to prepare students for universities of different types; school is supposed to deliver the basics of sciences, but the syllabi include information that cannot be regarded as basic; today’s school students more actively express their protest against injustice and hypocrisy and have a stronger sense of self-esteem than earlier generations; the role of a textbook in the learning

process becomes a decisive factor of its effectiveness; the quality of knowledge shown by graduates is decreasing, while school performance indicators remain high; awareness of students about innovations in science, technology and culture is gradually exceeding that of teachers; gone are the days when teachers could expect absolute subordination from students.

The overall conclusion that can be drawn from the above mentioned documents is that school education was falling behind social demand more and more, preserving the same drawbacks decade after decade. This happened because the Soviet school represented an education system based on the ideology of duty. Its fundamental features are described in the article *Obrazovanie kak pravo i obyazannost'* [Education as a Right and Obligation] [Lebedev 2005]. They include: unification of curricula; detailed prescriptions for the learning process; no right for students to choose an educational trajectory; the obligation of students to retain not only facts, rules and scientific notions but evaluative judgments as well; a strict code of student behavior in and outside of school; encouragement of creative thinking only within the framework of the tasks assigned; prevalence of authoritarian methods in teaching; academic performance as the main indicator of educational effectiveness; seeing the goal of education in preparing for the future, not in achieving a new quality of life by students. In fact, the value basis of this education system was governed by the attitude toward school as a tool for preparing children for “grown-up life”, not as an important component of a child’s lifestyle.

The subject-class-and-lesson didactic system was rather easy to regulate and to use as a reliable tool of forced education, inevitable in a situation where all schools are uniform.

As students were losing interest in learning, especially in high school, the scope of school activities regulated from above was widening: not only the learning process but also its outcomes—performance rate—were now subject to regulations. With the reduced responsibility of students towards their academic achievements, the quality of education kept going down, whereas school performance approached 100%. School started losing its moral authority. As a result, the teaching staff underwent a qualitative transformation, undermining the potential of the education system even more.

School performance was assessed using imposed quantitative indicators: education coverage, performance rate, enrolment of graduates in professional education institutions, a set of “educative measures” applied, etc. As a consequence, prescriptive expectations were taken as the reality, eliminating any impartial basis for change management in education.

The Soviet school experience demonstrates that a situation where school performance is assessed by its compliance with imposed indicators is fraught with a considerable risk of reduction in school education quality.

Why the Soviet School Was Built Around the Ideology of Duty

As the orientation of schooling towards the ideology of duty was the main inhibitor of education quality management, a question arises: what were the fundamental factors of the Soviet school education system in general?

The system was conceived to achieve the goal of developing a universal labor school that would provide equal educational opportunities for all children, regardless of their families' socioeconomic status. However, it was specifically emphasized that a universal school would not imply school uniformity.

Anatoly Lunacharsky said at the First All-Russian Congress on Enlightenment held on August 26, 1918: "We don't want schools to be uniform in all governorates and uyezds. On the contrary, the more diversity, the better—yet, naturally, this diversity should have some obvious boundaries. We can't make children sit at desks for several hours, breathing dust and bad air. It won't be diversity, it will be hideosity." His speech was published by *Uchitelskaya gazeta* on March 15, 1988. In the same speech, he spoke for the decentralization of management in education and for the development of school autonomy.

The ideas of school democratization existed parallel to those of individualized instruction: "Maximum individualization of learning is a critical principle of the new school. Individualization should be understood as the process where teachers analyze aptitudes and personal traits of each student to adjust school opportunities and requirements as much as possible to their personal needs" (Lunacharsky A. *Osnovnye printsipy yedinoy trudovoy shkoly* [The Fundamental Principles of a Universal Labor School]). This work of Lunacharsky was also published by *Uchitelskaya gazeta* in 1988, namely on July 12, during preparations for the All-Union Congress of Education Workers, which was held in December that year.

The purpose of publishing Lunacharsky's works was clear: the principles underlying the education system that had developed by the late 1980s stood in stark contrast to the ones declared 70 years earlier: management centralization instead of decentralization, authoritarianism instead of the democratization of relationships in education, unification instead of individualized learning.

Therefore, a question is raised: why did the logic of providing a universal compulsory education lead to such a distortion of the fundamental principles of the education system?

Educational policy experienced a sharp turn in the early 1930s, when the famous resolutions of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks on school education issues were adopted. Their adoption was concurrent with the changes in the sociopolitical development of the country: the elimination of all opposition, the refusal of the New Economic Policy, the collectivization of the agricultural sector, the widespread use of terrorist techniques in management, etc. Processes like those could not leave the education sphere untouched. The overall meaning of the changes of the

late 1980s was described as the establishment of “Stalinist pedagogy” designed to turn the teacher into a state agent, whose autonomy was first suppressed and later unwanted by the teacher [Radzikhovsky 1988]. However, it would hardly be right to attribute the changes in the educational policy solely to the political factors specified above. The inner logic of development mattered as well, first of all in respect to the didactic component of the education system.

A serious attempt to withdraw from the subject-class-and-lesson system was made in the 1920s: comprehensive programs were becoming widespread, standard textbooks were often renounced, and team-based lab learning methods were used. The didactic changes were interrelated with the decentralization of the learning process management, the democratization of relationships among the learning process participants, and the orientation towards creative methodology for teachers.

The return to the subject-class-and-lesson system in the 1930s is explained by the fact that school performance did not conform to the requirements of higher professional education institutions. Using modern terminology, we can say that those requirements were not satisfied by the subject-specific outcomes of school education. Professional education requirements were determined by the demands of industrial society development. The incompliance of subject-specific outcomes of school education to those demands can be explained by the few chances for exploiting the potential of the alternative system due to the insufficient competencies of the teaching staff: there is no data on teacher education in the 1920s available, but the proportion of teachers with higher education diplomas was 14.2% in the academic year 1950/51 [Central Statistical Directorate of the Soviet Union 1971:105].

The turn to the subject-class-and-lesson learning system provoked changes in education management. The quality of subject-specific education outcomes was provided by regulating the learning process: a unified curriculum, unified syllabi, unified standard textbooks, and unified requirements to the lesson structure.

The above mentioned factors should also include the ideological one, which manifested itself, in particular, in the attitude toward the international experience. A statement in an article published by *Sovetskaya pedagogika* journal in 1973 can be considered typical of that time: “The accelerating scientific progress and the rapid obsolescence of knowledge require that working people of all levels and categories be prepared to the ongoing expansion, improvement and renewal of their knowledge. The same is required by the changes going on in the world and the growing involvement of general public in social and political life. The existing education systems do not prepare for that. Authoritarianism and dogmatism result in presenting knowledge as something unshakeable, complete and applicable unchanged for a lifetime. Such knowledge doesn’t inspire a person for a creative idea,

initiative, or innovation” (no 2, p. 123). The article applies this strong criticism to bourgeois education systems only. It asserts that “there is antiscience in the attempt to Illich and Reimer to attribute social peculiarities and basic features of bourgeois school and education to school and education in any society in general”.

In 1981, *Sovetskaya pedagogika* published an article on the approaches to educational effectiveness used by leading capitalist countries (no 10). It points out that “the United States and Western European countries elaborated new forms of learning process organization, continued modernizing the content of education and the teaching methods, determined new criteria to assess performance of educational institutions, and brought the traditional effectiveness strategies up to date.” Further on, the article talks about the purely class orientation of those measures taken in the era of drastic social transformation, when socialism was growing stronger and proliferating, while the instability of capitalism was becoming ever more obvious.

The closed nature of the education system and the contraposition of the Soviet school experience to international practices constricted the development opportunities of Soviet education. The country had developed a compulsory education system that only allowed some minor changes. The attitude toward the Western European and American schooling experience didn’t begin to change before the end of the Soviet era, with the attempts to identify progressive trends in the development of foreign educational practices [Dzhurinsky 1988].

The transition to universal education for children implied taking measures to make children obey adults’ requirements immediately and unquestionably. The then dominating views on the child and child’s nature tolerated violent methods. Such views began to change in the second half of the 20th century, which was reflected in the adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959) and in the development of humanistic pedagogy ideas. The attitude towards children as participants of the learning process was changing.

By that time, other factors determining the nature of the education system had begun to lose their importance: the demands of post-industrial society were being shaped, the political system was undergoing a transformation, and the skill level of the teaching staff had increased considerably.

Signs of a Soviet schooling crisis started manifesting themselves in the 1970s, during the transition to universal compulsory secondary education. With the development of mass media, TV initially, school was losing its monopoly on general education. Its significance as an institution of general education was gradually decreasing.

The existing education system provided equality of access to education and equal educational opportunities. The level of graduates’ competencies had long been improved by means of extending the period of schooling. However, this resource was exhausted after the transition to universal secondary education.

**How and Why the
“Hybrid” Education
System Appeared**

The transformational processes in education gave birth to the so-called “hybrid” system, an “educational Janus” looking into the ideology of duty with one eye and into the ideology of right with the other.

The 1990s witnessed a boost in school diversification. This was a step towards creating a system of diverse schools, in line with the ideology of right. The right to choose an education program was sustained by a pretty broad array of study guide methodologies. Additional conditions for enforcing this right were supposed to be provided by the transition to subject-oriented instruction in high school. The 2012 law On Education in the Russian Federation allowed the use of individualized curricula and seemed to support the ideology of right as well.

In reality, however, diversity in education programs received no further development; instead, the unification trend began to prevail. The differences between schools are determined more and more often by their position in the ranking showing their performance in implementing almost identical education programs. The law allows the development of customized programs adjusted to the specific features of the learning environment and student population, but in practice most curricula copy the sample ones. The orientation to unification is also confirmed by the attempts to bring the “unified textbook” back to life.

Implementation of the ideology of duty in the Soviet school was associated with strict regulation of school performance indicators. It would seem that the pressure of administrative institutions on schools designed to obtain the desired indicators has weakened over the last 25 years, as there is no real need for it anymore. On the one hand, performance indicators and the like have become familiar reference points for schools; on the other, schools whose enrolment depends on parental choice cannot ignore parental expectations about education outcomes. Yet, schools are still responsible for providing high USE¹ results and producing graduates on a regular basis.

Coercive measures in education are hampered by inertia, while their efficiency is on a downward trend: mass grade repetition is long gone, and very few students fear earning unsatisfactory academic quarter final grades, although school still has ways of poisoning a child’s life. Independently assessed final examinations become an ever more significant factor affecting student attitude towards the learning process. Some prerequisites are now created to get students and their parents more interested in education outcomes than teachers.

Understanding of education outcomes is most often restricted to subject-specific performance. Meanwhile, the possibility of compensating underachievement in a specific subject by other achievements in the same domain is virtually out of the question. As for meta-subject and personalized outcomes of learning, opinions vary: some teach-

¹ Unified State Exam

ers see them as another pedagogical slogan; some acknowledge their importance but pay little attention to them, because these outcomes are not analyzed or assessed in any way; and others regard them as the ultimate goal of teaching.

The school preserves its orientation towards familiar academic performance indicators, which mostly matter for students from the perspective of further education, while having little relevance to the development of a life philosophy and skills important for their personal fulfillment.

There are signs that the professional community is gradually recognizing the need to assess education outcomes on the basis of individual advancement of students in various learning activities instead of using the degree of approximation to the accepted standard. Yet, the orientation towards the familiar educational effectiveness indicators is still prevailing, as the actual responsibility for their achievement is imposed overwhelmingly (and often exclusively) at school.

The subject-class-and-lesson system is preserved as well. The subject link of this system has undergone some changes: along with traditional academic subjects, schools have begun to offer optional courses that cannot be always attributed to the basics of a specific science. Other formats of learning are emerging, apart from the lesson; conventional classes coexist sometimes with other student groupings. These “deviations” prove the retreat from comprehensive regulation in education; however, the orientation towards unification and academic performance is still prevailing.

Schools continue to focus on achieving the required outcomes, which are controlled by the state final examination system. Thereby, students gain experience of fulfilling others’ prescriptions. At the same time, just as in the Soviet era, efforts are made to compensate for the strictly mandatory nature of classes by creating an uncontrolled space in terms of out-of-school activities. However, attempts to regulate even this sphere have been observed over the last years, as the new education standards have been introduced. Such attempts are not designed to consider children’s interests or strengthen the ties between classroom and out-of-school learning; they are induced by the requirement to submit statements of application of funds allocated for out-of-class learning activities. As a result, there is a risk of reduction in time resources that students can use at their sole discretion, including time required for doing homework. In the end, the possibility of education quality deterioration is increased.

In analyzing the effects of transformational processes on the fundamental values of the Russian education system, we can conclude that changes focus on the “right for education”, while preserving the overall orientation towards the “ideology of duty”.

The “hybrid” system owes its existence to the contradictory nature of the transformational processes going on in society as a whole and in education in particular.

The notion of *transformation* is used in sociology to discriminate between “change” and “modernization”. Vladimir Yadov called attention to the fact that “...transformations may have any direction: it can be copying of an image, or moving horizontally with due regard for peculiarities, so to say, or going back to “the good old days” lost due to intrigues of internal and external enemies—all of these changes happening, of course, “for the better”. The trouble is that everyone understands “the better” in their own way” [Yadov 2006: 9].

As Yadov emphasized, the differences in social changes are determined by the existence of two types of matrixes of social being: western and eastern. These historically developed matrixes each reproduce their own type of social attributes, which are strikingly different in western and eastern countries. In an eastern-type matrix, social life is dominated by the state, which represents a rigid hierarchical structure. Non-governmental civil institutions are developed extremely poorly. Contrastingly, horizontal ties within the civil society are the shaping factor of western-type matrixes.

The idea of two matrixes seeking to reproduce specific types of social institutions can be applied to explain the transformational processes in school education. Two “sociocultural matrixes” defining the fundamental values of education systems manifested themselves most conspicuously in discussions of the late 1980s–early 1990s. The matrixes were reflected in two conceptions developed at the very end of the Soviet epoch. They were published by *Uchitelskaya gazeta* on October 18, 1988, shortly before the All-Union Congress of People’s Education Workers. One of the conceptions was elaborated by the working group of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of the Soviet Union (APS), and the other by the Basic School Interim Research and Development Team (IRDT) headed by Eduard Dneprov, Artur Petrovsky, and Vasily Davydov. Both teams proceeded from the need for an in-depth transformation of the secondary education system, justifying this need in different ways though.

The first conception rested upon the demands of the state and the need to ensure a reformation of Soviet society. It argued that “young people should understand the policies of the Communist Party and the Soviet State <...> They should be creatively productive, business-oriented, socially enterprising and proactive, with a thrifty attitude to business, and willing to accept sole responsibility for the future of the country and socialism.” The other conception blamed the pre-crisis of school on its one-legged orientation: the school had begun to work solely for the benefit of the state: “The nationalization of school transformed it into a closed-type, nearly secure facility. The child’s interests and society’s needs have been gradually forced out of the school.”

The conceptions also differed in their approaches to defining the goals of school education. The APS conception was premised on prescriptive expectations: what a personality should be like from the per-

spective of a specific ideology. The IRDT conception relied on reality: actual existing problems and the opportunities available at the school.

The gap between the two approaches could be observed in the attitude toward universal compulsory secondary education. *Izvestiya* newspaper published two articles touching upon the issue on December 15, 1988. One of them read: “The APS conception agrees with the publications whose authors, while declaring the universal right for education, would like to cancel the universality of secondary education by releasing sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds from the responsibility of obtaining such comprehensive secondary education and their parents from the responsibility of helping their children complete such education. Will the society win in this case? Won’t be students and their parents misguided by such an apocryphally democratic and blatantly simplified approach to the universal nature of secondary education?” The opponents replied: “Life has demonstrated unmistakably what coerced learning can lead to. Haven’t we had enough rough time with compulsoriness that changed into coercion?! Wasn’t it this compulsoriness that “allowed for” the depreciation of school certificates, the drop in education quality, the obsession with rankings, and large-scale false reporting that destroyed the moral image of the school?”

Both attitudes were represented in the All-Union Congress of Education Workers and later in the practical measures taken to develop the education system. Fundamentally, the two approaches differed in being oriented toward interests of different education participants—hence, education systems with different “centers of gravity”, one state-centered and the other child-centered. The interests of the state and children can not be defined as opposite, yet they may be conflicting.

The approaches described above are represented in the Russian educational community even now, almost 30 years after the discussions were analyzed. Moreover, they sometimes combine most surprisingly in everyday teaching practices, ultimately maintaining the orientation towards prescriptive expectations as the key characteristic of the compulsory education system.

It was not only about the processes going on in the social macrosystem. It was also about the teacher-centered education system that began to replace the state-centered one in the 1990s and focused not so much on prescriptive expectations as on what was feasible given the actual resources of an educational institution. In some cases, this orientation resulted in a boost of creative teaching methods, in others it only increased teachers’ abuse of power and nostalgia for the Soviet school.

How Education Quality Is Changing

The school education system has undergone many more changes over the past quarter of a century than over the last 25 years of the Soviet era. Can it be said without prejudice that these changes have improved education quality a lot?

The public is convinced that education quality has decreased: 46% of Russians believe that the quality of school education is getting worse, and 56% conceive that they obtained a better education than their children are offered. Such are the results of a study conducted by the Public Opinion Foundation².

Fifty years ago, education was usually understood as the process and outcome of retaining systematized knowledge, competencies and skills³. This perspective of education goals can often be found today as well. In-depth, comprehensive and durable knowledge is the indicator of education quality in terms of this approach.

The value of education is understood differently within the competency-based approach that has become widespread over the last few decades. Education can be defined as a specifically organized process where a child develops an ability to independently solve problems of social and personal importance in various domains by learning social experience, of which individual experience is an integral part. Under this approach, education quality is primarily indicated by the level of education achieved by students that allows for pursuing a graduate education, socialization, self-cognition and self-determination.

A knowledge-oriented approach to school education quality assessment prevails within public opinion, as proved, in particular, by parent surveys. USE testing and assessment materials are designed first of all to identify subject-specific performance, i. e. skills and competencies in specific disciplines.

USE results allow for the conclusion that there have been no signs of any considerable improvement of knowledge indicators of education outcomes: the average scores were higher in 2016 than in 2013 in some of the subjects and lower in others. Improvements in the USE results can be explained by certain changes in the school education system to some extent only. Rather, they are explained by an increased amount of time spent by students in order to achieve the desired outcomes (tutor training, pre-entry courses, etc.). If the enhancement of education outcomes is primarily associated with increased student workload, it can hardly be regarded as an indicator of education quality.

Positive changes are observed in PISA results. In 2015, the average performance improved by 36 points in reading literacy (as compared to 2009), 26 points in mathematical literacy (as compared to 2003), and 8 points in scientific literacy (as compared to 2006). The indicators achieved are slightly higher or lower than the average OECD results, yet Russia is still falling behind the top-ranking countries. Changes in PISA outcomes reflect the inconsistency of the processes

² Ogonek, no 38 (2016), p. 7.

³ Sovetskaya entsiklopediya(1966) *Pedagogicheskaya entsiklopediya* [Pedagogical Encyclopedia], Moscow, vol. 3, p. 141.

taking place in education: the system-activity approach ideas are penetrating teaching practices, but the transformation is taking too long.

Some obvious downfalls are also observed, as compared to the Soviet school. The universal education system is based on using adapted texts in the learning process, but it should also provide experience of working with authentic cultural phenomena. In school practice, these include mainly literary works, but many believe that today's school children read less than previous generations.

Society is undergoing changes that impose new education quality requirements: the proportion of mental labor is growing, new forms of business organization are emerging, political life is being liberalized, and the choice of leisure activities is widening. However, there is still no convincing evidence that the education system is able to respond to the existing challenges.

Changes in education outcomes will be enabled by changes in the quality of the learning process, which depends largely on the students' attitude towards this process. The proportion of students appreciating school as an educational institution is falling, according to Semyon Vershlovsky's findings. When assessing the significance of school education, 67% of respondents agreed that school had given them knowledge in 2009, as compared to 82% in 2001 [Vershlovsky, Matyushkina 2011; Vershlovsky 2010]. Academic honesty is an important indicator of attitude to learning. A number of studies in higher education have been devoted to academic fraud in recent years, in particular to plagiarism and cheating [Maloshonok 2016; Shmeleva 2016]. Obviously, universities enroll yesterday's school students who already have some experience in plagiarizing and cheating. This practice is established and consolidated in a situation where performance indicators matter more than practical outcomes. The school itself may sometimes encourage this practice of demonstrating the should-be indicators of its performance. Therefore, there is every reason to believe that the existing "hybrid" system doesn't have enough potential to solve education quality problems in the rapidly changing society.

What an Alternative Education System Could Be Like

Qualitative changes should happen to the education system to enable it to solve the problem of education quality in the changing society. The need for such changes is justified in the article *Education as a Right and Obligation* [Lebedev 2005]: a new type of education quality has to be achieved to ensure the transition from literate to educated society; theoretical and methodological knowledge on the ways of increasing the quality of learning has been accumulated; transition to customized learning is under way, and conditions have been created for the selection of educational institutions and education programs by students and their families.

The basic characteristics of an education system alternative to the compulsory one have been outlined over the last decade. They

have been mentioned in publications by Alexander Asmolov, Anatoly Kasprzhak, Katerina Polivanova, Isaak Froumin and other education researchers [Asmolov 2012; Kasprzhak, Bysik 2014; Polivanova 2006] as well as in expert reports [Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation 2007; Volkov et al. 2008].

Skolkovo educational complex projects are a good example of designing a specific education system based on new didactic and management approaches. The projects suggest preserving the subject-class-and-lesson system at the existing stage of education development, while implying substantial changes in each of the elements of this didactic system. These projects underline that the content of education is not specific subjects but the mode of action taught with the help of those subjects, i. e. children learn not so much a subject itself but also the thinking, communication and behavioral patterns demonstrated by the teacher, as well as by the students themselves. The projects also elaborate the idea of shaping a package of education programs (meta-subject, subject-specific and individualized). The authors believe that any syllabus should be constructed not only as a program for learning subject content but also as a program for personal growth, development of necessary life skills, and gaining self-instruction experience. The projects promote the idea of using various internal class structures at each stage of school education as well as adding the format of mixed-age mobile teams to the class-based system. They suggest refusing linear time tables and using diverse forms of learning organization instead (mixed-aged lessons, adult/child design seminars, subject immersion, academic workshops, tutor training, etc.). These are only some of the project suggestions presented in the Skolkovo Schools Competition.

The conception of the new school education system is articulated quite clearly in the pedagogical manifesto *Gumanisticheskaya pedagogika: XXI v.* [Humanistic Pedagogy: The 21st Century] written by Alexander Adamsky, Alexander Arkhangelsky, Vladimir Sobkin, Igor Remorenko, Tatyana Kovaleva, and other professionals famous within the community. These and other publications all contain answers to the question: whom should school teach what, how, and why?

Radically different answers can be given to this question, as proved by school education practices and educational project development experience.

Two options are offered for the question “Whom to teach?”: (i) everyone who is obliged to attend school; and (ii) everyone who has the right to obtain a school education. Education is regarded as an obligation in the former case and as a right in the latter. Obligation suggests orientation towards the state’s interests, while right implies the focus on students, thus providing the opportunity of choosing between educational institutions and education programs.

The answer to the question “How to teach?” has to do with the learning process organization and the choice of teaching methods.

Learning has traditionally been organized within the framework of the subject-class-and-lesson system. At the same time, however, there have been numerous attempts to renounce this system or at least to retreat from it in some aspects.

Meanwhile, there can be different degrees of learning process regulation within such a system: prescriptions apply to either (i) all the learning process components and outcomes or (ii) the learning environment required for providing high academic achievements alone. In the first case, schools face the academic performance requirement, which means that different children should digest the same curriculum within the same period of time. In the second case, focus is placed on the requirement to create conditions for the individual progress of all children within the same academic period. Such progress may take the form of objectively different achievements which, nevertheless, have the same value in terms of the development of a student's potential. Thus, schools search for either coercive teaching methods, as in the first case, or methods to promote cognitive thinking, as in the second.

When the learning process is comprehensively regulated, it becomes unified; refusal from comprehensive regulation means recognizing the value of diversity and the multivariance in education.

Answers to the question "What to teach?" can also vary. Two alternative options can be identified, proceeding from the goal-oriented nature of education: (i) achieving required outcomes; and (ii) fulfilling one's educational opportunities. In terms of everyday teaching practices, it means coaching students for USE tests in the first case and helping them see their opportunities and ways of fulfilling them in the second one.

Possible answers to the question "Why teach?" are rather unambiguous: (i) for the sake of the future; and (ii) for the sake of improving the quality of life "here and now".

The differences in the answers to these questions are explained by the differences in the fundamental values of the education systems. In one case, education is treated mainly as a tool for solving problems important for the state, while in the other as the ultimate value, a factor of personality's potential development, and an integral component of lifestyle. Therefore, the education system is centered around the ideology of duty in the first case and around the ideology of right in the second one.

In constructing an alternative model of the education system, we can use the higher education modernization experience based on the principles of liberal education. The fourth issue of *Voprosy obrazovaniya/Educational Studies Moscow* journal in 2015 was largely devoted to this experience. The liberal education model can be implemented as a system alternative to compulsory education.

An analysis of the practices described in publications identifies the following liberal education system characteristics applicable in the school context:

- Development of the attitude towards education as an important factor in improving the quality of life in students by following up on and satisfying their educational demands;
- The broad scope of general education implying equivalence of all domains along with identification of three components—humanities, science and engineering—in each domain;
- Individualized educational trajectories based on the independent choice of courses within the selected domains, the level of immersion in compulsory subjects, sources of information and problems to solve, interim assessment methods, supplementary education and self-education programs (provided that students have enough free time to make all these choices);
- The use of interactive teaching strategies, which imply a lot of independent work (written and oral statements, research, critical analysis of one's own texts, etc.), and workshops on independent learning techniques;
- The interdisciplinary nature of curriculum, which includes not only subject-centered but also meta-subject programs put into practice by combining different subjects and building strong ties between learning and extracurricular activities;
- Students developing higher personal responsibility for the choice of a customized education program and its outcomes step by step (as they are getting older); changes in the area of school responsibility as well: focus on creating conditions necessary for effective learning;
- Integration of the system of curators to support students in their independent learning.

Naturally, the enumerated characteristics have to be tailored for each specific stage of school education. Yet, the factors shaping the education system remain the same for every stage: attitude toward education as the right of students to select an individual trajectory for developing their personal potential by educational means; school responsibility for creating conditions necessary for making and fulfilling this choice; and responsibility of students for using the provided conditions to develop their personal potential. While the compulsory education system is oriented at prescriptive expectations, individual progress is the fundamental focus of liberal education.

A change in the system-forming factors and, consequently, in the key characteristics of the education system will result in creating a value environment that will become the main driver for achieving the new type of education quality.

Such a value environment appreciates the following:

- Independence, not prompt obedience;
- Thirst for the truth, not being able to give “correct answers”;
- Individuality, not uniformity;

- Teamwork skills, but not susceptibility to group influence;
- Willingness to assume personal responsibility in a risky situation instead of leaving the decision to others;
- The ability to encourage learning, not the ability to teach.

The list of values may differ from the above, but the design of any education system should inevitably include a description of the value environment to be constructed.

Having the idea of an alternative education system in mind is an indispensable yet insufficient condition for a qualitative change in education. Real opportunities for such change will appear if it receives support from teachers, students, school administrators, and the public. The evolution of attitude toward education and cross-actor educational relationships, which act as a system-forming factor, is a sophisticated process, controlled and unpredictable at the same time. Educational relationships are affected by managerial decisions, but the latter, in turn, are affected by the attitude of education system players.

National education standards could contribute a lot to changing the situation in the context of the “hybrid” education system.

Where the Point of Bifurcation Will Be

Third-generation education standards, which haven't yet been presented, at least in the form of the first drafts, will inevitably determine the vector of further transformation in school education—whether preserving and improving the existing compulsory education system or creating the conditions for transition to an alternative one.

Based on the possible functions and role of education standards, we will try to determine the specific characteristics of second-generation standards and the distinctive features of the third-generation ones [Lebedev 2011].

Federal state education standards for primary, middle and secondary school contain the chapter called *Requirements to Education Outcomes Obtained Within the Basic Education Program*, i. e. they standardize academic performance indicators. The complete secondary education standard provides a detailed description of expected personal achievements (15 items), meta-subject performance (9 items), and subject-specific education outcomes (222 items in total). The “Portrait of a Graduate” (11 items) should also be added to this list. The same detailed elaboration of requirements to education outcomes can be observed in primary and middle education standards.

The standards do not specify the proportion of students able to achieve results conforming to all the requirements. They say nothing about how these requirements could be used to assess a specific situation, e. g. to assess the effectiveness of the whole education system, its regional or municipal levels, or the performance of individual

schools. Obviously, such requirements can not be applied to individual students in final examinations. Otherwise, most graduates would lose their right to a certificate due to at least one unsatisfied requirement (e. g. due to the lack of competency in the main types of professional military activities, item 11 in the Safety and Health chapter of the secondary education standard).

In addition, there are no regulatory documents to stipulate who should and how they should assess the compliance of real-life education outcomes to the standard requirements. This way, the standards required for education outcomes obtained within basic education programs rather tend to resemble pedagogical slogans in practice.

The extent to which the education program implementation requirements stipulated by the standards should be compulsory remains unclear too. It is not specified who should monitor fulfillment or analyze compliance of real-life conditions to those prescribed, or what the possible effects of noncompliance could be.

Standards can regulate education content as one of their functions. Curriculum structure and content are regulated in great detail (the secondary education standard contains about 60 requirements in regards to the content of basic education programs), while the learning process as such is not regulated too strictly. The standards contain curriculum instructions and assessment requirements; however, they provide no distinct learning process assessment criteria. In the context of the existing management practices, characterized by a high level of bureaucratization, the school often concentrates its efforts on preparing relevant documents to comply with the standard requirements instead of focusing on changes in the learning process.

Second-generation standards mostly regulate the process of goal setting, since performance requirements are in fact articulated as the goals of education. The extent to which the goal achievement process is regulated gives enough freedom for creative methodology in the development of programs and the choice of teaching techniques. The same can be said about the regulation of the system designed to assess the achievement of expected education outcomes.

It would seem that the focus on requirements and the low extent to which the outcome achievement process is regulated open the door to pedagogical innovations designed to improve the quality of the learning process. In reality, however, creative pedagogy opportunities are used rarely and by few teachers. It is not only about the qualification level or workload, it is also about how education outcomes are regulated. If such regulation has no significant practical relevance due to the vague status of outcome requirements, it will not affect the learning process in any way: outcomes required in practice can be achieved without much change. The opportunity for creative pedagogy exists but can be easily omitted.

If we approach third-generation education standards as a means of regulating the transition from compulsory education to an alterna-

tive education system, we can suggest a few hypotheses on the prerequisites required for the standards to fulfill this function.

The underlying hypothesis consists of the following: national education standards can become a means of regulating the transition from compulsory education to an alternative education system if the scope of their regulation is restricted to management problems that should be solved at the level of individual educational institutions.

This hypothesis is customized for particular chapters of the education standards.

Hypothesis 1. Education standards can serve as a tool for change management in education if:

- They inherently set the goal of such change;
- They determine the importance of change for every category of education system players;
- They determine the importance of compliance with the standards for educational institutions.

The first chapter of the existing standards describes the desired social effects of standard implementation, the expected personal characteristics of graduates, and the types of management and methodological activities to carry out on the basis of the standards.

For education system players, transition to an alternative system will be associated with higher decision-making autonomy in the context of a broader choice of options, and at the same time with greater responsibility for their own decisions. Access to a wider array of opportunities should be provided for the development and implementation of authentic education programs by school administrators, syllabi by teachers, and individualized educational trajectories by families. Otherwise speaking, standards should allow for unorthodoxy and promote diversity in education.

To change the status of standards and increase their importance for educational institutions, it would make sense to change the very first item in the existing standards. It says that the standard represents a set of requirements to be fulfilled by nationally accredited educational institutions. It would be more important to emphasize that national accreditation is available for educational institutions complying with all the standards.

The proposed changes may develop a different attitude toward standards, initially on the part of school administrators and teachers, who would treat them not as prescriptions they should respond to but as new opportunities for solving the existing problems in education.

Hypothesis 2. Educational effectiveness can be increased if education standards:

- Confine themselves to indicating the level of education to be achieved at the stage of primary, middle or secondary education instead of giving a detailed description of required education outcomes;
- Stipulate that every educational institution determines independently the education outcomes, specifying and exceeding the standard requirements, that it guarantees to achieve and indicate the relevant assessment methods.

The necessary level of education in primary school may be identified as common literacy, which is indicated by the retention of universal learning activities. This level should guarantee the opportunity of successful learning in middle school, which, in turn, should guarantee achievement of the level of functional literacy sufficient to continue education and solve socialization problems.

Complete secondary education should ensure achievement of general cultural and pre-professional competencies at the level sufficient for solving self-identification problems.

Of course, levels of education defined in such a way can easily be subjected to criticism. Therefore, in this phase of discussing the conception of third-generation education standards, it would be essential to develop the fundamental understanding of the main outcomes to be achieved by students at each specific stage of school education using the opportunities acquired at the relevant stage.

If standards stipulate the minimum requirements to education outcomes, complete fulfillment of which entitles a student to a certificate of the relevant level of education, each school will face the necessity to declare the level of education (including supplementary) it can provide beyond the minimum standard. Obligations of this type will only make sense if the standards require that schools specify in their education programs who is going to assess education outcomes, and how.

Such an approach to defining education outcomes will not be accepted by all schools. However, it will find support from the most advanced schools or those seeking to achieve this status.

Hypothesis 3. The quality of the learning process in school can be improved if standards:

- Refrain from elaborating detailed requirements to the structure and content of programs that make up the overall education program of an educational institution (universal learning activity development program, character-building and socialization program, syllabi for specific subjects and extracurricular activities, and correctional program) and confine themselves to defining the problems to be solved by such programs;

- Set individualized education program development and implementation goals, for the achievement of which schools will be held responsible;
- Require that individual characteristics of education programs be justified by the specific nature of the student population, learning environment, unique school traditions, etc.

In this case, the focus of education management will shift from preparing documents showing compliance with the standard requirements to tailoring the learning process to fit into the existing socio-cultural context.

Education standards must provide not uniformity but rather diversity of schools, so that the latter can use their potential and individual opportunities more effectively. Education programs that serve as schools' internal standards must provide for the pluralism of individual educational trajectories, including various forms of individual progress in specific subjects. It is highly probable that such orientation will require schools to develop and implement customized education programs for specific classes, which will dramatically increase the role of class teachers in the organization of the learning process. This will necessitate the creation of the institution of "mobile class teachers" capable of performing tutoring functions.

Hypothesis 4. The significance of education standards for the provision of conditions necessary to achieve the required quality of the learning process can be increased if the standards:

- Specify which group of education system players these conditions are created for;
- Determine who will be responsible for the provision of said conditions;
- Require that schools specify in their education programs the conditions beyond the required minimum that they will guarantee to provide.

In this case, instead of classifying the conditions by type, *Requirements to Education Outcomes Obtained Within the Basic Education Program* will use "target-based classification": conditions for students; conditions for teaching staff; conditions for students' parents; and common conditions (relating to all education system players).

Some conditions are already required from all schools without exception (although they are not always absolutely categorical): fire safety requirements, health and hygiene requirements, requirements for the provision of students with study materials, etc. In practice, many conditions that play an essential role for education system players differ from school to school. Such differences will always exist. The challenge consists not only in creating conditions required to provide

a normal learning process but also in promoting the modernization of those conditions by schools and education authorities. The education program of each individual school must indicate the conditions that the school can provide beyond the required minimum.

* * *

A change in the national education standards is an insufficient yet indispensable prerequisite for transition to an alternative education system. The introduction of new standards implying a higher level of school autonomy in constructing education programs will make the school more open to cooperation with parents. The need for synergy with science, typical of the first half of the 1990s, will increase again. All of this will result in a qualitative change of the school's learning environment and fundamental values.

Analysis of the school education system's potential in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods allows us to conclude not only that refusal of compulsory education is inevitable but also that transition to an alternative education system is possible.

This possibility has to be used to achieve a new quality of education conforming to the challenges of the 21st century. Considerable changes in education quality are not impossible, provided that quality management methods change and the techniques that used to be effective at an earlier stage are abandoned. International practice confirms this conclusion [Barber, Mourshed2008].

Comprehensive regulation of all the learning process components was the main quality management method used at the stage of establishing the system of universal school education to provide accessibility of the latter. The approach began to lose its effectiveness when the social problem of providing access to education began turning into a pedagogical one.

Orientation toward uniformity was losing its significance quickly in the context of universal secondary education. Education quality management based on the diversification of educational institutions led to the development of discrepant trends in education, giving birth to the "hybrid" education system.

Under the existing conditions, the role of the system-forming factor is assumed by the individualization of the learning process, which implies increasing the degree of autonomy and responsibility in every group of education system players: students—in the choice and implementation of individual educational trajectories, and teachers—in the individualization of the ways to prepare students to make this choice.

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