Policy and Practice: Russian and Soviet Education during Times of Social and Political Change

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POLICY AND PRACTICE:
RUSSIAN AND SOVIET EDUCATION DURING TIMES OF
SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHANGE

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By

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Introduction

This is a study of education policy and practice in Russia and the Soviet Union during periods of revolutionary social and political change. It begins with the late tsarist era and moves through the Soviet era into the modern Russia state, a period of time spanning from the late 19th century through to the present period of educational reform. The modern educational system of Russia is still adapting to the post-Soviet world in many ways. Modern Russia inherited a confusing and contradictory educational tradition marked by high standards of learning and achievement along with ineffective traditions of student uniformity and standardization. The attempt at democratization, decentralization, and individualization seen in the immediate post-Soviet period was derailed by an absence of regional or local administrative infrastructure and a deep and scarring economic crisis. Teachers, many of whom attempted to maintain the schools as a haven of continuity for students, faced the challenge of retraining and structural shifts amidst the deconstruction of their country and culture. They were often left unpaid and unsupported for extended periods and saw the general decline of materials, facilities, and societal cooperation. In addition, following a short period of post-Soviet political and social activism among the Russian youth, a culture of disillusionment and capitalistic single-mindedness took over. The state is now trying to find an effective way to set statewide standards of education, while allowing the development of a regional education culture. The positive legacy of the Soviet educational tradition is in danger of being lost while the ineffective communication, an overemphasis on standardization, and impractical policy threaten to reemerge.
The socio-political culture of a state, particularly one as large and diverse as the Soviet Union undergoes constant evolutionary change, the education system adapts as a part of this greater system. In any state, as a part of this system, public education is closely connected with the social and political climate. The system of education influences political life through the formation of public opinion concerning civil society and ruling groups from childhood. In its treating of socio-political life, even the most liberal education is never entirely ideologically noncommittal, as Amy Gutmann discusses in her article, “What’s the Use in Going to School”, even “an education directed at maximizing future choice cannot be neutral among all ways of life.”1 The Soviet system of education was plainly not focused on the maximization of choice; the education outputs were instead carefully orchestrated to fulfill state economic and political needs. This allowed the Soviet Union to excel in science and technology education while maintaining the doctrinal authority of the accepted Soviet ideology.

The system of education is the most effective and universal form of social influence maintained by the state, particularly during the developmental years of citizens. As such, it is revealing of trends in public policy and the relationship between the government and the people. This is especially true for authoritarian and ideologically homogenous regimes, for which the education is often explicitly used as a tool for the management of social perceptions and cooperation. From the beginning of the Soviet Union, the education system was identified as a vital tool for the construction and

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maintenance of the new regime. Policy concerning the specific role of the schools was contentious in the early Soviet Union and plans ranged from an experimental microcosm of a future classless society to an overly political tool of the proletarian dictatorship. However, both recognized the political and social importance of education, Lenin wrote, “it is hypocritical to say that the school is outside of life, outside of politics.”

Connecting education with the socio-political and economic reality was an integral component of the Soviet educational policy, reflected in theoretical traditions like polytechnic education. However, the Soviet Union was characterized in many aspects of its socio-political structure by a disconnect between policy and practice.

The identification of the traits of a system of education is a deceptive notion in any state, “the notion of setting ‘national’ aims of education…is rather illusory, as policies will inevitably reflect the political and ideological beliefs of the policy-makers.”

Even within centralized, tightly controlled education system, such as that of the Soviet Union, state goals are not necessarily in line with the goals of educators, parents, or students. The development and implementation of a cohesive policy reform are different challenges. Edward Dneprov, the Russian Minister of Education in early Post-Soviet Russia, wrote of the struggle to create practically relevant change in the country, “any work on education reform is inevitably separated into two phases,” these are the

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“conceptual” and “implementation” periods, which may not coincide. This tendency has been reflected throughout the history of the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation. An accurate study of the reality of education and the relationship of education to the political culture is challenging due to the misrepresentation of practice by educational policy.

However, as a researcher noted in an examination of the successes of the Soviet system, “a totalitarian regime, having at its unlimited command both the material resources and the human energies of a vast country enormously rich in natural resources, can achieve much more than any democratic state.”

Soviet schools effectively shaped the ideological formation of citizens in part because of the universality of their reach. Through the schools, Soviet Russia succeeded in educating a vast empire of disparate peoples. The shortcomings of certain aspects of the education notwithstanding, from a largely illiterate and uneducated society, the Soviet education system effectively eradicated illiteracy during the Soviet regime and created a respected and successful system of science and technology education. All Soviet children attended the school geographically designated to them, excepting a small minority who attended specialty or national minority schools. The ability to offer all children the same education by maintaining uniformity among regions and schools was a central goal of the regional Ministries of Education.

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This study begins with a discussion of the efforts at education reform and the early attempts to create a nationwide, cohesive system of education in the late tsarist regime. The importance of this era lies in the precedents for pedagogy and practice it set among educators and the population as a whole. While the revolution of 1917 marked a sharp turning point in creating a new socio-political society in the new Soviet Union, a clear demarcation of classroom practice did not accompany the shift in policy. Early Soviet educators were themselves children of a tsarist regime; many educators brought into the Soviet era traditional teaching methods and values, this group proved an important and unanticipated resistance force to the early reforms of education. As Anatoli Vasilievich Lunacharsky would discover during his years in charge of Soviet educational policy, the population at large was not overtly welcoming of the more radical changes in education and society. In his speech to the First All-Russian Congress on Education, “the attitudes of the teachers and parents to the new school should not turn out as sabotage of it. One has only to hand over the schools completely to the teachers and the parents and they will resurrect the old schools and turn people into spiritual cripples again.”

This was surprising to Lunacharsky and his fellow reformers; the difficult relationship persisted throughout the 1920s, and effectively unhinged the experimental education of the period, particularly in the face of material shortages and ineffective communication. The pre-Stalin period of Soviet education was marked by the encouragement of diverse educational practices, Lunacharsky remarked, “we do, however, want the teaching staff to seek for and put into practice in their schools in all manner of experiments. We do not...

want all the schools...to be on one and the same model; on the contrary, the more variety
the better.”

However, the teachers and mutual blame did not meet the expectations of
Lunacharsky and his supporters at Narkompros and resistance to cooperation arose. Due
to resulting failure of reforms, many in the education community accepted the reactionary
educational practices introduced during the early Stalin years. The ideological hegemony
of Stalinism infiltrated the character of the schools, inquiry and exploratory education
ceased to exist during this period. Memorization and unquestioned acceptance of the
factual authority of the teacher became the norm for schools, “the body of doctrine
taught to all Soviet citizens’ became, after 1929, so leaden-spirited and pointless as to
defy belief.” Education ceased to evolve in any significant way after this point, as the
writings of Krupskaya reveal the trends of experimental and practical education initiated
during the pre-Stalin years of Soviet were abandoned. Beginning in the early 1930s, ideas
were so heavily politicized as to make discussion and theoretical change nearly
impossible. Pragmatism and the interests of the Soviet state determined the structure of
schools and the nature of learning.

In education, as in other fields, the mobilization of thought was reflected in
sweeping changes in the early 1930s when the relatively untrammeled
experimental ideas of the first years after the revolution gave place to the
practical, purposive criteria of the Five-Year Plans...the shift in Soviet
educational thought ran parallel to those in other disciplines- from determinism to
activism, from idealism to realism, from the hopes raised by progressive theory to
the realities of social demand

Beginning just before the advent of Perestroika, the government acknowledged that the system of education had fallen behind the times and was not fulfilling the needs of the state or children. With Perestroika and Glasnost, educators and the public became involved in the debate over the needs of the schools and the direction for change. From the established educational researchers arose a group of reformers and activists for radical change; they were joined by teacher reformers, who met in small groups around the country called Eureka Clubs. Edward Dneprov and his followers were an integral part of this movement, and with the appointment of Dneprov as Minister of Education the radical reformers took control of the state policy on education. However, Dneprov’s radical alteration of the system failed to account for the instability and insecurity in the country at the time. His policies lost support before they could take effect and he was removed from office. Mark Johnson wrote of the position of the reform movements, and the incompatibility with the national climate at the time:

Rapid decentralization exacerbated the administrative and financial chaos in regional and local education that was further inflamed by hyperinflation in 1992. The reformers overestimated the capacity of local officials and teachers to respond to the new demands, and the failed to anticipate the professional and public outrage at the seeming abrogation of the states’ commitment to free, public, and secular compulsory education.11

Reform since Dneprov has lacked decisiveness and continuity, “Dneprov…argues that the ministry under his successor Evgenii Tkachenko, has engaged in mere “pseudo-policy,” has been paralyzed incompetence and intellectual inertia”12 In addition, the

12 Johnson, “Visionary Hopes and Technocratic Fallacies,” 220
economic situation of the late 1990s in Russia made any effective reform unlikely and the successful decentralization of the schools impossible. Since the new millennium, the education system has been largely untouched, reforms have not effectively altered the situation and, many claim, schools still resemble in many ways the stagnated system of the late-Soviet era. Recent attempts have been made to modernize schools and recentralize authority.

The Russian political climate will deeply affect the future of the schools. Education, as Lenin said, is not “outside of life,” the Russian system of education has always reflected the political trends and sometimes, as was the case in the late 1920s and the early 1990s, anticipated the coming changes in political culture. “Politics and education are symbiotic variables in all societies. Each is interwoven with the other and each is influenced by the other. This complex, symbiotic relationship is viewed as being interdependent. Usually the interaction between these two variables results in cooperative efforts to achieve the goals and needs of the society.”

I. The Development of a Russian Education System

Russian education before the Communist revolution in 1917 was undergoing an evolution from an elite privilege to a popular institution. The political and social upheaval of the February and October Revolutions in 1917 overturned the growing tsarist education system and instituted a new education authority. An examination of the evolution of this change, focusing on key periods of reform and change from the late tsarist period through the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in the early 1930s, illustrates the effects political change has on Russian and Soviet education. Russian education moved from traditionalist to experimental and back according to the trends in government stability and agenda. In addition, the popular role in Russian education, particularly the power of teachers over implementation of reform policy, shaped and even stalled government reform efforts. Beginning with the drastic changes in educational policies during the reign of Tsar Nicholas II, this section will examine the effect of government policy on the structure and effectiveness of the education system.

Government educational policy in the late years of tsarist autocracy, 1894-1904, and inter-revolutionary period, 1905-1917, did not overtly shape the post-Revolutionary education policy, but historical trends affected reform implementation at a local level. The development of a cohort of teachers that spanned the revolutionary period influenced implementation of educational policy. Following the October Revolution in 1917, the Soviet government struggled to establish a new education system that would be based on Marxist principles and operate as an integral part of the restructuring of society. Civil war, material shortages, and general lack of effective communication marked the early
years of the new regime and rendered many reforms ineffective. These setbacks in the early reforms allowed reactionary educational policy of the stabilized government to reverse the efforts of the early revolutionaries. Despite the heavy handed nature of Russian and Soviet governments on education policy, student groups have historically been some of the most contentious and likely to offer dissent. The liberalization in late tsarist years led to the democratization of the education system, creating an increasingly educated peasant and working class provided popular pressure for liberalization and eventually for the revolution. The development of an education system and socio-political structure are deeply connected; the evolution of the current system could play heavily into the future development of the Russian government.

The Late Tsarist Period

The last half-century of tsarist rule brought democratization into schools and the government made significantly greater amounts of money available for education. The secular Zemstvo-funded schools increased enrollment at the elementary level from 910,587 students in 1893 to 1,324,608 students in 1903. A series of reforms allowed for the expansion and support of secular elementary schools, in an attempt to promote universal education among the peasant population. Long-standing partiality shown toward Orthodox religious education, gave way to a more balanced system of support. Regulations on Zemstvo run schools, limiting the development of new schools in areas

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already endowed with the church system, were declared illegal in 1897.\textsuperscript{15}

Simultaneously, the Church was restricted from opening competing schools in areas where Zemstvo schools already existed, unless granted permission by lay authorities.\textsuperscript{16}

This pattern of development significantly increased the accessibility of education in rural areas. In the years last years of autocratic government, the government introduced a more straightforward policy of state aid to the school system, breaking with the standing system of intermittent grants.

The empowerment of the Zemstva was important to the changes in educational structure in place by the 1900s. The Zemstva system, created to collect and distribute money to enable the opening and operation of secular schools, originated through the order of the Statute of the Zemstva in January 1, 1864.\textsuperscript{17} These councils did not hold administrative powers over the schools; the schools were controlled instead by the regional School Councils, run by members of the local bureaucracy, and the gentry, following a decree from Alexander II in 1873. Many members of the gentry placed little stock in the education of peasants, while some feared that ‘overeducating’ the lower classes was dangerous. As a result, very few Zemstva granted substantial money for elementary education in the early years, and instead focused on secondary levels, available to those who could be privately educated in the primary years. This was in keeping with the general attitude in Russia at the time; secondary and higher education were considered more important to the needs of the country than elementary. The

\textsuperscript{15} Hans, \textit{History of Russian Educational Policy}, 189.
\textsuperscript{16} Hans, \textit{History of Russian Educational Policy}, 188.
\textsuperscript{17} Hans, \textit{History of Russian Educational Policy}, 131.
peasants were, therefore responsible for the operation and funding of elementary schools. This only began to change in the last decade of the 1890s, when the Zemstva began supporting elementary schools far more than secondary; they still held no administrative powers over the schools they formed.

Conflict between the lay and church parochial schools came to a head in the 1890s. Alphabet schools were elementary level schools organized and run by local clergy, they had little in the way of curriculum and essentially consisted of the teaching of church Slavonic and the memorization of religious texts. While some continued to exist due to the lack of funding for elementary schools, more progressive Zemstva claimed that “The very existence of Alphabet Schools will do harm by distorting the popular conception of school education and debasing the very idea of school.” The trend of educational reform during this period moved the population away from an incomplete, religion-monopolized education, to state-funded, secular education. However, the conservatism of a tsarist and aristocratic society led to constant setbacks in the spread of primary-level peasant education.

**The Inter-Revolutionary period**

The 1905 Revolution, while not successful in a real transfer of power, brought attention to the changing needs of the people. The State Duma was created to see to the fulfillment of these needs. A legislative body with no legislative power, the Duma was ultimately limited to making suggestions to the tsar regarding policy. The first Duma met

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in 1906, and began offering advice to the government of Tsar Nicholas II. After the threat of imminent revolution faded, the state was slow to implement the more liberal reforms, including those concerning education. The mandates of the Duma were extremely progressive, and even with the lackluster implementation they set the country on the way toward the expectation of universal and compulsory elementary education. Reform at the secondary level was more halting than at the elementary, as the constant turnover of Ministers of Education forestalled progress. The more localized control of the elementary schools allowed for dramatic changes, and increased eligibility among the peasants for a secondary education.

Enrollment at the elementary level skyrocketed from the late 19th century until the Revolution in 1917. The Duma instituted a series of reforms that altered the structure of the elementary school system; they organized a uniform structure and created a system of grades intended to create a more complete ladder system in later years. In 1908, the government approved a law that made education compulsory and free to all children in the empire ages 8-11. Over the next several years, similar progressive education policies were in the works, but the onset of World War I, and the following revolution halted progress and turned education to the control of the new Soviet government. Nicholas Hans observed in his book on the history of Russian education, “On the eve of

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the revolution of 1917 Russia was on the threshold of possessing a network of elementary education accessible to peasants in the remotest corners of the vast Empire.”

Education at the secondary level was less homogeneous, and there was no straightforward way to meld this into a uniform system. Some students entered gender specific Classical Gymnasia, others entered Real Schools, or Real Gymnasia, that eliminated the teaching of classical languages and focused on more vocational education, still other schools were somewhere in between these two models. The string of Ministers of Education that held the office in the years before the Revolution each had their own model of an educational ladder system that would incorporate all the disparate sections. These systems invariably created a step to lead students from the elementary schools to the secondary, a feature eliminated by the government of Alexander III, however, none of the ministers were in office for long enough to implement their reforms.

A change in secondary schools came in 1905, when the school system incorporated parent involvement on the Pedagogical councils. This change followed the official recognition of Parents’ organizations by Count Tolstoy due in large part to student actions in the fall and winter of 1905. On October 14, 1905, secondary school students joined in a strike demanding the convention of a Constitutional Assembly, and the authorities found themselves ill-equipped to handle the situation; the strike, which persisted for as much as three months in some areas, only ended when parent groups intervened. The teachers, many of who were complicit in the strike, organized to form the

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highly political All-Russian Teachers Union. The politicization of the universities had long been a source of strife with the government, and in 1905, for the first time in any significant way, the secondary schools took part.

A great limitation on education under a tsarist government was the conflict inherent between a class-based, stringently divided society and the quest for an ideal “democratic ladder system” throughout the Russian Empire. It is likely that despite the great strides made under Tsar Nicholas II, this conflict would have come to a head in one way or another had the revolution not rendered the question irrelevant. “The whole period, however, may be regarded as that of the introduction of universal elementary education and the democratization of secondary and higher instruction” The changes made undoubtedly contributed to the success of the events in 1917. Democratization in many ways came from the school system as well as to it. The education of lower classes brought to light other changing needs and conditions. Developments such as the students strike demonstrated the power of the school system, and teachers who were largely believed to have orchestrated the movement, at least in part.

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II. Change of Regime and a New Education System

Immediately following the February 1917 revolution, church parochial schools were secularized. The secularization and unification of the Russian education system was a priority of the revolution, as the education system would be the means to restructure society. However, the provisional government focused on a moderate reform pace rather than a wholesale abolition of existing socio-political institutions. Following the October Bolshevik revolution, the Commissariat of Enlightenment (Education), Narkompros, received complete control of this system from the short-lived Ministry of Education. As the first Commissar of Education, Anatoly Vasilievich Lunacharsky led a policy of educational revolution to match the comprehensive restructuring taking place in society as a whole. In a speech to the First All-Russia Congress on Education, Lunacharsky declared, “we had to wipe out everything; it was absolutely clear that the school was due for a revolutionary shake-up. I shall not say “for destruction and recreation” because the schools as an existing apparatus are by no means due for destruction.”

Narkompros sought to create an education system that would function as a fundamental element in the reorganization of Soviet society; they attempted to build this system based on the vague prescriptions of Marx and Engels for education in a communist society, “locally controlled public schools which would offer a secular and

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free education to all children regardless of class.” The levels of local autonomy, accompanied by teachers and local authorities ill-equipped and disinclined to rebuild following a Communist agenda, created a series of issues with discontinuity and traditionalism that would make the counter-reforms initiated by Stalin particularly successful.

The role of the new education system was a source of contention among the leaders of the Bolshevik party, and opponents of Lunacharsky contested many early reforms. In a speech on Education Marx identified a particular problem with establishing a new societal order, “On the one hand, a change of social circumstances is required to establish a proper system of education. On the other hand, a proper system of education is required to bring about a change of social circumstances.”

The Bolshevik leadership divided precisely over what stage of their struggle the school system should embrace, the future classless society, or the present dictatorship of the proletariat. There were subtleties that separated individual members, but a central schism broke the Narkompros leadership, Anatoly Vasilievich Lunacharsky and his deputy Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya, from other key leaders in the Bolshevik leadership, such as V.I. Lenin.

The educational needs of the Soviet Union were debated by the party leadership and support organizations, such as Komsomol, throughout the early 1920s. Central to the debate was the basic argument over the nature of the Soviet Union, a state for proletariat or a proletarian state for all people. Lunacharsky examines the impact of this debate on

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the education system in his speech “What kind of School does the Proletarian State need?” If the state is for only the proletariat, then exclusivity in the educational system would contribute to the development of the proletariat and the sustenance of the dictatorship. However, the dictatorship of the proletariat was, in the progression from capitalist to communist state, intended to be a temporary condition. The proletarian state, therefore, needed to become, “a state led by the proletarian in the spirit of the proletariat ideology which lies as its goal the complete annihilation of classes, and which benefits all.”

The Lunacharsky favoured organizing education as a “microcosm of a future classless society,” as did Krupskaya. Many Bolshevik leaders, in some cases Lenin, along with the youth organization Komsomol, felt that the children of peasants and working class citizens should be granted privileged access to education. The children of political undesirables and the remnants of the middleclass would be treated as second-class citizens or even banned from schooling. The temporary policy of egalitarian education implemented during the leadership of Lunacharsky lasted only until the end of the experimental era of Soviet schooling at the end of the decade. Lunacharsky and Krupskaya represented the utopian element in the Bolshevik party, who “advocated a psychological transformation of the masses as a prerequisite for building socialism.”

By the late 1920s, the education system was to become a tool of repression.

The focus of the Narkompros in the early 1920s was a comprehensive restructuring of the schools into a unified, universal school system. This would allow the seamless transition of students from one school into the next allowing; this would prepare

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31 Lunacharsky, *On Education*, 121.
the system for the implementation of a mandatory universal education through the secondary level. Policy on content was limited to the experimentation with different forms of polytechnic education, that is the connection of education with life in a meaningful way. The specific content was, according to alignment with Marxist doctrine, left to the determination of local authorities. The party only released the broadest guidelines as to curricula, at least for the first years of reform, more specifically outlining what not to teach, such as religion. Until 1920, the Commissariat of Enlightenment focused on doing away with the pre-revolution education structure, and attempted to complete a unified, ladder-style system that would equalize the still stratified Russian-Soviet society. However, the unified school system was intended to create an equality of educational experience among Soviet children, not an identical education. This was an element of the Lunacharsky-Krupskaya educational policy that was destroyed under the homogenization of Stalinist policy. “Unification does not in the least presuppose absence of adjustment of the school to the particular conditions of the area in which it is developing. The school is variable.”

To execute these reforms, Narkompros depended on the local levels of education administration, and the teachers, to share the reform ideals of the Narkompros leadership. This was a misguided notion, which was soon evident from the varied and disparate efforts of schools and administrators to implement and monitor the reform efforts at the school level. Many still operated under the pre-revolutionary educational divisions, and maintained the stratified school hierarchies so adamantly opposed by the Communist

leadership. Through all the reforms and new education inadequate implementation of reforms

Early mandates ordered the restructuring of schools to focus on child exploration and self-guidance. The new system intended the school to be a place of exploration rather than dictation and memorization, meanwhile eliminating many long-held educational traditions, such as grades, homework and entrance examinations. Through the emphasis on exploration and real-life applicability of schoolwork, “Subjects lost much of their significance in a rush to center instruction around the more relevant areas of labor, nature, and society.” Lunacharsky and Krupskaya hoped to eliminate the divide between physical and mental labor, in keeping with the Marxist tradition. This was the first attempt at implementation of polytechnic education in the Soviet schools. Krupskaya continued to encourage the development of a polytechnic system of education after such efforts had been abandoned for the most part in favor of more traditional education structures. Polytechnic education allowed education to connect to the technological and economic needs of society without creating a system of early specialization, favored by technical groups. More than a decade after the formation of the Soviet Union, Krupskaya was writing in support of building a polytechnic school system, “the need for machinery awakes an interest in technology not only in scientist but among the broad masses…now it is necessary to cultivate this interest skillfully and channel it in the proper direction.”

In addition to exhibiting the continued search for a method of education that fulfilled the

needs of the economy, Krupskaya’s continued lobbying for a polytechnic schooling system illustrates that as of 1929, the reform efforts of Narkompros a decade earlier had failed.

There was a great deal of experimentation and change during this periods, as a result education styles and standards varied greatly from one region to another. The differences between the policies of the Petrograd Department of Education and the Moscow Department of Education in the late 1910s and early 1920s illustrates this early disconnect. Petrograd called for a combination of new and old techniques, with a syllabus and timetable designated for each grade and specific skill and knowledge sets for each age group. In contrast, Moscow implemented a system of “thematic study, aesthetic training, games, and handicrafts.” While the creation of a single co-educational ladder system, first attempted during the late tsarist era, was achieved early in the communist era, as least officially. Narkompros banned the pre-revolutionary school divisions. Realistically, reports as late at the early 1920s showed that some regions were still using the titles of Gymnasia, vocational schools, and the like for official reporting. The individual regions did not have the means or knowledge to adjust the schools to the new system demanded by Narkompros. Disunity of reform implementation, due in part to the inadequate communication, allowed the counter-reforms and politicization of the late 1920s to easily gain foothold in the schools.

36 Holmes, The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse, 11.
Reform Setbacks and the Restructuring of Narkompros

As Holmes states in his examination of Soviet education policy, “The naïveté dominant at Narkompros stemmed, in part, from its’ leaders’ focus on the future.” The indiscriminate rejection of pre-revolutionary structures failed to account for the great improvements in the Russian education in recent years and alienated the teachers trained in pre-revolutionary methods. While inequitable and backwards practices were still widespread, existing schools had dramatically increased attendance in an effort to promote universal, democratic education. Lunacharksy denounced uncooperative teachers as anti-progress and ineffective in a series of speeches on education given in the early 1920s, this attitude did not encourage cooperation, and reform stagnated. Overall, the policies of Narkompros from 1917 through 1920 marked a complete separation from the reality of the country’s situation. The country was torn apart by civil war, and the Russian people as a whole were not prepared for the new curricula and educational structures immediately following the revolution. The elimination of religion in schools was upsetting to the population, particularly in rural areas, the reactions of some parents became violent when teachers attempted to remove crucifixes from the schoolhouse. This was not the norm, most teachers and schools simply refused to implement the policies.

In a tour of the countryside, to investigate the manner and effectiveness of reform implementation, Krupskaya found that there was little change in many parts of the country, “she found that most teachers resented Bolshevik rule and Narkompros’ plans.

They opposed innovations in teaching methods and the curriculum, scorned labor as a subject, and refused to share authority with their pupils or the local population."\(^{41}\) The All Russian Teachers Union, organized a strike, many teachers refused to work for months until Narkompros changed their practices.

**The Failure of Reforms, Debate over Labor and Politicization of Soviet Education**

Before 1920, Narkompros had almost complete control over education policy. The education system they inherited was a part of a war-torn society, a still heavily illiterate population that was not supportive of the atheistic, radical Bolshevik policies, particularly not in the schools. The reforms were not compatible with the values of the people; they were overly ambitious, poorly communicated, and faced criticism within both the party leadership and the local ministries. Documents intended to explicate vague reform orders arrived at schools poorly printed on dark paper with lines missing, rendering them ineffective and often illegible. The poor communication coupled with dissent from the local population made it nearly impossible for teachers to begin reorganizing schools, had they wanted to.

In response to the dramatic failure of the Narkompros reforms from 1917 to 1919, by late 1920 the Soviet of People’s Commissars (Sovnarkom), the Party’s Central Committee and Lenin joined the parents, teachers, and local education boards, in criticizing the policies of Narkompros.\(^{42}\) In an effort to remove authority from Lunacharsky, the Sovnarkom announced the reorganization of the Commissariat of Enlightenment. The change removed power from the leadership of Lunacharsky and

\(^{41}\) Holmes, *The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse*, 15.

Krupskaya, and redistributed it to groups more in line with the common view of a strong labor base for schools. The change put the administration of vocational schools, special courses, technicums, and higher educational institutions under the new Main Administration for Professional-Technical Education (Glavprofobr).\textsuperscript{43} The new administration immediately modified the role of labor in secondary schools, and announced, in late 1920, that it would introduce specialized technical curricula for the upper levels of secondary schools. Lunacharsky and Krupskaya were adamantly opposed to the policies of Glavprofobr, holding that early specialization eliminated the Soviet policy of an equal education. The debates over the manner and method of labor inclusion into schools was a contentious issue.

The system set up by Lunacharsky and Krupskaya was organized to break down the divide between physical and intellectual work through the slow introduction of age-appropriate labor into schools.\textsuperscript{44} However, the plan was poorly developed, the teachers were not adequately trained to educate children on labor any more than they were to implement the other extensive reforms outlined by Narkompros; Krupskaya, in fact, intended for polytechnic education to incorporate professionals, “it is not possible to assign polytechnical education to teachers. In this case, participation by all types and categories of specialists is vital.”\textsuperscript{45} In the absence of implementing this aspect of polytechnic education, the tasks were left to untrained teachers. The intended work of tasks such as training in a school workshop, or agricultural work in the school plot

\textsuperscript{43} Holmes, \textit{The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse}, 20
\textsuperscript{44} Krupskaya, \textit{On Labour-Education}, 56.
\textsuperscript{45} Krupskaya, \textit{On Labour-Education}, 58.
reduced to cleaning the schoolhouse, or other menial labor. The Youth Communist League, Komsomol, was one of the earliest and strongest opponents with the education policies of Narkompros, and tried repeatedly to discredit their efforts.

Beginning with the first Komsomol conference in the fall of 1918, the group called for the rejection of Narkompros reforms in favor of a stronger labor focus and rejection of traditional school curriculum. Komsomol claimed that the secondary schools were still pre-revolutionary in curriculum and structure, and did not cater to the need of the working class students. Komsomol was correct in many of their criticisms. Older students, who already worked in factories, were unable to attend the full-time schools that were the only official option under Narkompros, and when they did attend had a difficult time relating to the instruction material. Komsomol proposed, as an alternative, vocational and technical schools, but gave no advice or instruction as to the formation of these schools. Lunacharsky and Krupskaya thought that polytechnic schools, in which labor was integrated as a component of the school day, was the only productive way to offer students a full general education, while preparing them for participation in the socialist workforce. They argued that the early specialization, as suggested by Komsomol, would limit students and perpetuate the ignorance so prevalent in the Russian working-class. The debate over the role of labor in education and students in the labor force was to color educational policy the Soviet schools

Lunacharsky managed to sustain the Narkompros secondary education course until the First Party Conference on Education, which took place from December 31, 1920

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to January 4, 1921.\textsuperscript{47} However, the inadequate success of Narkompros-led reforms, already evident in the modification of the internal structure, put the Commissariat of Enlightenment at odds with the delegates of the conference. The role of labor in education was the central point of the conference, and the delegations were disinclined to accept proposals from Lunacharsky and Krupskaya. In a last attempt to compromise, Krupskaya prepared for the conference a set of theses, which outlined a greater role for labor in the education system, while still limiting complete specialization. The theses instructed cooperation of the schools with industry to provide real labor training, but forewent specialization until students reached 16 years.\textsuperscript{48} The attempt failed and the conference voted for a completely different system. The delegations called for a system alternative to the secondary school as in place, which they slandered as a bourgeois relic.\textsuperscript{49}

Krupskaya feared that the decision would destroy the existing system of education and asked Lenin to intervene on behalf of an autonomous secondary system. While this action saved elements of Krupskaya’s polytechnic schools, the intervention removed the last remnants of autonomy over education reform from Narkompros and invited the Central Committee to control educational policy. The change became immediately apparent, Lenin stepped in and prevented the elimination of the existing secondary school system, and at the same time outlined his vision for education in the Soviet Union. He believed that the Commissariat should focus less on reforming educational structure and

\textsuperscript{47} Holmes, \textit{The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse}, 22.
\textsuperscript{48} Krupskaya, \textit{On Labour-Education}, 57.
\textsuperscript{49} Holmes, \textit{The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse}, 22
methods, and contribute more directly in determining the curricula used in schools, with a greater focus on traditional education techniques. Lenin said that Narkompros indulged in “general arguments and abstract slogans”\textsuperscript{50} The intervention altered the relationship between Narkompros and Sovnarkom and set up precedent for the elimination of educational autonomy.

Narkompros conceded to the wishes of party leadership, as they had no other option. In some cases, the changes were simply acknowledging already existing institutions, such as allowing factory-sponsored part-time schools for working youth, in the fall of 1918.\textsuperscript{51} They also moved to create a consistent curriculum for schools to adopt; this created more confusion and a new set of reforms, begun as the New Economic Policy took hold of the country, causing more shortages in schools.

**The NEP and Education**

The New Economic Policy almost destroyed the fledgling Soviet education system in the 1920s. The schools had not recovered from the shortages of the Revolution and ensuing civil war. The cutbacks and limitations faced during the NEP canceled out any progress, and forced teachers once again to ‘make-do’ with whatever materials and students showed up at the school. Education was not an economic priority, and neither Moscow nor the local governments could maintain the appropriate level of financial support to keep schools running. Teachers did not receive their pay, there was no money to open new schools, buy supplies or maintain upkeep in the schools already in existence. Many schools closed due to insufficient funding, and other schools instituted coping

\textsuperscript{50} V.I. Lenin as quoted by Larry E. Holmes, *The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse*, 23.

\textsuperscript{51} Holmes, *The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse*, 21.
policies to accommodate the resulting increase in students. Students in some densely populated areas attended school in shifts, with teachers teaching up to three groups of students a day, none of who had sufficient materials. The leadership, both Narkompros and the Central Committee, were desperate to find new ways to fund schools. Beginning on a voluntary basis in 1921, and expanding through the next several years, the Central Committee reinstituted fees for school. Many elements of this period of Soviet educational reform would be repeated during the shortages following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Decentralization of control and funding became a necessity of the socio-economic situation, as well as a reform policy.

Due to the economic struggles, issues with policy and curriculum, and lack of public support for educational overhaul regression took the place of progress. Parents began to pull their children from school, due either to lack of faith in the system or economic insecurity. From 1921 to 1923, the number of operating primary schools dropped from somewhere between 76 and 82,000 to 49,000. It was not until 1926 that the system rebounded enough to reach up to 1920 numbers. Throughout this period, the government in Moscow and the local authorities continued to debate which level was responsible for the funding and operation of schools.

Early Soviet Curriculum Development

In 1920, after the demand came for a common curriculum, leaders began to look abroad for examples of new education techniques. Krupskaya was well versed in

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education philosophy, and the Soviet schools soon showed signs of influence from a number of foreign sources, including the American John Dewey, and elements of the Montessori system.  

The Complex Method was one of the experimental education techniques implemented by Narkompros during the 1920s. The method is not an especially important example of Soviet teaching, as implementation of the method, which depended on the destruction of traditional subject divisions in school, was never successful in most, if any schools. The traditional array of subjects divided the world into false categories. It is important as an example of the constant flux and confusion in Soviet schools in the 1920s. Trial programs in education attempted to create an educational system to fit the new social and economic policy under creation and experimentation was natural. However, the teacher populations were offered little support on a local level and became resistant to radical change, which was soon associated with Narkompros and the early leadership. The lack of popular and party support for their programs soon forced Lunacharsky and Krupskaya to seek compromise; the resulting programs failed to show results as the country struggled from War Communism to New Economic Policy and through the implementation of Stalinist central planning.

**Narkompros Compromises**

In apparent disconnect with the idealistic outlook on the implementation of new polices and reforms, the leadership of Narkompros spent a significant amount of time touring schools, and looking at the work of policy first hand. In 1925, after a look into the

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55 Holmes, *The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse*, 39

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success, or lack there of, of the Complex Method, Narkompros faced that the reforms were not affecting schools in any significant or positive way, they attempted at first to assign blame elsewhere. 57 They released a manual that more carefully illustrated instruction in the Complex Method, and blamed “politically backward, inert, uncreative, and disorganized”58 teaching for any failures. In a speech to the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, Krupskaya claimed that the Complex method had won global recognition, and that “many teachers deviously picked on the complex method because they found the Narkompros program new and its content revolutionary.”59

Krupskaya was most likely correct in her assertion that many reforms were failing simply because they were not being properly implemented, however this was at least partially due to the lack of adequate training in these methods. Assigning blame did not hold off change for long, the failure of the Complex Method became a final failure for autonomy of Narkompros, Sovnarkom pushed for a return to more traditional structure with clearly delineated subjects. By the 1926-27 curriculum, Narkompros offered a compromise with the teachers. They organized the material on the new curriculum into subject areas, and provided teachers with “detailed syllabi that specified the knowledge and skills to be learned in elementary and secondary grades,” as well as approved textbooks.60 Once Narkompros compromised on these points, Komsomol became a temporary ally against the technical lobby, who desired the early specialization and

57 Holmes, The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse, 70.
58 Holmes, The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse, 70.
59 Holmes, The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse, 71.
60 Holmes, The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse, 77.
vocational training of youth.\(^61\) Komsomol rejected this idea because it would interfere with the ideological and political training they saw as necessary for a communist society, and Narkompros rejected due to the limitations it imposed on instruction. However, the issue of meeting productive demands of the labor force would arise repeatedly throughout the next decades, particularly in times of economic crisis or restructuring. During World War II, the need for trained workers necessitated the specialized training of secondary school children, particularly war orphans.

**Departure from Experimental Education**

Beginning in the late 1920s, noticeably at the Eighth Congress of the Young Communist League, Narkompros came under brutal attack. By now, the lackluster reform success had gone on long enough to incite a call for new leadership, which the leaders of Komsomol began in full force. Chaplin, the General Secretary of Komsomol, declared that the only way to remedy the problems was to send in the “best workers to the Narkompros apparat to shake it up for new work.”\(^62\) Lunacharsky and Krupskaya did what they could to further their reforms over the next years, but a continued lack of adequate funding and the reduction of central educational funding during NEP left reforms and theory to local interpretation. The theory of polytechnic education, “teaching of labor linked with the teaching of other subjects,”\(^63\) was incorrectly applied to school children, either as means for exploiting child labor in factories or through the superficial incorporation of labor education without practical application. Krupskaya’s vision of

\(^{62}\) Holmes, *The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse*, 111.
polytechnic education was, therefore, never implemented before the traditionalist movement accompanied the impulsion to homogenization of schools in the 1930s. By 1937, Krupskaya was writing in defense of the official expulsion of polytechnic education from schools, while continuing to urge for the implementation that never occurred. She denounced the course of school development to A. A. Zhdanov, the Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, “In recent years labor instruction in the schools has in effect been terminated. Instead, some kind of craft-oriented “labour processes” are being taught, and more than ever before labour is divorced from learning.” When the NEP was abandoned in 1929, education funding was centralized along with other aspects of economic policy and polytechnic education was slowly minimized in favor of academics. The general politicization of social and economic life affected schools as well, In February 1929, Lunacharsky wrote a scathing letter to Stalin denouncing the recent purges of students from schools, following this letter Lunacharsky, along with Krupskaya and many of their allies in Narkompros leadership, announced their resignations.

Lunacharsky’s replacement, A.S. Bubonov, had little experience in the field of education and much in the field of propaganda distribution. He immediately called for a greater level of Narkompros involvement in the activities of the Cultural Revolution, which Lunacharsky had adamantly opposed. The Commissariat quickly became a tool of Stalinist purges, and increased the political and ideological indoctrination of students. In 1929, in a book published to explicate the system of Soviet schools to foreign

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spectators, Albert Pinkevitch, a Soviet educational researcher and President of the Second State University in Moscow wrote that, during the evolution of the Soviet society, the schools must adapt accordingly and reflect the external conditions of the country. “The school will of course reflect the existing situation,” this marked a clear departure in policy from the goal of Lunacharsky and Krupskaya to create schools that reflected the goals rather than the reality of Soviet society. Pinkevitch reflects the policy of school politicization that occurred during the late 1920s, “this calls for a relationship between the school and questions of politics and economics…this flowing into schools of the contemporary life requires an organized participation of the proletariat in the work of the school.”

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III. Years of Repression and Stagnation: Education from 1929-1984

The focus of education during Stalin’s years in power abandoned the experimental educational practices of the Complex method and learning by inquiry, instead adopting a traditional approach with strong political and ideological components. Stalinist education focused on the uniform teaching of all Soviet children, including an emphasis on the development of Russian language skills in all Soviet non-Russian minorities. The years from the early 1930s through to World War II saw a considerable draw of power into the Politburo and Central Committee (Orgburo). The autonomy of Narkompros, which had begun to wane during the years of Lunacharsky and Krupskaya, became completely subject to the approval of the Orgburo. With all final decisions made centrally in Moscow, the curriculum and structure of schools became uniform across the Soviet Union, at least in policy if not in practice.

In the summer of 1931, Lazar’ Moiseyevich Kaganovich, Stalin’s spokesperson on education, officially called for a permanent turn away from the experimental educational practices, such as the project method, and an increased focus on academic success and rigor. Due to the lackadaisical implementation of the earlier reforms in some areas, the rejection of experimental programs was, in many ways, simply a statement of educational reality. Teachers and parents joined the government to make this change. Teachers had been left the isolated implementers of the radically experimental education policies during the early 1920s, their position in towns often became tenuous.

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Therefore, despite grave uncertainties generated by Stalin’s reign most teachers- including the pre-1917 cohort, those who entered the profession in the 1920s and those who flooded into schools in 1930s- came to an accommodation with a Stalinist state that offered material security, a measure of authority in the classroom and community, even if at the price of political obedience and severe limits on professional autonomy.  

During Stalin’s years in power, the curriculum became heavily politicized and the practice of modifying historical lessons was cemented in Soviet policy- Stalin became a key figure in the Revolution of 1917 and in the formation of the Red Army.

Creating a fully literate population remained a central goal of the Soviet education system. To this end, widespread reach was required; the reach of the education system expanded greatly as the school enrollment doubled from 1928-1931 and continued to grow until World War II. During the war, student enrollment dropped by 25%, but was back up at pre-war levels by 1950. A central achievement of the Stalin era was the expansion of education, this was of vital importance to the development of an ideologically cohesive nation and the consolidation of power. The state committed previously unseen amount to the expansion and development of the education system. “From 1932-1937 the states budget allotment for schools increased four times and per capita expenditure rose from 10 to 38.01 rubles a year.”

In August 1931, the Politburo, having drawn most real power away from Bubnov and Narkompros, ordered a single, traditional academic curriculum free of experimental

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methods. Over the next four years, the government created a centralized group of
textbooks, fixed lesson plans, homework, grading system, and every other detail of
educational policy down to the timetables for each grade. Centralized homogeneity was
diametrically opposed to the stated polices of Lunacharsky and Krupskaya; this reflected
the shift occurring in the socio-political culture at large. Following the successful creation
of a universal, compulsory, homogenous system of education during the Stalin years,
there was little change until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Robert Conquest “the
period saw fundamental shifts in principle which are directly connected with the
emergence of a totalitarian regime in the Soviet Union…Objectivity and the pursuit of
truth for its own sake—so far as they had survived—gave place to partisanship, propaganda,
and, ultimately, to falsification.”

The increased politicization of the education system made the schools vulnerable
to the over-politicization of society under Stalin. Elements of this trend affected both the
school structure and curriculum. In 1936, following the writing of the Stalin Constitution,
two hours per week of the seventh grade was committed to its study and the emphasis of
the superiority of the Soviet social system. However, even during the highly policed
1930s, a clear distinction between practice and policy persisted in schools; mandatory
periods of political and social education existed, but often outside of these lessons, the
schools remained focused on traditional education.

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Eklof, Holmes, and Kaplan, 57.
Centralized control of education became the norm until the reform efforts of Perestroika. The experimentation and change that had been present through the mid-1920s were eliminated during consolidation of central power under the Stalinist regime; there was little significant change or effective reform following this period. “Of the 20 obligatory subjects listed for teaching in the senior classes of the RSFST schools in 1978, no less than 17 corresponded to entries in the 1947 version.” Reform efforts under Khrushchev attempted to revitalize the school system and reinstitute polytechnic education, as developed under Lunacharsky and Krupskaya. However, the education community and students, unaccustomed to the true integration of labor education in the general schools, rejected the reforms.

IV. Education during Perestroika

By the early 1980s, Soviet education had fallen drastically short of meeting the requirements of the Soviet people and economy. An ideological shift had taken place among the Soviet youth that left them disillusioned with the structure and philosophy of Soviet schools. The schools were still largely undifferentiated in training, with few options for older students to specialize knowledge, as a result, the schools could not provide skilled workers for the increasingly specialized technological fields. Reform attempts in the late 1950s and 1960s had only superficially addressed the material and curricular inadequacies in the education system. Stagnation in policy was such that curriculum was essentially the same as it had been before World War II. In addition, the curriculum reflected many inconsistencies and historical inaccuracies that had been institutionalized during Stalinism.

During Y. V. Andropov’s short tenure as the General Secretary of the Communist Party, K. U. Chernenko held the position of Second Secretary of the Communist Party. The second secretary traditionally held the position of Director of Propaganda, Ideology, and Education in the Politburo, as such, Chernenko controlled issues of education and enlightenment and was appointed to chair a commission to develop a reform program for the educational system. On January 4, 1984, he issued a reform proposal titled, “The Guidelines for the Soviet School Reform.” The reform intended to address the unmet needs of the Soviet economy while modernizing the science and technology programs in secondary schools. To this end, the new system would divert 2/3 of the senior level

students from the upper levels of Soviet secondary schooling into new vocational-technical schools. Andropov died a short time later and in February of 1984, when Chernenko became the general secretary, he broke precedent and retained the leadership role in the Department of Propaganda, Ideology, and Education. This provided some continuity in educational reform, Chernenko maintained his reform program and the second secretary, Mikhail Gorbachev, was given the task of guiding the reforms through the committees to implementation. Education was never a priority of Gorbachev’s, either during the tenure of Chernenko, or during his own time as general secretary. His involvement was “procedural …[with] no substantive contributions to the provisions of reform,” his interest in education extended only as far as it was needed to fulfill the changing needs of the Soviet economy and political system.

Many educators were initially optimistic about the 1984 reform; the reform was a sign that the government was finally taking a real interest in the practical needs of education. However, it was soon apparent that the reforms were insufficient to combat inadequacies of the system. The system was in need of dramatic restructuring and realigning to fit the changing needs of the Soviet system, and the reform did not satisfy these needs. The Chernenko reforms attempted to mollify the exhaustion of the Soviet education system. The reforms engaged in several courses of action, including encouraging a greater number of students to leave general education for a vocational track following the eighth grade, lowering the age of entry to six years from seven, and

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creating new textbooks.\textsuperscript{76} The historian Ben Eklof identifies a central problem with the diversion of eighth graders into vocational institutes, “survey’s conducted at the time showed that most parents thought this was a wonderful idea, but not for their own children.”\textsuperscript{77} Vocational education was introduced repeatedly throughout Soviet education as an effort to encourage the development of the workers needed to fulfill economic imperatives. However, despite the importance of polytechnic education to Soviet educational theory, the general education system never successfully or fully incorporated the policies. The true deficiency of the 1984 reforms was the incompatibility with the changing society. The reforms were formulated during the Andropov administration, initiated by Chernenko, by the time they took hold during the beginning of Gorbachev’s tenure, they were already outdated. From Andropov to Gorbachev the Soviet Union underwent intense ideological alterations that changed the stakes for policy reform. The 1984 reforms did not fit with the ideals of democratization and decentralization of Perestroika. Following the advent of Perestroika, the partial reform agendas of the Soviet era no longer satisfied the educators who wished to see a comprehensive restructuring of the education system. Reformer Edward Dneprov wrote of the program, “The 1984 school reform, instead of alleviating, actually exacerbated the crisis in the schools. In

reality, it didn’t merit the name reform because it was not preceded by a sober, critical  
analysis.”

Perestroika and glasnost subjected Soviet social policy to a critical evaluation and  
set the stage for debate over alternative modes of governing and policymaking.  
Educators, many of whom had developed a philosophy contrary the Soviet line through  
their work in the classroom, sought to share their experiences to change policy. Education  
in the Soviet Union had undergone little meaningful change since the 1930s, largely due  
to the lack of debate permitted concerning teaching methodology and school structure.  
The system established during the Cultural Revolution of the 1930s favored a uniformity  
and structure that precluded innovation. Educators were excluded from the formation of  
education policy, and, for the most part, prohibited from making changes on the local or  
classroom level. Policy often did not reflect the needs and realities of the classroom. The  
late 1980s brought forth widespread concern that elements of social thought had been  
irreparably damaged by the years of Soviet absolutism. Divergent thought was  
discouraged or actively repressed for three generations, leading to a society accustomed  
to following the dictations of a monopolistic ideologically based policy. Early education  
reformers sought in large part to open up educational policy to the teacher experience,  
and to encourage teachers to view the classroom as a place for experimentation and  
creative learning, “this shift is both particularly difficult and necessary, because, for a  
long time, teachers’ consciousness was shaped by an inert and dogmatic system which

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in *Democracy in the Russian School*, ed. Ben Eklof and Edward Dneprov, (Boulder:  
denied all creative endeavor.\textsuperscript{79} Shalva Amonashvili, a major proponent of individualization in education attributed stagnation in the system to a “lack of creativity because for 60 years teachers had been afraid of inspectors.”\textsuperscript{79} During the second half of the 1980s, there was a significant increase of public participation from educators in favor of reform, these groups tended to push for individualization in the education system and increased classroom level control. However, this was still a minority of the education community, albeit the vocal portion, many teachers craved change, but on a more evolutionary clearly delineated path.

In 1989, the party changed the method by which local secretaries would be elected to a direct election by constituents rather than indirect appointment. “The process was designed to break the monopoly of power exercised by self-perpetuating cliques with the Party.”\textsuperscript{80} The break of party monopoly extended into areas of ideological and social homogeneity, perhaps more importantly for education. The removal of Party Ideology from the Soviet curriculum opened textbooks and curriculum to critique and left a vacuum in content and classroom resources. The perpetuation of historical and political inaccuracies for more than one generation created a problem with teacher training as well. Following the rejection of Soviet pedagogy, the majority of Soviet teachers were simply no longer qualified to teach many subjects having themselves been educated in the same system. In addition, economic insecurity made the rapid production of new resources a challenge, particularly as the late Perestroika and early post-Soviet eras saw a

\textsuperscript{79} Sutherland, \textit{Schooling in the New Russia}, 53.
\textsuperscript{80} Brian Holmes, et al., \textit{Russian Education: Tradition and Transition}, 24
growth in experimental and new educational techniques that made pinpointing classroom needs difficult.

Despite the widespread debate within the educational community, education reform was not a priority for the political community at-large, and particularly not during the Gorbachev years. His administration did not focus on education as a central area of reform. Gorbachev did call for change to create an education system that better educated the Soviet youth and schools that “fully meet the needs of the day,” and altered the system by replacing many party members in the field of education. The new officials were not all effective reformers, and a persistent lack of action arose from the widespread debates over the direction of policy reform. However, the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of the USSR (APN) controlled the development of Soviet educational pedagogy through a monopoly on educational research. The APN rejected most grassroots early reform efforts during Perestroika, criticizing teachers for interfering in areas of educational theory for which they were not qualified. The APN maintained that educational practice should continue to reflect policy, as developed according to their research, rather than policy reflecting the classroom practice. The APN held a monopoly over the development of pedagogy in the Soviet Union since its establishment following World War II. The realities of the classroom were increasingly divorced from the development of theory. In the late 1980s the “Creative Union of Teachers” and the

reawakening of the “Pedagogy of Cooperation,” focused on removing this separation and creating policy and theory based on needs of the classroom.\textsuperscript{82}

Criticism of the APN policies arose both from external teacher reform groups and from within the organization. Edward Dneprov, future Russian Minister of Education, was on such internal critic. His strong objections to the policies of the APN and skepticism of their ability to adopt policies in fitting with the

Even now, when the Communist Party has irreversibly adopted a course of expanding socialist democracy, when in Gorbachev’s words, “it is either democratization or inertia and conservatism: there is no third way,” we are still reluctant to take the smallest step towards democratization of school affairs.\textsuperscript{83}

Debate within the educational community was forthcoming following the advent of Perestroika, but consensus was not; the future of education remained murky, and a coherent policy of education in Russia ceased to exist. The end of Communist Party dominance opened methodology to disputing theories that had been blocked by party ideology since the Cultural Revolution in the mid to late 1920s. The field of educational theory was open to debate for the first time since the early years of the Soviet Union. This was undoubtedly the most significant contribution of the government to educational reform during the era.

An outpouring of criticism and ideas arose following the 1984 education reforms; the debate and criticism was channeled in a “War of the Media” by late 1986. Vladimir Matveyev and Simon Soloveichik, two former teachers working in journalism, gave a

\textsuperscript{82} Brian Holmes, et al., \textit{Russian Education: Tradition and Transition}, 30.
public theater for the movement to humanize and practically reform Soviet education according to the practical experience of the classroom teacher. “Seven teachers issued the “Peredelkino Manifesto” in October 1986, which called upon the teachers to rise up and carry into every Soviet classroom the “Pedagogy of Cooperation.”” This was followed by two more manifestos of the teacher group all calling for change from the school level on the part of the educator. Originally created during the Khrushchev era by I.P. Ivanov, the ‘Pedagogy of Cooperation’ was popularized in the mid-1980s by Soloveichik. This theory of educational democratization would prove vitally important for the formulation of policy in the late 1980s and into the 1990s.

Most significantly, for the evolution of practical methodology, Soviet educators entered the field of theoretical pedagogy for the first time in three generations. Reform-minded teachers began to challenge the accepted doctrines of educational pedagogy and explore new ideas for the innovation of teaching. The education community newspaper, Uchitel’skaya gazeta, was instrumental in the coordination of innovators during the early years of the thaw. The newspaper “invited a small group of the best-known progressive teachers…to a two-day meeting in Peredelkino, near Moscow, for an exchange of ideas.” The result of the meeting was an eighteen-point ‘Pedagogy of Cooperation’, challenging the policies and prescriptions of the USSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences (APN). Before this point, educators in the Soviet Union were expected to act as the

84 Brian Holmes, et al., Russian Education: Tradition and Transition, 30.
implementers of policy and research, all of which was coordinated by the APN, but not as contributors to the formulation of educational policy. This would become the basis for the research done in VNIK Shkola and the Ministry of Education policy under Edward Dneprov.

Through the manifesto, and two subsequent documents, the group of educators proposed a new approach to educational theory and teaching methods, which, according to the innovating teachers was “not a particular methodology but the pedagogical thinking of the epoch of perestroika.” The APN, challenged openly for the first time in decades, was encouraged to respond; the exchange pulled the larger Soviet educational community, including parents and older students, into a debate over the future of Russian education. The conflict between the teachers’ group and the APN led to level of support for many of the proposed reforms from a number of sources, including some members of the APN and many readers of the Uchitel’skaya gazeta.

This encounter can be used to mark the beginning of the dissolution of the Soviet system of education. Teachers, who had been expected to implement policy to the dictations of the Soviet government for seven decades, entered the field of pedagogical theory in droves. Previously, the APN monopolized the field of theory and policy, now a number of alternative research groups arose, many of which were based on practical application instead of ideological imperatives.

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The Eureka Clubs

The educational community came alive with debate over pedagogical practices and education policy during the late 1980s. Many educators came forth with ideas derived from their own classroom experience and their understanding of the disparity between policy and reality. Eureka clubs were the earliest organized grassroots manifestations of the Perestroika era reform efforts. The first clubs came into being in 1986 and the clubs spread throughout Russia— at their height more than 500 existed— as more teachers sought an outlet for their opinions.\textsuperscript{88} The Eureka movement was influential as one of the earliest channels for discussion and debate among teachers. Organizations such as the Eureka clubs were the most genuinely democratic of the innovations of the 1980s. They brought out the experiences of those most closely connected with the schools and opened up policy and pedagogical theory to the critique of their experiences. The sustained influence of the Eureka clubs is difficult to determine due to the many and varied nature of their policies. However, the activity created by their existence played an influential role in forcing the resignation of the director of APN in 1987, and facilitated one element of the creation of a Russian civil society.

VNIK Shkola

VNIK Shkola, ‘Provisional Research Group on the School,’ was established in response to general dissatisfaction with the results of research of the established Soviet APN.\textsuperscript{89} A criticism of pre-Perestroika Soviet educational pedagogy centered on the

\textsuperscript{89} Brian Holmes, et al., Russian Education: Tradition and Transition, 37.
disparity between policy and practice, a problem exacerbated by the exclusivity of policymaking and research. The work of VNIK Shkola was structured to operate in contrast to this rigidity and institutionalization by adapting to the realities of the classroom, it sought to bring the discussions started in organizations such as the Eureka clubs into the formation of new theory and policy. The participation of teachers in the work of VNIK Shkola was instrumental.

The policies of VNIK called for the democratization of the school system through radical decentralization and a focus on the individual needs of the child. The director of VNIK Shkola, Edward Dneprov, came from within the APN and the group of internal dissenters. He supported a departure for the uniformity of Soviet years as a part of the overall decentralization of Soviet social policy. He believed that effective education came through regionalization and localization of monetary and policy control. However, Dneprov and his fellow reformers at VNIK Shkola equated democratization with regionalization, which left little cohesive nation-wide education policy and allocated most control to localities that had no experience in creating policy. In December 1990, VNIK contracted with the late Soviet government to redefine and rework the idea of general education, incorporating many of these ideas. However, the more lasting influence of VNIK Shkola policy was through the professional progression of Dneprov, who became the Russian Minister of Education in 1990 and the education advisor to Yeltsin in 1991.90 Dneprov trained as a pedagogical historian and worked in the APN until the mid-1980s. As reform movements arose following the 1984 reforms, Dneprov

emerged as an internal dissident to the overly institutionalization and homogenization of educational theory within the APN. He soon entered the reform movement as an advocate of the pedagogy of cooperation and the development of new policy based on the individual. Dneprov’s abilities as a researcher and reform agendas as the head of VNIK Shkola won him a significant level of support and he became the Russian Minister of Education in 1990.

Under Dneprov’s leadership, VNIK Shkola developed a set of tenets to guide the reform of Russian education reform. The ten points of reform were divided into two categories, “external” principles and “internal” principles. Dneprov outlined these principles in an article for Uchitel’eskaya gazeta. The external principles were “the societal and pedagogical preconditions for assuring that the educational system be full-blooded and vital,” they were: democratization, decentralization of administrative powers, multiplicity and the legitimacy of alternatives, regionalization and multiculturalism, and openness. The internal principles were the “pedagogical conditions” to be fulfilled within the schools itself: humanization and a focus on the child; a focus on the humanities; differentiation based on inclination, interest, and ability; lifelong education; and developmental education.

Dneprov’s reform program embraced the ideals of democratization and ideological pluralism of Perestroika and Glasnost, at times to the detriment of addressing the day-to-day needs of schools. A similar mistake to that of Lunacharsky and Krupskaya following the Communist Revolution of 1917, the teachers and local administration were

not prepared or trained for the changes being made and soon support waned. Even those local administrators eager for change could not manage without retraining the responsibilities of reform implementation and decision-making expected under the proposed structure. Dneprov presupposed that he would enjoy enthusiastic support from the people as a whole. On the contrary, while there was a general recognition of the need for educational reform, localities and teachers were neither prepared nor willing to remove take on educational administrative or financial duties to the extent Dneprov hoped.

Perestroika and glasnost created the forum for a critique of Soviet policy and allowed for the testing of new theories of governance and the incorporation of new ideas into the Russian socio-political sphere. The period also initiated the development of a Russian civil society and democratization from the increased involvement of the people in policy development. However, while some elements of late-Soviet reform were embraced and even intensified following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, economic insecurity and ideological disunity disabled the more radical reform movements and endangered efforts at regionalization. Local and regional educational authorities, expected to shoulder a large portion of the administrative and financial burdens of the new education system, did not have the experience or financial ability to do so. As a result, regionalization led to inequality of educational opportunity and a backlash against radical reform movements.
V. Post-Soviet Russian Education

The modern Russian educational system continues to be highly politicized, a natural continuation of the ideological unity of school, society, government during the communist era. The construction of a new system has been contentious and politically encumbered in the post-Soviet Russian Federation. The elimination of Soviet ideology from the schools in the early 1990s left a vacuum of direction and meaning for the schools. The social and political structure of the independent Russian Republic evolved over a period of years following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The reforms began in the late Soviet years and are still in process more than 20 years later. The process brought to power a variety of reformers and counter-reformers as access to new ideas and an openness to debate reshaped Russian society. Education in the new Russia attempted shape to the needs of the evolving country, the individuals forming the system became immensely important to the course of reform. “In our political culture the status the leader’s personality enjoys is incomparably higher than the status attributed to various parties, movements and state structures (“Though the Soviet Union is no more, Soviet people are still here” New Times, No.13, 92, pp.4-7).”92 During the years between the inception of Perestroika and a turn away from radical reform following Yeltsin’s first year as President of Russia, Edward Dneprov was the most important figure in education reform and a radical voice for the dismantling of the Soviet political structure.

The construction of socio-political institutions following the Communist revolution adhered to strong ideological principles that provided a frame of reference for

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92 Brian Holmes, et al., Russian Education: Tradition and Transition, 263
debate and restructuring. Perestroika removed the assumption to consensus, opened the Russian socio-political field to the critique alternative views, and allowed debate. The opportunity to dismantle the ideological monopoly of the party-run education system, a period of radicalism focused on the rapid decentralization and personalization of education. Debate reigned through Perestroika reforms and came to a head after the failed August coup. The reformers and policy makers were then faced with the imperative of creating a functioning social system out of jumble. As a popular reform figure who gained influence during the late 1980s, Edward Dneprov maintained his position as Minister of Education following the fall of the Soviet Union. Dneprov’s radicalism placed him in a position to carry out the necessary restructuring following the decisive repositioning of Russian politics following the coup of August 1991. However, the pre-coup unity formed around the dismantling of the existing regime was lost when the construction of a new system began. As often happens following the comprehensive dismantling of a regime, unity among reformers dissolved quickly in the new Russian Republic.

Uncertainty in political development, a problem exacerbated by the ongoing power struggle between Yeltsin and the legislative bodies, left social institutions struggling to redefine their societal roles. The inundation of new information left the people confused and unsure of the development, the insecurity soon began to take its toll. Nikolai Nikandrov, an education researcher in the Soviet Union and in the independent Russian Federation, discussed this difficulty in an analysis of the position of Russian education following Perestroika. For the first time in 70 years, “the individual is free to
search for meaning…while this is exhilarating, it is also profoundly confusing for many people.” The dramatic influx of alternative theories of social organization and policy led to experimentation and polarization in education; this was compounded by the inexperience of the country with decision-making in reform and policy.

**The Ministry of Education and Government Reforms**

Edward Dneprov was appointed to the position of Minister of Education in the RSFSR during 1990, and was then elected to the position for the new Russian Republic. His sweeping reforms focused on dismantling and decentralizing Russian education, granting the majority of administrative powers to the regional and local authorities. In saying “We have two principles that form the pillars of our policy: democratization and humanization,” in a January 1992 interview, Dneprov’s main reform tenets were simplified from the ten points of reform developed during his time at VNIK Shkola. His radical position, which had gained the support of important persons during the years of Perestroika, was too divisive to retain support during the challenging post-Soviet years, and he slowly simplified his plan while addressing the practical needs of governance. The move toward democratization, individualization, and marketization profoundly altered Russian education. Dneprov’s reforms attempted to address the Soviet disconnect between policy and practice by reversing the process, “we have challenged this tradition by reversing the stages, so that we focus on what we wish to implement and then justify that with out conceptual statement.”93 However, this provided an inadequate structural

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guidance for local school systems and teachers attempting to transition from a Soviet to a post-Soviet classroom.

The division among the political community forced radicalization of theory and polarization of policy. The deep connections of the education community to policy makers guaranteed that the appointment of radical reformers, such as Dneprov, was controversial. Russian political culture was highly personal and partisan. “Policy decision and reform programs were often accepted more on the basis of who formulated them rather than on their intrinsic merits.”

The only consensus was that the highly centralized, ideologically driven administration of the central government was failing to meet the needs of students or society. The success and composition of education reforms in the early 1990s was tied inextricably to the corresponding reforms in other sectors. Dneprov appreciated the importance of the broader political reforms and spent a significant amount of his short time in office attempting to work out the relationship of the education system to the central Russian government, and clarify the division of power. Dneprov addressed this problem himself, and warned that “the kind of reforms in education he envisioned were bound to fail unless changes took place simultaneously in the legal system, property rights, and the political process.”

Others realized that only a coherent widespread reform could successfully ensure the evolution of the education system. However, serious issues concerning the logistical and financial management of

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daily school administration remained unsolved. The longer these issues remained unsettled, the more support for radical reform agendas waned.

The first education reforms of the Russian federation reflected aspects of policy created during Dneprov’s tenure at VNIK Shkola. Decentralization and democratization and were embraced by the Yeltsin government as key factors in dismantling the stifling Soviet homogeneity. Dneprov believed the way to develop a new, modern school system to fit the needs of the new market based, privatized economy was the creation of a complementary system of education. This necessitated not only the removal of Soviet ideology from the school curriculum, and the modification of education to a child’s specific needs, but the encouragement of non-state schools and specialization.

“Decentralization of the system of administering education is a must, excessive regulation must be eliminated, and all those involved in the schools must be empowered.”96 This model of educational planning was a rapid departure from the highly centralized, dictatorial policy of the Soviet years by focusing on regional education needs and allowing individualization of coursework. The plan essentially disassembled the existing structures to rebuild a new decentralized system free of the ideological and structural traditions of the Soviet Union. Under Dneprov, new policies for Russian education stemmed from the reform movements of the late 1980s and early 1990s; the teacher-reform groups that pioneered Perestroika education reform heavily influenced theories on individualization and humanization in education. The practice-centered

theories Dneprov developed encouraged policy that allowed local determination of most elements of education.

A central problem with Dneprov’s reform program was the lack of oversight for local administration as to how they would rebuild the dismantling of the system with. Dneprov and his supporters believed that local and non-state enterprise would compensate for the lack of central control. His program divided responsibility for educational planning and administration between three levels: federal, regional, and local. In Dneprov’s plan, the federal level would lay forth very general regulations concerning educational law, leaving the majority of responsibility to the lower levels of government. This plan severely “overestimated the capacity of local officials and teachers to respond to the new demands.”

Following 70 years of centralized planning and funding, the expectation of local and regional authorities to take on the burden of educational administration, while simultaneously dealing with the economic crisis underway in the early 1990s Russia was impractical.

These reforms received support from the intellectual opposition and secured for Dneprov an influential role in restructuring Soviet education during Perestroika, eventually earning him the appointment to Minister of Education under Yeltsin. However, Dneprov was somewhat unsuccessful in turning his theoretical plans into action once in power. His devotion to the he “devoted much of his energy to the political struggle at the top. His critics, nevertheless, have bitterly attacked him for neglecting the school in favor of “Big Politics” and, by implication, for pursuing his own career

Dneprov’s decisive leadership of VNIK Shkola did not translate into the position as minister. Following his installment as Minister of Education, Dneprov’s sweeping reforms quickly suffered from lackluster support and the practical limitations of economic insecurity. As Olga Marincheva observed in an article for Komsomol’skaya Pravda on May 25, 1991, “Dneprov the minister is not as sharp-edged, and not as distinctive as Dneprov the rebel.” As the Minister of Education, Dneprov failed to maintain adequate support for his policies as he dealt with the practicalities of paying teachers and modernizing school buildings.

Dneprov’s reforms were largely unenforceable due to the lack of a law on education for the Russian Republic. His involvement in the broad law was delayed by divisive factions in the legislature who believed more detailed guidance was needed for ensuring a successful nationally cohesive education system. In 1991, Dneprov wrote an article for the Teachers’ Gazette in December 1991, Al’terniva, “The tendency toward differentiation is a welcome development, in that it opens up new opportunities for satisfying personal needs in education and serves as a stimulant to growth for the system as a whole.” When finally approved on May 22, 1992, the law divided administrative powers between three levels of government, allocating certain duties to the federal, regional, and local governments, and greatly reduced the power of the Central


government from Soviet times. It also laid forth a great deal of regulations and stipulations concerning mandatory specifics of school administration and curriculum.

Education systems rely on a stable government structure to develop sustainable and socially appropriate policy and structure. Dneprov attempted to reverse this process by anticipating the restructuring of the political system through reforms in education system by decentralizing and democratizing the schools. A central feature of this was the marketization of the school system. The Soviet education system was authoritarian, centralized, and uniform, the reform movement embraced the ideal of democratization in schools, and equated it with decentralization and extreme individualization. Therefore, many state reformists encouraged the development of alternatives in the early 1990s. “A major shortcoming of the existing school network is the virtual absence of alternatives to the state system.”

This led to rampant experimentation and the creation of largely unregulated, alternative schools.

Dneprov encouraged a radical restructuring of the system of education to distribute the majority of power among localities and regions, while creating a highly differentiated system that promoted experimentation and personalization in education. The realities of the fundamental lack of modern facilities and education resources outside of the urban centers outweighed pedagogical concerns in the needs of many schools. The rampant inflation of the early 1990s in the Russian Federation also exacerbated the problems of pay stagnation or lack of pay that arose during Perestroika. After the upheaval of 1992, a more conservative approach to reform took hold of certain societal

sectors. In many ways, this was a natural reaction to the attempt at a full-scale dismantling of a social system 70 years in the making. The Russian people, while facing uncertainty in economic and political security, sought the restabilization of social institutions.

The need for a new beginning in Russian society and politics led to the widespread overturning of Soviet policy during 1992. In a wave of overarching societal change, old social institutions were disbanded to make room for a new system. Without a cohesive plan for the reconstruction, this caused a great deal of confusion and fighting within the education community. By late 1992, the system was spiraling downward amidst economic hardships and a lack of effective leadership. An examination of the reform movements of the young system reported “The deepening economic crisis and the instability of the political situation have marginalized the liberal reformist leadership and fueled a yearning on the part of many teachers to return to a more stable learning and teaching environment.”\(^{102}\) The reforms were not sustainable and failed to gain adequate public support. Faced with fewer supporters and a fractured system, Dneprov narrowed his scope to a few elements of his original reform movement, but failed to compromise on the essential nature of his reform movements. “This commitment to high principle and combative passion are exactly what made Dneprov such a dynamic reformer to begin with and then, tragically, also made compromise and building consensus difficult once power had been achieved.”\(^{103}\) Dneprov’s opponents united in an effort to remove the minister from office a year after the final dissolution of the Soviet Union. A scandal


\(^{103}\) Johnson, “Visionary Hopes and Technocratic Fallacies in Russian Education”, 221.
involving Russian children’s homes, which fell under Dneprov’s jurisdiction and foreign adoption agencies. Dneprov resigned his post on December 4, 1992 and moved to the position of advisor on education to Yeltsin. Edward Tkachenko replaced him as Minister of Education.

Tkachenko, while not a reactionary force in education, was a considerably less radical force for reform. His appointment “signaled a slower and more cautious approach to reform, a time for critical analysis and evaluation of the best of the Soviet educational traditions as well as the recent reforms.”\(^\text{104}\) His policies did not completely reject the reforms initiated by Dneprov, but tempered these reforms with an effort to maintain certain elements of Soviet educational practices. Tkachenko supported the division of the organizational control into federal, regional, and local levels, but also attempted to adjust the focus of the Ministry of Education to supplying of necessary resources to the schools, an effort hampered by the lack of material resources in the early 1990s.

**The Russian Academy of Education**

The Academy of Pedagogical Science (APS) faced heavy criticism from education reformers and many teachers beginning in the earliest reform debates in the mid-1980s. Reformers felt the work conducted by the research monopoly was impractical and ideologically driven and called for the dissolution of the institution. Since then, a number of research groups had been established, most notably VNIK Shkola, but also a number of independent experimental schools and teacher-led organizations, to offer an alternative source of pedagogical research. The final stroke came in October of 1991 with

Yeltsin’s decree discontinuing funding for All-Union organizations. APS was given the option of existing under the authority of the Russian Ministry of Education in on a temporary basis until other arrangements were made.105

105 Brian Holmes et al. Russian Education: Tradition and Transition, 287.
V. Modern Trends in Education Reform

Since the reform era of the early 1990s, the Russian system of education has faced a number of reform setbacks, including financial difficulties, a conflict between regional and national interests, and conflicting views on the educational requirements of the modern Russian Federation. The 1993 Russian Constitution declared that, “The Russian Federation shall institute federal state educational standards and support various forms of education and self-education”\textsuperscript{106} This somewhat broad illustration of the duties of the federal government towards the schools has created difficulties in maintaining policy and funding schools. The central funding of education established during the Soviet Union was drastically reduced in favor of regional and local funding. Regionalization, while desired by many areas as a step toward freedom from Soviet era centralized control, placed heavy administrative and financial burdens on unaccustomed local governments.

In general, the financial insecurity of the 1990s endangered many experimental reform movements, somewhat like the trend in the 1920s. The practical needs of school funding and teacher salaries were not being addressed, this made implementing new policy nearly impossible. During times of uncertainty and material shortage, educators and parents craved traditionalism and stability in education. When the economic collapse came in 1998, education reform was relegated to a role of secondary importance. Since the 1990s, there have been increasing levels of concern regarding the trajectory and long-term stability of Russian schools, “Russian education since the mid-1990s has been

marked by increasing signs of collapse. There are two primary reasons for this, one internal to the system itself—the virtual disappearance of financial resources to support the system—and the other external—the continuing and worsening problems with children’s health.”

The reform policies of the early 1990s, initiated by Edward Dneprov, centered on decentralization and individualization, as discussed above. However, when Dneprov was removed from his position, his successor, Evgenii Tkachenko, adopted a more moderated approach to reform, while maintaining the emphasis on diversity of schools. His policies combined elements of Dneprov’s policies, while attempting to incorporate successful elements of the Soviet era. Unfortunately, the resulting policies did not eliminate the problems of unregulated schools found in the early 1990s, and lacked the theoretical cohesiveness that guided policy under Dneprov.

One of the major reform slogans (especially in the mid-1990s, under Minister of Education Evgenii Tkachenko) was ‘education by choice’. This slogan was generated in an atmosphere marked by an abundance of new opportunities, and was based on the proposition that the very process of choice was inherently democratic and educational. Many scholars simple equate choice with democracy. In her engaging study of democratization of the schools, E.M. Kolosova wrote: ‘Choice is the essence of democratization.’

Democratization efforts in Post-Soviet Russia were a fundamental aspect of transition to the new Russian Federation. The movements, particularly in the education sector, sought to address the needs of the people neglected during the intense centralization of the


Soviet system. The centralized authoritarianism of the Soviet system led reformers to seek a policy based on ‘democratization’ and ‘decentralization.’

A period of reform stagnation followed the economic collapse of 1998, when the economy stabilized in the 2000s, it appeared to many that educational reform had done little to impact the reality of the schools. The removal of Soviet ideology from textbooks and incorporation of different social theories and ideas opened up the schools to influence from the outside world. However, fundamental change to the structure and operation of schools had never been successfully implemented. The schools operated as havens from the uncertainty and instability of the socio-political climate in Russia in the late 1990s. The teachers often endured extended periods of nonpayment and institutional abandonment at their posts, but remained and provided an invaluable service to Russian youth. However, the fractional success of the reforms in the early 1990s and the stagnation experience in the intervening years left Russian education operating under a still highly Soviet system of educational structure and curriculum without the benefit of state funding, ideological unity, or culture of learning.

Its [the education system] resiliency has been demonstrated…under repeated attempts at reform of the system itself, its curriculum, its materials, the ways its teacher, and its cost. In spite of these multiple reform efforts, what still happens from day to day in many Russian schools looks quite similar to what happened in Soviet schools a generation ago  

The needs of the Russian Federation and the people in modern Russia are not addressed by many of the existing schools. Post-Soviet demographic shifts, due to both immigration and emigration, have encouraged an increasing consciousness concerning

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109 Kerr, “Demographic Change and the Fate of Russia’s Schools: The impact of population shifts on educational practice and policy,” Educational Reform, 153.
multi-culturalism and globalism. This trend, along with trends of theoretical shifts to privatism and democratization among the younger generations, tied with the reality discussed above concerning the continuity of educational practice through attempted reform efforts have left the education system out of date with the population. In addition, while teachers have held their positions through tremendous hardships “there are some signs of more open stress among teachers. One example is teacher strikes, which in 1998 involved 7,695 schools, and 252,000 teachers around the country.”\textsuperscript{110} The teaching profession has lost considerable respect through the transition to the Russian Federation. This could be revealing of an overall trend among the Russian people, particularly the youth. While education was widely respected in Soviet society, along with the teaching profession, the capitalization of Russia and the emphasis on monetary success have altered the public values. Due partially to the economic privation experience during the childhood and adolescence of many students, financial security is more valued than education.

In January of 2010, Medvedev identified education reform as a priority in his over the next years, and announced a plan, titled ‘Our New School’, to reevaluate the needs of the Russian education system and rework the schools to fit the needs of modern Russia. The plan, initiated in early 2010, was implemented under the guidance of current Minister of Science and Education Andrei Fursenko. Fursenko described the goal of the initiative following Medvedev’s announcement in January of 2010:

\textsuperscript{110} Kerr, “Demographic Change and the Fate of Russia’s Schools: The impact of population shifts on educational practice and policy,” Educational Reform, 168.
"Our New School" aims at the gradual transition to new education standards, some changes in the infrastructure of the school network, at keeping up and building up the health of schoolchildren, and at developing the teaching potential and the support system for talented children.\footnote{111 "Medvedev to Launch Education Modernization Project." \textit{SRAS}, Jan, 22, 2010, http://www.sras.org/medvedev_to_launch_education_modernization_project (accessed on April 15, 2011).}

The effort led to the creation of a new Law on Education in early 2011.

When the new education reform was released in early 2011, public backlash was such that Vladimir Putin, the Prime Minister, and Minister of Education Andrei Fursenko, immediately backpedaled, calling the reforms too extreme. Vladimir Ryzhkov, writing for the Moscow Times, illustrated the popular perceptions of the law, “according to the plan, starting in 2012, schoolchildren will study only four required subjects, and of those, only two are clearly defined: physical education and general safety. The remaining two are the cryptic “individual project” and the highly suspicious Russia in the World.”\footnote{112 Vladimir Ryzhkov, “Disastrous Consequences of Neo-Soviet Education in Russia” \textit{The Moscow Times}, Feb. 17, 2011 http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/force-feeding-political-indoctrination/431014.html (accessed April 15, 2011).}

Criticism of the efforts has extended beyond the education community, with the public wary of the implications for the future of Russian education. Students have taken an active role in protesting the changes, particularly those at the levels of upper secondary and higher education.\footnote{113 Ilya Naymushi, “Russian Students Protest against Education Law.” \textit{EuroNews}, April 13, 2011, http://www.euronews.net/2011/04/11/russian-students-protest-against-education-law/ (accessed April 22, 2011).} Public dissatisfaction intensified following a statement by co-author of the reform, former Deputy Education Minister Alexander Kondakov, “added fuel to the fire by calling patriotism more important than math. "It's a
priority task for any state to bring up a citizen and patriot," he told Gzt.ru last month. "It's even more important than mathematics or physics." Many fear that the reforms will become a tool of the United Russia party to ensure support among the younger generations, particularly with the introduction of the mandatory ‘Russia in the World’ class, one of only three mandatory subjects under the new reform plan.

The reform program, originally scheduled for implementation beginning in 2013, is currently on hold as debate unfolds around the plan. President Dmitry Medvedev told an audience in April 2011, "We will not hurry with the education reforms. No one is going to mess up our education system. We will act very cautiously" However, fears concerning Medvedev’s plans for the education system are exacerbated by the release of the budget for 2011-2013; the budget “calls for cutting the share of federal spending on education from 1.1 percent of gross domestic product in 2009 to 0.5 percent in 2013.”

Education reform in Russia is historically highly politicized and integrated with socio-political trends. The discrepancy between educational policy and classroom practice was problematic throughout the Soviet Union, and remained difficult in the Russian Federation under Dneprov and Tkachenko. The current situation in Russian schools is tenuous and on the cusp of significant change in one direction or the other. Some educators and reformers deem the elimination of a significant number of

116 Ryzhkov. “Disastrous Consequences of Neo-Soviet Education in Russia”
mandatory courses and the increase in student-selected electives will bring Russian education more completely in line with Western traditions and allow for specialization that is more effective. This view is reflected in the new reform, which cuts the mandatory classes in secondary education to four, including one independent study and the somewhat vaguely titled, Russia in the World. However, critics denounce these reforms as a challenge to Russian classical education and an effort by Putin’s United Russia party to indoctrinate Russia’s youth. The legacy of the Soviet education, and its success in maintaining literacy and developing a superior science and technology education, is being lost to the interests of modern Russian capitalism and reform failure. The stagnation in system of education reflects the theoretical conflict underway in the educational community and Russia as a whole. Every major educational reform since Perestroika has been cut short by political conflict and theoretical disagreement. The impetus for radical change that thrived in the early post-Soviet years has dissipated and been replaced by more moderated reform program. However, dispute concerning the course for education has stalled reform efforts since the early 1990s. In a 2008 conference on trends of change in the Russian political economy, a report on policy trends in Russian education identified a source of the post-Soviet stagnation in education. “During the 1990s, there was enormous energy and the will to change, but available resources encouraged a survival mentality. Since 2000, the economic situation has improved markedly. However, resistance to change has grown.”

education is developed, Russian schools will remain disconnected from the trends of modern Russian society.
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