

Education in Russia: historical and philosophical aspects

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Abstract. Education is the most effective tool of management in politics, since it directly and indirectly acts as public legal coordination of the interests of different social strata representatives, and manifests the ability of the authorities to such coordination. The prerequisites of the present research are the productive achievements of the national educational cultural tradition, its goal setting, which is also the goal of this work. Education as a social institution is a tool of constant state policy, while the policy is not a one-time action but a procedural, dynamic phenomenon, and therefore must always be at the focus of attention of the authorities. Education is the incessant carrying of a certain “image”, in other words, the “image” of the state and, at the same time, its function (in Latin, the function is service, or, in Russian, “the sovereign’s burden”). Service is associated with the upbringing and training of a creative person, his way of thinking, and his entire lifeline. The research methods used, included interdisciplinary and comparative-historical (comparative) approaches. The most important results, novelty, and significance of the present research are associated with the ways of developing spirituality and preserving the tradition of creativity and freedom in humanitarian education, which form the public consciousness.

Keywords: state, upbringing, diachrony, humanitarian education.

1 Introduction

Policy in education is both a process and an institution[†]; both an existing system and an idea of what is due. This is how it is possible to realize the dream, peculiar, according to K.V. Simonov, to many political philosophers, when it comes to “the concept of meritocracy (from Lat. *meritus* meaning worthy, etc.; in Greek meaning power, κράτος) – a concept of the state structure, according to which the most educated and intelligent people occupy the leading political positions, regardless of their social origin, wealth, and even public sympathies and preferences” [2: 520]. In the field of education, the state coordinates, directs, and encourages

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[†] As it is rightly emphasized in the “History and Philosophy of Science”, social and humanitarian knowledge arises as an organic part of the unified knowledge of humanity about the world [1].

the development of conditions for education as a branch of the social sphere, as well as exercises supervision over it, which makes the degree of legal responsibility of the authorities clear to civil society. Also, the cultural tradition assumes delegating the part of the state functions to others, namely, to state and public institutions, such as scientific, university, religious organizations, and the very civil society. Undoubtedly, cultural tradition, or custom, morals in education can be expressed, after Aristotle, by the formula of “ethos” = phronesis + arete + eunoia, meaning “image of the people and the state” equals to “thinking plus morals” shown in the “consent” of the people and the state. In other words, the state and civil society not only establish an agreement with each other in writing (in the Constitution, and legislative acts) but also manifest this agreement in the image of a higher school. The purpose of this study is to reveal the productive developments in achieving such an equilibrium agreement.

2 Results

From the standpoint of developing sustainable creative skills, one should give priority to the diachronic tradition in education. This is evidenced by both the history of culture and modernity. This concerns the ancient, medieval experience, modern age, and contemporary times both in the West and in the East. The tradition of the physics and mathematics school in the Soviet period is particularly significant. The teaching of natural scientists was based on the priority of the personality of the pupil and the teacher, their joint creative scientific interaction, i.e., the diachronic tradition was maintained. The synchronic tradition of distance learning forms performers rather than creators, and subordinates rather than leaders. This is “remote” learning (let’s call a spade a spade, in many respects – extramural education, although it requires the personal presence of the student on the air) with a ready-made set of pre-recorded video lectures and tests of knowledge in the form of testing, in which the correct answer can be guessed randomly in 50% of cases. The study of the humanities and socio-economic sciences lacks an educational component. Priority is forcedly given to passive reproduction, especially in the context of digital regional inequality, often manifested by the failure of technical training tools at the most important stage of the presentation. Today, during the coronavirus pandemic, experience has already been gained, which has shown throughout the country that the reduction of an interactive dialogue between teacher and student, or even the replacement of an experienced teacher with a third-year student who is beginning to teach, turns out to have the saddest consequences for both secondary and higher education. As noted by Socrates, who preferred dialogue to monologue, written knowledge, no matter how wise, always points to the same thing[‡].

For Russians, the closest thing is the Russian experience, i.e. established national educational tradition in the humanities. This tradition is often either hushed up or denied in its very right to exist. How and what “image” did the Russian state reproduce in its cultural tradition? First of all, the freedom and openness which are peculiar to Russian education in general, and the importance of the Russian Orthodox Church concerning education in the earliest historical period. Spiritual pastoral counseling, postulancy as a departure to the world,

[‡] “I cannot help feeling, Phaedrus, that writing is unfortunately like painting; for the creations of the painter have the attitude of life, and yet if you ask them a question they preserve a solemn silence. And the same may be said of speeches. You would imagine that they had intelligence, but if you want to know anything and put a question to one of them, the speaker always gives one unvarying answer. And when they have been once written down they are tumbled about anywhere among those who may or may not understand them, and know not to whom they should reply, to whom not: and, if they are maltreated or abused, they have no parent to protect them; and they cannot protect or defend themselves.” [3]

to people, was the most important thing in the activities of the Orthodox Church. The most important feature of the Russian tradition was that education was subordinated to neither the church nor the state, but was manifested in the tradition of senility, mentoring, teaching, as a dialogue about the pressing issues of life.

In the Western tradition, the economic interests of the church, for example, property disputes between the secular new European states and the Roman Curia, on the contrary, became the driving force in the formation of the institution of education. To resolve property disputes, it was necessary to have an evidentiary foundation, framed laws, written evidence, and educated citizens, which gave rise to the need for the development of education.

The legal documents of the pre-Mongol and Mongol periods in Russia contain no information about educational structures. Meanwhile, these documents contain very detailed and even pedantic prescribes of all the rights and obligations related to legal proceedings and the payment of witnesses, which include the main economic classes, namely, plowmen and artisans, military and service people, foreigners and guests, and even the homeless, the poor, and the infirm. In other words, there is a variety of evidence about many areas of the state and church life, while not about educational institutions. The conclusion suggests itself that educational institutions were not included in the sphere of state activity, and therefore no reliable data are available, neither in the legislative activities of Vladimir the Great or Yaroslav the Wise nor other documents [4, 5].

At the same time, there was the highest educational culture, which was embodied in the great monuments of writing (The Tale of Bygone Years by Saint Nestor the Chronicler, The Tale of Igor's Campaign, The Sermon on Law and Grace by the Kievan Metropolitan Hilarion, the works of Vladimir II Monomakh and Kirill of Turov, etc.). Educational structures were created on their own initiative, voluntarily, and lived their own lives. There were both pros and cons, up to the manifestation of pagan tendencies and heresy [6].

National education is another stage in the development of education in Russia. Before the abolition of serfdom, the state was the main actor in educational activities and even replaced the church. Indicative in this sense is the statement of K.D. Ushinsky: “After the February revolution (meaning the liberation of the peasants from serfdom on February 19, 1861), our high-ranking educators not jokingly talked about how to leave just technical institutions in Russia..., and not to educate at all politicians, philosophizing lawyers, publicists and the like unnecessary and restless people” [7: 262]. There was even a period of restrictions on teaching philosophy at Moscow University, since the authorities, represented by Minister Platon Shirinsky-Shikhmatov, believed that “the benefits are doubtful, while the harm is obvious”. At the same time, Russian education continued to develop often not because of but despite the “guidelines” and prescriptions from above. The essence of this statement is revealed in the famous triad of Count S.S. Uvarov: “Orthodoxy – monarchism– nationality”, which is very often misunderstood in the “reactionary”, i.e. “supervisory and protective” sense. In fact, this concerns goals and values which, as it were, hold themselves the national unity of the country, that is, about patriotism. Uvarov explains in detail his attitude in his approach to education as a “revival” of the moral and mental forces of the people. This attitude was given by him in his report to His Imperial Majesty for 1837. Here is what he writes about the independent manifestation of the creative principle in education as a form of culture. At least, the administrative and political component, which seems to come only from above and is most often criticized, is not really meant at all, that is, Uvarov is accused of something that he has not meant[§].

[§] “With the revitalization of all mental powers to guard their course within the boundaries of safe improvement, to impress upon the youth that at all levels of social life, mental improvement without moral improvement is a dream and a pernicious dream; to erase the struggle between the so-called European education and the needs of our own, to heal the newest generation of blind and reckless addiction to superficial and overseas, spreading in the young minds reasonable respect for the domestic

The authors have already mentioned the teaching tradition such as spiritual eldership. It should be emphasized that the great pleiad of numerous prayer books of the Russian land, available in monasteries and priories, were of great importance for education. For example, N.V. Gogol, F.M. Dostoevsky, K.N. Leontiev, L.N. Tolstoy, and other figures of Russian culture used to come to Optina Pustyn for advice. In any case, strong influence on the public consciousness was exerted by people who lived as they preached. Moreover, the lessons taught in deeds were stronger than the lessons taught in words. This tradition is still alive and strengthening today [9–12]. Some researchers, such as A.D. Andreev, A.D. Shcherbinin, N.G. Shcherbinina, P.E. Boyko, A.Yu. Shutov and others have shown that the culture of civil society in contemporary Russia of the late 20th - early 21st century has a strong degree of self-organization, and this should be taken into account in educational policy.

Thus, A.I. Shcherbinin develops a very interesting concept, which traces the connection between efficient management and education, in particular, university education [13]. This refers to the role of teachers and scientists in shaping the public opinion of the electorate, as a kind of mentors of voters, which often manifests itself in the election process directly in the mode of direct communication with voters rather than in the form of anonymous influence through the information channels of the mass media. Here democracy is combined with the fundamental nature peculiar to domestic education.

The study of the subjects under consideration is relevant to the extent that many contemporary educational institutions focus their activities on other value orientations. Priorities are given to “memory-based education” rather than “creativity-based education” with the predominance of memorization methods rather than understanding, ingenuity, and acumen; heuristics in education, as it were, is excluded. The teacher is often not a mentor, but an intermediary who formalizes the knowledge contained in the slides and tests. As an educator, the teacher almost completely troops away from the student. It is no coincidence that the term “remote learning” has appeared. Most university teachers regret to note that the information component of education is being brought to the fore, while the pedagogical, educational role is being lost. In this context, utilitarianism becomes more important than creativity. However, the heuristic principle in education is especially important when studying the humanities and social sciences.

The idea of the benefits can be wrong, and pragmatism in education may be a mistake in the career growth strategy. Understanding benefits will appear in the course of the creative use of knowledge, based on personal experience of the individual, and humanitarian knowledge will become of paramount importance. In any case, the propensity for independent innovative creativity cannot be replaced by ready-made recipes of the information field created on the Internet. This is, as it were, already “old” knowledge, reflecting earlier experience. However, in this case, computer programming itself, as innovative activity, soon may simply stop.

The question of whether the sources in science and education found on the Web are reliable is not a rhetorical question. If there is no clear answer to this question, the criteria of objectivity and persuasion of knowledge are lost.

In any case, the fundamentally problematic creativity is hindered, while the “technological” and “instrumental” creativity, which should help the former, is exalted. As is known, D.E. Durkheim warned against such dangers. He divided specialists into “clinicians” and “technologists-engineers”. The former are preferable since they study the development strategies of both knowledge and humanity in general. The latter do not go beyond the immediate interest and can offer only a short-sighted tactic instead of a strategy with all the costs associated with this choice.

and complete belief that only adjustment of general, all-round education to our people's spirit can bring the true fruits to everybody and everyone” [8: 146].

Currently, it is the humanities, especially philosophy education, that are being reduced. This applies to departments (merged with other departments, they lose their specificity and educational function), as well as educational programs and courses. Thus, philosophical education has been reduced from the 30 faculties previously available in the country to just three. Passive acquisition of skills as “training for the desired result”, unfortunately, is becoming an increasingly important component of training. At the same time, the experience of unemployment increased during the quarantine period due to COVID-19 shows that only a person with creative skills can choose a new direction of activity for himself, and such skills are brought up by the humanities with their immanent multi-interpretativeness and schedography.

3 Conclusion

So, it is not necessary to dismiss the values that underlie Russian education in favor of the ideas of globalism. Summing up the results, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Creative freedom and accessibility of education in Russia have a long history of spirituality [14].
2. This tradition is represented by numerous examples of “teaching monks”. Spiritual elders** are moral models of perfection.
3. The humanities at the university are the sciences of the freedom of choice of everyone in an ever-changing world. From the very beginning of her/his education, a person absorbs the figurative and artistic foundations, which are manifested, for example, in acrophony, where the alphabet is already a philosophy, an established worldview, which is assimilated simultaneously with learning the basics of literacy. Each letter of the alphabet has its conceptual content and educational and instructive meaning (For example in the Cyrillic script: A (azŭ (I)), Be (buky (letter)), Ve (vĕdĕ (I know)), Ge (glagoli (I say)), etc.
4. The association with philosophy [11, 12, 14, 16] and classical ancient and patristic culture, in general, can be traced also on the example of language arts and “liturgical theology” [17], as well as through a specific philological and encyclopedic method called schedography, which assumes erudite knowledge of a large number of meanings of the same sign systems.
5. In the new information space of the emerging digital society, where a human inevitably leaves a digital trail, the humanities insure against the dangers and costs of digitalization (including the possible digital totalitarianism when connecting the Internet of things), as well as support a person’s ability for creativity and freedom.

As the historical experience has shown, the survivability of the national educational tradition has been tested by time, as well as by the most unfavorable hardships and challenges that have befallen Russia.

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** According to the apt expression of E.V. Zimakova, spiritual eldership is an invariant property not only of religious culture but also of the entire human society [15]

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