

Literary Education: What Key Stakeholders Think

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Received in August 2019

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Abstract. In order to determine the structure of literary education, i. e. the school literature demands of the key

stakeholders in education as well as the institutions and resources used to satisfy those demands, we analyze the term “literary education”, describing the long-established approach to interpreting the underlying concept, and use findings of qualitative sociological studies, such as focus groups and in-depth interviews with teachers, librarians, parents, college and high-school students. For all the interpretation differences, what the stakeholders have in common is the extremely low perceived role of school literature courses and libraries, along with searching for ways to satisfy the existing demands in other forms of acquiring literary knowledge and gaining reader experience.

Keywords: stakeholders in education, literary education, qualitative research in sociology, school, library, family, teachers, parents, teenagers, self-reflection, demands.

DOI: 10.17323/1814-9545-2020-1-159-181

Literary education today is a complex, multicomponent process involving a broad variety of social institutions. Approaches to literary education, its organization and efficiency have been increasingly problematized by stakeholders and researchers. What is it actually for? Should it be compulsory? Why is the school failing to raise a skilled reader, and often any reader at all? Which institutions, apart from the school, are and should be involved in this process?

This study, conducted by the Laboratory of Sociocultural Educational Practices of Moscow City University, aims at assessing the performance of Moscow institutions of literary education based on the opinions of key stakeholders capable of self-reflection. Findings of qualitative sociological research — focus groups and expert interviews — done as part of the project provided the foundation for analysis.

**Defining
“Literary
Education”**

As a starting point, we analyze the definitions of “literary education”. Investigating the term’s origin and history, we outline how its interpretation affected literature education and how modern teaching practices have been changing.

Viktor Chertov, a historian of literature teaching methodology, documents the emergence of the term in his monograph *Russian Literature in Pre-Revolutionary School*, quoting the poet Mikhail Dmitriev’s memoirs: “Back in the days of Zhukovsky and in my day¹, literary education was given the highest priority at the university’s noble boarding school. Sciences were in place, but Anton Antonovich Prokopovich-Antonsky, the never-to-be-forgotten head of the school, seemed to find general education more useful than specialized classes, the former being many-sided and satisfying a greater number of needs both in personal and professional life.” [Chertov 2013:38] Remarkably, “literary education” is interpreted as designed to satisfy the students’ needs; we assume that “literary education” in that boarding school was not limited to mandatory courses in rhetoric and poetics but also involved participation of students in literary meetings, where their writings and translations were critically reviewed and works of contemporary literature were read and discussed.

The phrase “literary education” came into wide use through the works of Viktor Ostrogorsky, who understood it as ethico-aesthetic education by literary means which involved literary analysis as well as emotional and moral assessment of literary oeuvres. In fact, he equated literary education with the gymnasium course in language arts, though pointing out that “language arts, as a discipline, is not to be understood solely in the narrow sense of prose and poetry (rhetoric and poetics) and history of literature. Language arts is the totality of the so-called literary education acquired by a boy during his years at the gymnasium, from the earliest grades until grade seven or eight.” [Ostrogorsky 1941:157] Later works by Ostrogorsky and his contemporary Vladimir Stoyunin defined approaches to the content and structure of the gymnasium course in literature of the 19th–early 20th century, which survived into the school literature curricula of the Soviet Union and present-day Russia. Methodology, and soon daily teaching practices as well, thus became focused on the school course of literature.

To illustrate this thought, let us refer to a glossary entry proposed by Elena Tselikova, a modern St. Petersburg-based educational specialist. The entry begins with a definition: “Literary education in school is a process and outcome of absorbing systematized literary knowledge and competencies acquired during the school years and necessary for a full-fledged perception of language arts and for the development of speech culture and creative skills. Accordingly, the main

¹ Zhukovsky was a boarding school student in 1797–1801.

spheres of literary education include reading, analysis and interpretation of literary texts, theory and history of literature, and individual creative writing.” [Tselikova 2015:184] Further on, in line with the established tradition, the article discusses the purposes and stages of literary education, making reference, in particular, to the federal state learning standard for literary education. Basically, the *Glossary* documents the state of things that took its origin with Ostrogorsky, limiting literary education to the literature course both temporally (school years) and spatially (classroom lessons, with rare extracurricular activities).

Today’s occasional discussions on the content of literary education are mostly focused on the required reading list but provide no analysis of the structure of literary education as a combination of formal and informal practices. Meanwhile, informal practices do exist; being oriented toward the reader’s interests and needs, they allow defining literary education in a different way today, as “a process of mastering a system of literary knowledge and skills that allow the reader to perceive belles-lettres as the art of writing, develop their personal reading interests, worldview, philosophy of life, consciousness, behavioral patterns, and a deep need to fully satisfy their reading interests through independent and purposeful action. The process of literary education is a component of socialization that secondary school is supposed to provide. The distinctive nature of literary education is determined by that of literature as a discipline and as the art of writing, as well as by the complex effects that reading and individual cognition have on the development of students’ spiritual world, moral values, taste for art, and aesthetic needs. As an outcome of literary education, students must be able to evaluate literary works against their own operational and terminal values and in their own very special way. The structure and content of literary education as well as grade-specific differences are regulated by a number of normative documents, the national school curriculum in the first place [Sitchenko, Gladyshev 2014:83] Importantly, this definition does not limit “literary education” to studying literature at school, much less to literature classes. And, while the final paragraph defines literary education as a formal type of education within the school curriculum framework, this definition outlines a new approach to literary education oriented toward shaping and satisfying students’ needs and teaching them reading behavior models. Based on the same premise, we explored the infrastructure of reading (a 2017/18 academic year project), examining “the key components of a reading person’s behavior, represented as a description of generalized purposes or situations, and only then the institutions involved in shaping or satisfying the reader’s needs.” [Asonova et al. 2018:29]

This year, our research was targeted at stakeholders in literary education and what they thought about the relevant institutions. We assume that modern stakeholders do not perceive literary educa-

tion exclusively as teaching literature in school, as it goes far beyond that. Here, literary education is broadly interpreted as involving not only formal institutions (schools, public and school libraries) but informal ones, too (book reading clubs, etc.). Other institutions—such as theaters, museums (not only literary ones), cinema, and others—can also act as providers of literary education. While their primary goals are not related directly to the purposes of literary education, in reality they do contribute to such education, especially when teachers integrate them into the learning process. Finally, family is another obvious institution of literary education, as that is where reading experience usually begins. This article thus seeks to explore the problems of such institutions of literary education as school, family, and libraries.

Study Background

The sociological survey reported in this article was largely qualitative. Five focus groups were conducted with stakeholders in literary education capable of self-reflection on the issues raised: Moscow literature teachers and school librarians, parents and grandmothers willing to get their school-aged children and grandchildren into reading, and 17- to 18-year-old freshmen of Moscow colleges. The latter had just finished their school literature course, so the problems they had faced were still relevant. They also still had fresh memories of their school experience, yet an outside perspective already—more generalized and reflective. Besides, they had no fear that their judgment would somehow affect their academic performance.

At this stage, we did not include school students into the focus groups, assuming that it would be hard for them to analyze the institutions of literary education. However, we are going to include them in our further studies.

Focus groups were designed to find out which institutions of literary education and reading promotion were valued the most by key stakeholders in education, what problems they identified, and what possible solutions they could see.

In addition, a series of expert interviews were conducted with teachers, librarians, and other persons concerned, in which they expressed their opinion about the problems of literary education in Moscow, shared their practices of raising a competent reader, and proposed ways of solving the existing problems.

Before we zero in on the major problems experienced by the institutions of literary education, let us analyze what key stakeholders consider to be the purposes of literary education and why they believe the system should promote reading in children. That reading promotion is highly desirable is beyond argument in the Russian society (particularly among women). This is one of the greatest paradoxes in the modern sociocultural system that we have observed. Literature centrism has been gradually fading away as long as the intelligentsia has been losing its prestige—it was already in 1993 that sociologists spotted

this trend [Dubin, Gudkov 2009]. That is why school students inevitably find themselves faced with the problem of “why read” [Litovskaya 2014:156]. Nonetheless, literature and reading have remained highly valued, especially by women who are more committed to the intelligentsia values and more likely to conform [Borusiak 2016b], while the fundamental institutions—school first of all—keep promoting that value with varying degrees of success.

What Is Literary Education Actually For?

As focus group and interview data indicates, the overwhelming majority of stakeholders in literary education consider it very important because children should develop as readers and show an understanding of literature.

Paradoxically, teachers and librarians—that is, professionals who are actually providing literary education to students—found it more difficult than any other group to identify the purposes of such education. First, unlike other stakeholders, they tend to problematize this issue deeply and heavily as they constantly deal with it in their professional life. It turns out that purposes may be different, and teaching strategies should be determined by those differences. Fumbling for a universal answer, teachers mostly described the purposes of literary education in very general terms—“*raise readers*”², “*promote a reading culture*”, “*this is the art of living*”—avoiding any specifics. Second, some teachers realize that their professional goals are often remote from children’s interests, so their teaching practices often turn out to be ineffective. Third, many teachers are convinced that the school curriculum is largely inadequate to students’ needs, and thus their teaching goals cannot actually be achieved to the full extent. All of this results in strong feelings of unhappiness and career dissatisfaction. “*I think about it all the time, and I always want to flee, to run away from all those curricula and the USE³ in literature,*” said one of the teachers. Fourth, they understand that it is impossible to inspire love for reading in every child, given the intense competition among the abundant forms of leisure in today’s world.

During the study, some teachers doubted the feasibility of making literature a required course—exactly because the purposes of literary education are so blurred: “*I believe it depends on the purpose. If literature is perceived as an introduction into culture, it should be a required course, and we are thus pushing children into culture. It’s a different matter that one day, they may decide they don’t wanna be there anymore—but the cultural codes have already been crammed. If we are talking, say, about reading for pleasure, it’s quite a different story then, where the literature course may be unnecessary.*”

² Here and elsewhere, respondents’ answers are italicized.

³ Unified State Examination (*Translator’s Note*)

However, an absolute majority of the teachers and librarians interviewed consider literary education to be an indispensable part of the school curriculum: *“It is necessary, because reading is a universal tool for communicating with other people and the outside world. We are reading someone else’s views, someone else’s texts, and texts in a broader sense. We are reading the text of the world, and we are projecting ourselves into it, ideally becoming part of it.”* Most interviewees do not see knowledge of texts by students as the main goal of literary education, valuing more the opportunity to understand oneself and the world around through those texts. However, it is not literature alone that creates that opportunity, which is one of the reasons for doubts about making literature a required school course.

The approach adopted by mothers and grandmothers can be referred to as pragmatic. Being convinced that books may help children solve some real-life problems, they see their mission in choosing the right books and offering them at the right time. Some of them identify internal deficiencies in their children that they believe could be compensated by books. Others are concerned about helping the child through the challenges of puberty and expect books to be helpful in that respect—for suicide prevention, in particular. Still others hope that books will prevent their kids from excessive computer use, which they consider to be harmful to physical and intellectual development. Drawing on their personal experience, the respondents claim that reading is useful for learning from others’ mistakes: *“This is some kind of solid life experience. We don’t go personally through all the situations in real life. In some situations, I actually recall reading about it in a book, and I use it.”* Basically, mothers maintain that literary education should inculcate a proper system of values in children, compensate for their internal deficiencies, and help them solve real-life problems; passing on the cultural codes through literature was also mentioned in some cases. Meanwhile, there was no talk about understanding a literary text, its language or characteristics. Apparently, literature in itself, as an artistic value, is not as important in the public mind as the ability of books to teach helpful life lessons.

As for fathers, our focus group included those who were deeply involved in their children’s education. Most of them find it important for children to read, so they do their best to encourage reading. Meanwhile, a good part of the respondents rely on a different assumption. Reading is great, they agree; however, since it is not always possible to get children reading due to a wide range of leisure activities to choose from, it will be no catastrophe if they do not read: *“No one should be forced to read, as the world is changing and the amount of information is snowballing.”* Some fathers were not concerned at all about their child having no interest in reading: *“Children who got through the Soviet school, who read all those books—most of them did not make good adults, you know.”* Obviously, men tend to aban-

don the idea — traditional for the Russian culture — that books make people better by teaching them high moral values.

Yet, most fathers are eager about getting their kids into reading and try to read to them as often as possible. However, unlike mothers and grandmothers, they rather do it for the purpose of communication (“*I only engage in all of that to feel them and let them feel me*”), parent-child reading being “*sort of a nice and cozy form of communication first of all.*” Women normally spend more time with children than men, so for some fathers, having a chance to read to their kids before bed is one of the few accessible and pleasant ways of fostering an intimate relationship with them. Meanwhile, some respondents mentioned that books and reading played a great role in the personal and cultural development and reported taking great responsibility in selecting the books for their children.

Opinion among students was divided, some seeing the purposes of literary education as pragmatic and others as value-oriented. Boys who believed that reading and studying literature was useful for exams showed the highest degree of pragmatism. Some respondents said that books had helped them in real life or could do so in theory. Having read a book, one can learn a lot from the characters and their mistakes in particular — this idea has been vigorously promoted by the school. Meanwhile, our findings show that teenagers sometimes reinterpret it in a very pragmatic way, and some treat it literally, as an instruction manual. Numerous statements of the following kind were made during the focus groups: “*I read ‘The Horse Dancer’ by Jojo Moyes when I was cramming for the USE, and I got super motivated by the idea that you should always achieve your goals or die trying. I read it and I figured, ‘I should do my best too.’ And so I started writing a diary and doing a lot of studying, and it just helped me so much.*”

**Major Institutions
of Literary
Education:
Stakeholders’
Perspective**

The question about the institutions involved in literary education was analyzed during the focus groups. At the beginning, the participants were asked to name the major institutions of literary education, and their answers were written on cards. Next, the respondents were asked to arrange the cards in any specific way. Most often, the cards were ranged by significance, forming a linear or a more complex hierarchical structure.

Finally, the participants were handed out 7 or 8 prefabricated cards each. Every set of cards represented antonym pairs of adjectives (*hot—cold*, etc.), one adjective per card. The respondents were asked to match their cards with the pre-identified institutions of literary education. After that, the number of cards assigned to each institution was calculated (as an indicator of importance) and the adjectives written on them were read aloud. If positive connotations prevailed, the attitude toward an institution was deemed positive, and the other way round. What mattered as well was the order in which the

institutions were mentioned, i. e. whether they were recalled spontaneously or were reminded of by the moderator.

School was named first thing in all the focus groups. Today still, it is perceived as the most important (or one of the most important, for teenagers) institution by all the stakeholders in literary education. The “school” card was also assigned the largest number of adjective cards. The proportion of cards attributed to school was the highest among mothers and grandmothers (41%), followed by teachers (29%) and teenagers (19%). In the latter focus group, the number of mentions of “school” was slightly inferior to that of “mass media” and “the web” in the aggregate. The gap between the school and all the other institutions was significant in the adult focus groups, being remarkably wider among parents than teachers. Apparently, teachers are unsure if the modern school is able to make every child a competent reader, whereas mothers and grandmothers believe that it should be, ideally.

Family and libraries were also named as important institutions in all the focus groups, although the former was assigned few cards overall and the latter were only mentioned after being reminded of by the moderator. Theaters and museums were named by the adults, and most groups also identified informal institutions, such as reading groups, book clubs, literature Olympiads, etc. Teachers were the only ones to name children as stakeholders in literary education. Of course, children are not an institution, but it was teachers who found it important to emphasize that the whole process would be meaningless without children. In addition, respondents in some focus groups mentioned mass media, the web (teachers and teenagers), bookstores (teachers and teenagers), book publishing companies (teachers), pedagogical universities and teacher training institutions (teachers), and friends of school students.

**School as an
Institution of
Literary Education:
Stakeholders’
Perceptions and
Major Problems**

School was the first to be named among the institutions of literary education in all the focus groups, as nothing can beat its importance in the public perception or among professional educators.

Criticism of the school was the strongest among teachers, 20 out of their 22 cards being strictly negative: “*black*”, “*dull*”, “*unnecessary*”, “*sick*”, etc. Their choice manifests extreme dissatisfaction with the conditions, rules, and outcomes of their work. “*I now realize that the Ministry of Enlightenment was missing in those cards – it would have attracted all the negatives,*” said one of the participants – and this despite the fact that the sample consisted of engaged and highly skilled teachers. The findings also reveal that teachers lack understanding of their professional purpose.

So, what problems do teachers see in school literary education? What do they think should change? In the course of this study, literary education was largely treated as an institution, so the respondents were more likely to focus on the problems that inhibited teachers from

achieving their primary goal of raising a competent reader. In particular, the existing system of graduation assessments was referred to as a major hindrance. The teachers suggested cancelling or modifying the Basic State Examination and Unified State Examination in literature as well as the graduation essay requirements. One of the participants proposed “*shifting the regulatory focus from knowledge to skills and introducing analysis and interpretation of unfamiliar texts.*”

Lack of qualified literature teachers is an even more significant challenge in modern school literary education, judging by the number of mentions. The respondents insist therefore that the system of professional development for literature teachers needs essential improvements. The respondents themselves report not lacking sources of information, participating in online and offline literature teacher communities, giving and attending master classes; however, they complain, a number of school teachers have been using obsolete teaching methods over many years.

New approaches in the teaching of literature, new formats, and changes to the curriculum were mentioned most often by teachers. Statements concerning the new approaches can be generalized as follows: literature classes should be made lively and free of scholastic dogmas; modern methods of teaching, including interactive ones, must be designed and implemented. In particular, a number of teachers suggested integrating other types of art into literature classes (“*include music, painting, theater,*” “*use museums, theaters, and music in teaching*”), which many of them had already been doing. The modern context makes it “*advisable to use information technology and media environment as sources of formal and informal literary education*” and, most importantly, to “*avoid clichés in discussing literary works*”, “*make literature classes actually about literature — reading, analysis, thinking, and writing*”—so as to inspire interest in children, the absence of which renders reader development impossible.

Debates over the school literature curriculum have been raging for decades. Are school students able to understand the extremely complicated classics of Russian literature? Can an average school student read and perceive immense literary works? To what extent is the school curriculum harmonized with students’ interests? Not infrequently, sociological research gives negative answers to those questions [Pavlovets 2016; Pavlovets 2018; Borusiak 2016a, Borusiak 2017; Asonova 2017]. Nearly all the teachers involved in the survey insist that curriculum variation should be real, not declared; that teachers should be allowed to select literature depending on their students’ abilities and needs; that “*teachers — and students — should be given more freedom in choosing curricula and literature*”; that “*teachers should be free in shaping the curriculum, choosing the texts and methods*” (responses of this type were very common); that “*the required classics reading list should be reviewed*”; that schools need modern and foreign literature; and that “*preachy and didactic texts*

should be removed from the required reading list, especially in elementary school". Teachers believe that literary education in school will be unable to achieve its primary mission without such reforms.

Parents of today's school students tend to hold traditional views on school literary education. Considering it to be a function of the school first of all, they believe that children will have no problems if they go to a good school: "*We've been so utterly lucky to have this school. I would even rank it at the very top and move everything else down, even the family.*" A bad school becomes the source of the majority of problems with reading development and literary education.

In the focus groups with mothers and fathers, school was labelled as "*feminine*", and only two connotations were positive, "*new*" and "*necessary*". The rest of the characteristics, as in the teacher group, were negative, and most were even the same as given by the teachers. Despite being asked to assess the problems of literary education faced by their children today, parents were unable to close their mind to their personal experience of studying literature at school, sometimes positive—and sometimes negative because they had been unlucky to have a bad teacher. The respondents emphasize, meanwhile, that little has changed since then and it is all the same now.

An absolute majority of responses on the problems of literary education in school were related to inadequate curriculum. The books on the required reading list are outside the age of students ("*I just think the school curriculum should not include literary works written by adults and for adults*"), too long ("*My six-grader is struggling to read long books*") and complicated ("*He reads but doesn't understand anything*"), so school literature does not cultivate a love for reading in children. Many complained about their children not reading the required books because of a poorly designed literature curriculum and said they could understand it: "*My kid didn't read any of the school literature—it's utterly unreadable.*" This opinion was shared by mothers, fathers, and grandmothers.

Being convinced that the curriculum does not meet children's needs, parents believe that it should be altered. They suggest adding adventure fiction, fantasy, foreign classics, Soviet and contemporary young adult books, maintaining that if the school literature curriculum is tailored to children's age and interests, it will immediately improve the situation. However, mothers and grandmothers predominantly spoke about adding things and seemed to be unwilling to remove anything from the existing curriculum. Not daring to encroach upon the Russian classics, parents (in contrast with teachers, who insisted on curriculum variation in literary education) virtually did not bring this issue up.

Some fathers, though, proposed a rather drastic solution to the problem of literary education, which was to abolish literature as a required course ("*How come is literature a required school course? Why not make an optional reading club?*"). Some teachers are unanimous

with fathers on this point. No such proposals were made by mothers or grandmothers, who regard Russian classical literature as a top core value and do not see any institutions other than school that could introduce children and teenagers to the classics. On the whole, parents see two major problems in literary education: children are required to read books beyond their age and, as a result, do not read much. However, they were not concerned about literature in itself as well as the school's mission of raising a competent, engaged reader.

Teachers in the focus group named institutions of teacher education and professional development as important factors of improving the quality of literary education. Meanwhile, the cards that they placed next to those institutions bore negative characteristics only: *"false"*, *"foe"*, *"dirty"*, *"cold"*, *"far"*, *"worse"*, etc. Group discussion participants and interviewees contend that no positive change is possible in school literary education without an essential reformation of teacher education and professional development. Focus group participants consider the present-day institutions of teacher education and professional development to be archaic, their methods obsolete, and many teachers lacking the skills required to be effective in today's world.

Just like students, their parents and grandmothers did not mention teacher education and professional development among the institutions of literary education, as this aspect is rather a feature of the professional discourse. Nonetheless, they touched upon the issue superficially as they were discussing the figure of the teacher, whom they assigned a paramount role in literary education. The most important, they say, is to have a good teacher, which does not happen very often: *"You must be very lucky to get a good teacher of literature."* This opinion can probably be interpreted as an indirect complaint against teachers' qualifications.

To increase the number of good teachers, parents hold, it is necessary first of all to improve the quality of higher education, make the admission process more selective, raise teacher pay, and promote the prestige of the teaching profession. Situation will change when pedagogical colleges begin to select the best high school graduates and teach them appropriately: *"Selection should be tough"*, *"I guess the profession should have a prestige and a certain status."* In addition, pedagogical colleges should recruit motivated candidates who love children and literature: *"Well, it might be a dull answer, but I believe they must be fond of literature themselves, and of children too."* A great many respondents believe that a literature teacher must be a special kind of person since what they teach is not a regular discipline but a course in which high human values are constantly discussed: *"There are no born teachers, but there should be," "The person should be free. It's like, I teach because I want to, and I like it so much that I would do it without even being paid, I actually feel good doing it."*

On the one hand, parents would like to see well-prepared teachers in schools, i. e. they want the responsible institutions to be effective.

On the other hand, this is not enough for many others, who want the profession to be popular and every teacher to possess extraordinary virtues at the same time. Teachers demonstrate a sounder approach to this problem, being convinced that functioning of the teacher education and professional development institutions is what matters the most, since waiting for an inflow of “born” teachers to the school is quite utopian.

Unlike adults, teenagers treat school as a very important institution of literary education — not unique though. More cards were given to mass media and the web in the aggregate than to the school, yet slightly less severally. More positive connotations were assigned to “school” by teenagers — nearly as many as negative ones — than by teachers or parents. By the moment of participation in the focus group, it had been about six months since the graduation from high school, so their memories of literature classes were still very fresh. Depending on what they had memorized from that experience, they chose contradictory characteristics, e. g. “*kind*” and “*evil*”, “*old*” and “*new*”, “*obsolete*” and “*modern*”. Most probably, if they had participated in the survey in their being school students, they would have assigned the most important role to this institution and assessed its performance more strictly. As they graduated, however, this formal institution of literary education gave way to informal ones.

School Libraries as an Institution of Literary Education

Libraries were spontaneously named among other institutions of literary education by teachers, librarians, and mothers, while fathers and students had to be reminded of the option, which means they do not perceive libraries as a relevant institution.

In the focus group with teachers and librarians, this institution was mainly awarded positive connotations, yet of a specific kind: “*rural*”, “*daytime*”, “*kind*”, “*friend*”, “*quiet*”, “*feminine*”, etc. “*Nunnery!*” said one of the group discussion participants as the attributes had been read aloud, setting everyone laughing. The image of a library came out archaic, weak, and old-fashioned. When the discussion focused on school libraries, teachers and librarians, just as all the other stakeholders, claimed that the school library had been undergoing a major crisis, its functionality being restricted to checking out textbooks in most schools, so it appears vital to diversify its functions.

Some schools have integrated their libraries into the process of literary education, but none of the discussion participants or interviewees reported this practice to be effective. Many respondents claim that school libraries should complement literature classes, in which the choice of books to read is extremely limited. Less formal, subject-subject relationships could occur — which happens occasionally — between the librarian and the student to foster free choice reading that is so lacked in schools.

Teachers and librarians mentioned various forms of school library activities in their focus group, such as book fairs, author visits, Olympiads and competitions, etc. All of them imply integration between the teacher and the librarian. In reality, according to both teachers and librarians, such integration of effort occurs very rarely, provided that the library is actually interested in doing anything other than checking out textbooks to students—which is most often the case.

Although the school library received quite positive, “soft” connotations, all the focus group participants and interviewees believe the social image of a school librarian to be negative. *“When I say that I work as a school librarian, it puts an end to the conversation. Ninety percent of people had a negative experience with librarians, so if you wanna end a conversation, just say you’re a librarian.”* The focus group with young adults shows that there is a tangible grain of truth in this statement: *“I hated going to the library, I didn’t like it there. The atmosphere was somewhat like disgusting,” “Librarians are always angry because they like just sitting and doing nothing, and there you come and disturb them.”* Isolated examples of positive experience were provided, but the overall attitude among teenagers was profoundly negative. While the participants had little idea of children’s public libraries (except the Russian State Children’s Library), everyone had dealt with school libraries. All the respondents agreed about school libraries being necessary—this is where you get your textbooks—but communication with librarians had often involved conflicts, and no one could name any other functions of this institution.

Focus groups revealed that mothers and fathers also had a vague notion of this institution and little concern for the way school libraries functioned.

Family as an Institution of Literary Education. Family-School Communication

Family was named as an important institution of literary education by all the study participants and was given mostly positive connotations in all the focus groups—which was partly a reaction to the very notion of “family” irrespective of the educational context and partly because family did not have the pitfalls of literary education that the respondents could see in school. Family as an institution of literary education was assigned the cards “kind” and “friend” in all the focus groups—in contrast with school, described as “evil” and “foe”.

The role of the family in literary education, unlike that of the school, was mentioned very briefly by teachers. Apparently, classroom reading practices matter much more for parents than home reading practices do for the school. In interviews with teachers, the family aspect was not normally raised until a reminder question was asked. One of the teachers mentioned lectures for parents organized by a private school as a positive experience. In this situation, teachers were perceived as subjects and parents as objects of education. Teachers did not feel wrong about it as they rightfully considered themselves pro-

professionals and thus entitled to teach not only children but their parents, too.

As for subject-subject parent-teacher relationships, parents' attempts to influence and control the process of literary education mostly resulted in conflicts. Some teachers claimed that their own attempts—or those of their colleagues—to integrate non-canon literature had given rise to discontent and even complaints among certain conservative parents: *“There have been increasingly more parents who do nothing but demand and complain all the time, most often being unaware of the way things should be.”* Orientation of the best teachers toward curriculum variation and greater freedom of teaching obviously does not resonate with parents, who would prefer a rigid curriculum with minor improvements. One thus gets the impression, which is yet to be verified, that teachers and parents have developed different approaches to literary education. While teachers want more autonomy, from parents among other factors, parents often believe that the books proposed by literature teachers for reading are in conflict with the values they teach their children at home, so they would like reading lists to be agreed upon with them.

At the same time, teachers often expressed a contrary opinion that school and family should invest joint effort in literary education of children, but, sadly, parents stop engaging as soon as they send their kids to school, trying to shift the responsibility entirely to school teachers, which is wrong: *“Most parents still pass the buck to us. Their business is to earn money, as it's always been.”*

Teachers consider family to be a fundamental institution of reader development but mainly at preschool age—in school, parent-teacher communication within the framework of literary education turns out to be very weak.

On the contrary, mothers, fathers, and grandmothers talked at length and in detail about their effort towards cultivating a love for reading in children—sometimes fruitful, but often futile. They described how much they had invested in it and which techniques they had used. Mothers had sometimes even practiced coercion: *“I forced my children to read when they were small.”* Some tried to create a reading-friendly environment at home, with parents reading a lot themselves and building extensive home libraries. Others used a variety of methods to engage children in reading: *“At first, we would read together, me reading aloud a paragraph and her reading a word, then a line.”* More often, however, parents and grandmothers referred to the tradition of reading bedtime stories, usually to preschoolers unable to read yet. As a child begins to attend school, most parents delegate further literary education of their children to school teachers, although co-reading practices and help with book selection sometimes persist. Parents spoke little about school-family communication, just as teachers said nothing about interacting with parents in the process of literary education. Parents are supposed to provide chil-

dren with literature for school lessons and get them to read to the extent possible — those are the limits of family-school relationship in literary education.

Teenagers in the focus group spoke gladly and warmly about their parents reading them before bed in early childhood. Those who had not been read bedtime stories talked about it in a noticeably injured voice, as about something important that they had been denied as children. However, such reading practices stopped for nearly everyone as they started attending school. There was only one respondent who proudly said that her family still practiced co-reading, referring to this tradition as “weird” because she knew that it was different from other families. Many focus group participants pointed out that grandmothers had been more engaged in their reader development than mothers or fathers as they had more free time for communicating with their grandchildren than the ever-busy parents. Most teenagers consider this warm and cozy home reading practice to be important, claiming that it was then that they developed a love for books and that they wish they had been read to for longer than it usually happens. When school started, informal home reading was replaced with formal practices, which many students label as coercive, lamenting that they often had to read books that they did not like and were not willing to read. As soon as a school student started reading fluently on their own, parents would insist that children should read on a regular basis and often choose books without considering their tastes. From then on, literary education at home became quasi-formal, resembling the school version. Meanwhile, teenagers wish that formal and informal reading practices had proceeded in parallel and that the institution of family had maintained its role in literary education during the school years.

Conclusion As the study revealed, the purposes of literary education are neither obvious nor common for all the stakeholders. An absolute majority of the respondents believe that literary education is indispensable because it is critical that children develop as readers and show an understanding of literature. Meanwhile, not everyone is sure that literature should be a required school course, since there are other institutions of reading engagement. In particular, some teachers and fathers suggest that literature courses could be made elective.

Few respondents believe that even highly effective institutions of literary education can make every child an avid and engaged reader in a situation where other forms of leisure compete aggressively with reading. This goal appears to be desirable, yet not always achievable.

The purposes of literary education are seen differently by teachers (understanding oneself and the world around being the most typical answers), mothers and grandmothers (reading compensates for children’s internal deficiencies; books can help students avoid making mistakes in real life; reading is the most useful form of leisure that

allows saving children from excessive video gaming and social media use), fathers (focus on the communicative function of parent-child reading), and teenagers (who believe that literary characters can teach motivation and other essential life skills).

Assessing the importance of various institutions of literary education, teachers, librarians, and parents traditionally assigned the highest priority to the school. Teenagers ranked school nearly as important as mass media and the web in the aggregate. Projective tests revealed that teachers and parents were likely to attribute negative connotations to school, as compared to a more positive attitude among teenagers. The more important an institution is perceived to be, the more hopes are pinned on it and the more rigorously it is assessed.

As for school libraries, this institution is blatantly stalling, according to all the participants, most of whom believe that school libraries engage too little in literary education. Teenagers reported having had conflicts with school librarians; librarians themselves spoke about the negative social image of their profession; parents appear to be virtually unconcerned about school library activities; and teachers are convinced that ideally, school libraries should be an organic part of the educational process, but teachers and librarians rarely join their efforts in real life.

None of the subjects of literary education doubts the importance of family as a fundamental institution of reader development. When comparing home and school reading, teenagers tend to favor the former as an informal practice connecting children and parents. Regretfully, they say, many parents give up home reading as soon as their children start school, delegating the function of literary education to literature teachers. Unwillingness of many parents to keep engaging in literary education of their children during the school years was also reported by teachers, but they rather meant coercion of students into reading the required books than maintenance of home reading practices. Teachers also point out that if parents monitor closely the choice of literature by the teacher, it often results in conflicts. It happens because parents demand strict compliance with the school canon, whereas the teachers involved in the study insist on curriculum variation in literary education.

All the stakeholders share the opinion that curriculum inadequacy is a major problem of literary education. Teachers and parents also agree that literature teachers should be more qualified, which implies improvements in the quality of teacher education. Besides, teachers find it critically important to improve the system of professional development for literature teachers; they talked at length about possible ways of modernizing this system as a critical tool of enhancing the institutions of literary development. Parents agree about the teacher being the key figure in literary education, yet they care less about the specific aspects of teacher education, placing their hopes on new teachers that will be obsessed with teaching as their vocation or even

devotion. This is a manifestation of the traditional literature centrism of the Russian society, i. e. the perception of literature classes and reading as highly value-loaded activities supposed to inculcate the fundamental moral and ethical norms and values that consolidate the nation. Those demands have been decreasing with the gradual diminishment of literature centrism, yet they still remain heavy enough, especially among women.

According to the respondents, present-day literary education consists of two stages, preschool childhood — when home reading practices develop an understanding of belles-lettres as a communication resource and as a means of building emotional connection with the loved ones — and the schooling period, which represents a transition to independent reading so as to satisfy one's intellectual, moral, and professional needs. Ideally, literary education in school should be a joint effort of various institutions: school, library, mass media, and others.

The teacher remains the key figure in literary education, but their professional competencies should undergo a fundamental transformation to enable them to apply the cultural-historical approach in teaching while at the same time satisfying students' reading interests, use a variety of resources — libraries, mass media, etc. — efficiently to encourage reader autonomy in children and adolescents, and be able to communicate with all the educational relationship participants, parents in the first place. Therefore, the purposes of literary education appear to consist in raising the reader as a subject capable of showing autonomy in using all the components of the reading infrastructure, on the one hand, and ensuring ongoing development and maintenance of that infrastructure — which includes a variety of institutions to satisfy various readers' needs — on the other.

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