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Home Education in Russia

From the eighteenth through the early twentieth centuries, home education (home schooling) by tutors and governesses in Russia was a customary form of schooling for an overwhelming majority of members of the nobility. Social and political transformations of the twentieth century led to substantial changes as the state got actively involved with the aim of restricting or prohibiting home education, but now home education is reemerging as part of a search for new forms of educational experience in Russia.

The term “home education” has been interpreted in a variety of ways. For example: “home education represents education whose center and basis is the home. This kind of education is conducted either by the parents directly or by people chosen and appointed by the parents. Home education is seen as a temporary or a permanent alternative to state-run school education or private school education” [1, p. 139]. But what is the reason behind the existence of home education? “The parents’ choice of the home to serve as the base for the education of their children is what leads to the rise and development of home education. This choice is the result of the parents’ conviction that home education will be better able to meet their children’s needs. The parents are able to plan, implement, and

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rate the program used for their children's schooling. For that purpose, a variety of resources and sources are brought into play. . . . In the framework of home education, all the responsibility rests on the parents" [2, p. 108; 3]. The reasoning of these parents is that even though a good school collective and school environment enable a child to acquire excellent knowledge, that does not imply that there are not other equally effective or more effective options [3, p. 53; 5, p. 50].

It is well known that in all the countries of Europe from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries, home education functioned as a completely natural, very familiar, customary form of schooling. In the eighteenth century, knowledge and education that reflected the achievements of science gradually made their way into Russia as well. The development of fields of activity such as state administration, industry, finance, trade, transportation, and the military sphere required a particular level of education (although perhaps just a minimum level). The reforms of Peter the Great, which shaped the character of a series of subsequent transformations of Russian society, required the European type of educated people, not only the aristocracy but also other social groups that linked their activity and careers with state service. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Russia suffered from an acute shortage of special literature, publishers, publishing enterprises and printing facilities, state-run and private educational institutions, and cadres of teachers. Almost all the corresponding efforts of the state toward accelerated and administrative modernization (the creation of the Academy of Sciences, a university associated with the Academy, other educational institutions, and institutes) failed to yield the anticipated rapid result [6; 7].

This is why, for the overwhelming majority of the nobility until the 1770s, home education in the Russian culture remained virtually the only way to acquire knowledge. It basically provided for the relaying and reproduction of social and cultural norms, ideals, and values. But as the network of various kinds of state-run and private educational institutions such as gymnasiums, boarding schools, and so on became more extensive, home education began to be seen more and more as a preparatory stage for further schooling.

As a rule, people hired foreign tutors, mostly German or French, whose primary duties were to teach foreign languages, arithmetic, and ancient history. English tutors were used much less frequently. Since the time of Peter the Great the main foreign language had been German; later, during the reign of Elizabeth Petrovna, French became widely prevalent, essentially the official language of the court of Alexander I. Russian teachers from the ranks of feudal or retired military personnel taught reading and the rudiments of grammar. The ideal was that instruction should go hand in hand with upbringing.

Nobility families understood very well that the fate of their children could depend on the level of their primary education; even mothers who did not have a good education themselves tried to find the best teachers. Historical circumstances, especially in the late eighteenth century, facilitated this: after the French Revolution, many aristocrats, members of the French nobility, and in general everyone who wanted to avoid the upheavals linked to the coups, the frequent replacement of political regimes, and wars were forced to leave the country, and they looked for work abroad. What sometimes happened was that a Frenchwoman who had left her country while young would first work in England (this was characteristic of the second half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century), and then would make her way to Russia, where she was thought of as “an Englishwoman.” In Russia, Englishwomen as well as Scottish and Irish women were thought of as “English” governesses; it was a natural confusion.

In addition to modern languages, children were taught the “dead” languages of Latin and Greek. English occurred rarely on that list of languages. Even Princess Catherine Romanovna Dashkova, who was renowned for her knowledge of languages (she became president of the Russian Academy of Sciences) did not learn English until she was of mature age. She considered English an essential language for her son Pavel, who completed his education in England and Scotland, and her closest women friends (not only during the years of her glory but also when she had fallen out of favor) were the Irish Wilmot sisters, who often paid her extended visits in Russia and left accounts of the country.

Certain stereotypes came to be formed in Russia in regard to what could be taught by teachers from different European cultures and traditions. For example, it was easier for French governesses and tutors to find work in Russia, since the French culture was taken as the model in fashion and manners. Wealthy Russian parents invited French tutors and governesses to work for them without checking on their skills, knowledge, and abilities or letters of recommendation. Very often, especially after the revolution in France, they were from distinguished families forced into exile.

An edict handed down on 29 April 1757 stipulated that tutors and foreign teachers were required to have a certificate from the Academy of Sciences or the University of Moscow (starting in 1804, gymnasiums also issued certificates). Those without a certificate could be banished and their employers fined a hundred rubles, a lot of money in that era. The only teachers exempted from the examinations were graduates of universities and theological academies, as well as young women who had completed their studies in educational institutions under the department of the Ministry of Public Education.

An interesting assessment of the French tutors and their influence on Russian society was given by V.O. Kliuchevskii. He called the first French tutors during the time of Elizabeth “very unpretentious educators.” In contrast, French teachers who came to the country during the reign of Catherine II later represented a different picture: “some of them, on the lofty heights of their calling, were familiar with ‘the latest word’ of the French literature of that time”; among well-known French tutors some very often belonged to the “extreme current of the political movement of that time.” Among the latter the historian listed Lagarpe, the mentor of Grand Prince Alexander, and Romme, the tutor of Count Stroganov.

German tutors and governesses were more often hired to teach in the families of military men and merchants. They were known for their meticulousness, pedantry, and excellent organizational ability, which impressed disciplined Russians. As a rule, German governesses taught girls to be housewives, qualities especially valued in the merchant community. But German tutors were harsher than other teachers and they did not hesitate to apply the switch.

Grand Prince Nikolai Pavlovich, the future Nicholas I, was brought up by M.I. Landsdorf, who “applied the reed very strenuously as punishment during lessons,” and sometimes “put the ruler and even a gun-cleaning rod to work” [8, p. 28].

Teachers and tutors from England would show up in families of the Russian nobility if the family had lived for a long time in England, which often led to Anglophilia. N.P. Golitsyna, for example, the prototype of Pushkin’s famous old countess in *The Queen of Spades* [Pikovaia dama], spent her childhood in England. The children of Count Semen Romanovich Vorontsov, the famous Anglophile and ambassador to Britain, also grew up in an English environment and followed the customs of that country. Countess A.A. Tolstaia, who was fluent in French, English, and German and had a profound knowledge of British traditions and customs, became the lady-in-waiting to Grand Princess Mariia Nikolaevna (1819–1876), the favorite daughter of Nicholas I, and in 1859 she lived with her on the estate of Mariia Nikolaevna on the coast of the English Channel. Later on, A.A. Tolstaia became the teacher of Grand Princess Mariia Aleksandrovna (1853–1920). The influence of the English upbringing led to Mariia Aleksandrovna marrying the Duke of Edinburgh, youngest son of England’s Queen Victoria.

Foreign tutors were often hired when the upbringing of Russian nannies and governesses failed to produce desired results and did not foster the proper development of children. In his *Philosophical Letters* [Filosoficheskie pis'ma], P.Ia. Chaadaev wrote about such disorderliness in Russian family and domestic life:

We are living in a country that is so poor in manifestations of what is ideal that unless we surround ourselves in our home lives with a certain proportion of poetry and good taste, we will all too easily lose any subtlety of feeling, any understanding of refinement. . . . One of the chief factors slowing our progress down consists of the absence of any kind of appreciation of the arts in our domestic lives.

For this reason, the first order of business for foreign tutors and teachers was to lay down an explicit and correct order in daily life (school studies, taking walks, meals, rest, and so on), which differed a great deal from the permissiveness and slovenliness of the Russian landed bourgeois home [9; 10].

Children had to get up early even in winter, when a late awakening had been the custom on the farm. This was followed by breakfast, usually morning tea, as a rule alone (or often girls would have breakfast in the company of their governess), because the other family members rose much later. This was followed by school lessons, often starting with music (because of its orderliness and discipline, music helped children to gather their thoughts before classes).

The tutors, especially those from England, would keep careful track of the temperature (it was supposed to be kept low in the bedrooms and classrooms) as well as the ventilation of the rooms. It is well known that in the English system of upbringing and teaching, special importance was attributed to the temperature of the air in the rooms, as well as to physical exercises, which were considered extremely important ways to preserve and improve health as well as a means of moral upbringing. Exercises, walks, and boating took up the second half of the day. Moreover, the tutors and teachers (particularly those from England) also changed the order of meals. For example, British tutors introduced the practice of having breakfast (a “second” breakfast) at noon. The character of the physical exercises was especially manifested in winter. In her *Memoirs* [Vospominaniia], Sof’ia Vasil’evna Kovalevskaia (née Korvin-Krukovskaia) wrote: “If the thermometer shows that it is less than 10 degrees below freezing and there is not much wind, I have to spend a very boring hour and a half taking a walk with my governess back and forth in the lane that has had the snow cleared off. If, on the other hand, I am lucky and there is a hard freeze or it is too windy outside, my governess will go out alone to take a walk, something that cannot be avoided in her opinion, while I am sent upstairs to play ball in a room” [11, pp. 44–45].

After dinner, the assignments for the next day had to be prepared in the classroom under the scrutiny of the tutor or governess. The other family members spent time together before afternoon tea reading and playing music while the children played. The tutor very often tried to keep his pupil separate from the rest of the family. However, tutors and governesses also initiated and arranged evening parties, theatrical performances, in the home. In the choice of plays

and dances they were guided by their own taste and conception of appropriate “family” literature.

The tutors and teachers (especially those from England and France) did not practice corporal punishment, but they did use methods of moral control and penitence that were excruciating. For the tutors who favored the “French” model of upbringing, this was due to the influence of the pedagogy of the Enlightenment and Rousseau. It is well known, for example, that the future Alexander I suffered a great deal when his Swiss teacher, Legarpe, forced him to publicly analyze his own misdeeds, and he kept an “Archive of the Shame of Grand Prince Alexander.” S.V. Kovalevskaia jotted down the strict rule enforced by her English governess: “Whenever I am guilty of something, she pins a piece of paper on my back with my guilt written on it in big letters, and I have to go to the dinner table wearing that decoration. I am scared to death of that punishment.” If a misdeed demanded moral penitence that was especially powerful and memorable, the governess used a kind of report or confession, which the miscreant had to recount to her father:

The governess resorted to an extreme measure: she would send me to my father with orders that I myself had to tell him how I had been naughty. I was more afraid of this than any of the other punishments . . . , but the governess was implacable, and she would take me by the hand and lead me or, more correctly, drag me through the long series of rooms to the door of the office, where she would leave me to my fate. . . . I could not bring myself to go back to the classroom without carrying out her orders. If I had done that it would have made my guilt worse by outright disobedience. [11]

The influence of the foreign tutors and home teachers on the intellectual traditions of young people of the nobility and, later on, commoner young people was substantial. The influence exerted by German and French tutors and teachers was connected with specific eras. For example, the influence of French tutors began with the era of Elizabeth and reached its peak in the era of Catherine: a member of the nobility during that era, according to Kliuchevskii, was an *homme de lettres*, a freethinker, a Mason, and a follower of Voltaire [12, pp. 12–14]. At the end of the eighteenth century, there was a predominance of French émigrés of a conservative Catholic

and also a romantic orientation. The influence of the German home teachers reached its peak during the first decades of the nineteenth century, as a result of the fact that the traditionally high quality of the education of German university graduates went hand in hand with the intellectual and overall cultural influence of German philosophy and literature. The influence of British tutors became strongest starting in the second half of the nineteenth century. In general, this was linked to the popularity of positivism. It was due to a change in educational paradigms: in addition to the understandable rise in the interest in nature studies [*estestvoznanie*] the most promising sciences came to include such social disciplines as history, political economy (the first systems of theoretical economic science), and sociology. One contemporary, A.N. Shabanova, wrote that “instead of novels, young Russian women started to be interested in reading John Stuart Mill; instead of memorizing verses to write down in albums they started studying mathematics and the natural sciences.”

And so, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and early twentieth century, home education by tutors and governesses in Russia was a natural, familiar and customary form of schooling for an overwhelming majority of members of the nobility. However, the social and political transformations of the twentieth century led to substantial changes. The ruling authority of the state got actively involved in that sphere, and moreover the intervention had the sole purpose of restricting or prohibiting home education.

After 1917, home education became a way to compensate for shortcomings in the basic system of education. In the Soviet Union, the total ban on home education was decided on for political reasons. These reforms resulted in establishing children's right to a primary education; later, secondary education in school became mandatory. However, governmental bodies, legislators, and lawyers who prepared and drafted the laws on education inadvertently confused and essentially equated two concepts: mandatory education (included a prohibition against any obstacles to the acquisition of an education) and mandatory attendance at school or other comparable institution.

International law recognizes the right to obtain an education

as one of the most fundamental rights of children. Characteristically, international law does not explicitly spell out the form of education. The Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights recognize that parents have the right to choose the form of education in accordance with their convictions. Nonetheless, in a number of countries the right to obtain an education is equated with mandatory school attendance. In those countries as well, however (e.g., the Netherlands and Greece), rare exceptions are made in cases where the welfare of the child makes home education necessary. In addition, home education in Greece is permitted for children who need special conditions and treatment. There are various approaches to home education in the countries of Europe:

- it has been practiced and is still being practiced in Belgium, Great Britain, Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, the United States, France, and Switzerland (in a majority of Swiss cantons);

- it is not permitted formally by law, but is permitted and practiced in individual cases (in Germany, Greece, Spain, the Netherlands, and two Swiss cantons);

- formerly it was not permitted in Austria, but not long ago the ban was repealed.

During the 1980s, home education in Russia once more found itself at the focus of public attention. Interest in it increased in 1997 in connection with the passage of the Russian Federation Law “On Education,” where Paragraph 1 of Article 10 stipulates:

Educational programs shall be implemented in the following forms, taking account of the needs and abilities of the individual: in an educational institution, whether in the form of regular enrollment, regular enrollment in correspondence courses (night school), or by correspondence; in the form of education in the home, self-education, or externship. A combination of various forms of obtaining an education are permitted.

Present-day society is characterized by a substantial degree of stratification in people’s economic, social, and educational possibilities. As a result, the profession of home teacher is again in demand. Tutors play an especially large role at the preschool

stage of instruction and upbringing. According to surveys, parents who are well off and have called on tutors for assistance cite the following main reasons: they do not want to send their children to kindergarten (30 percent of the respondents); they want to provide their children with a good preschool education (27 percent); they are employed and are not able to spend enough time with their children (22 percent); they want their children to acquire special skills and abilities in fields such as foreign languages, music, choreography, and so on (21 percent).

Among the reasons for the rise in the tutoring's popularity in the past few years, many researchers refer to the inadequate effectiveness of preschool educational institutions. According to parents' testimony, many children who started going to kindergarten before the age of three are often ill and stressed as a result of the change in their familiar environment and separation from their mothers and family. Also, the noise of the group has a negative impact on the children.

In present-day pedagogical theory in this country there are a number of different approaches to the various features of tutorial educational activity. L.V. Pasechnik classifies it as a specific pedagogical technology. In her opinion, the essential nature of tutorial education is as a variety of nontraditional, specially organized pedagogical process in the conditions of the family, a process that makes it possible to differentiate the instruction, taking account of the parents' requirements and the child's needs and abilities. This characterization sees home education as most able to satisfy the child's individual abilities. According to Pasechnik's approach, the tutorial system is more comfortable and individually oriented toward children who have varying degrees of health and mental development.

S.V. Kupriianov looks at the current tutorial system as an alternative educational and upbringing approach with its own character and social niche. He is rather critical toward the historical experience of tutorial practice. In his opinion, home education today cannot be structured solely on an analysis of the past. To ensure the development of the appropriate quality of tutorial activity it is necessary to take account of the following characteristics of life today:

- (1) the parents' needs and requirements for the upbringing and schooling of their children;
- (2) the parents' difficulties in regard to upbringing in the home;
- (3) problems of today's institutions of education and upbringing when it comes to ensuring the quality of the child's education, upbringing, and socialization;
- (4) tendencies in the development of educational systems (both state-run and private);
- (5) the success of the existing system of individual schooling;
- (6) the relations between the school and the family.

The activity of today's tutor represents an educational and upbringing system that meets a number of requirements: unity of instruction and upbringing; individually oriented and emotionally comfortable interaction between teacher and child; and up-to-date pedagogical technologies. The content and results of the tutor's activity must be in keeping with the needs and requirements of society, educational institutions, parents, and the child himself.

The task of determining the essential nature of home instruction entails defining the basic functions to be carried out by the tutor. From the standpoint of an integrated approach that is oriented toward the comprehensive accomplishment of all components of education and the directionality of the pedagogical process, oriented toward the comprehensive, creative self-development of the personality, the following three functions of instruction are singled out: educational, upbringing, and developmental (V.V. Kraevskii). The educational function orients the instruction process toward the formation of a system of scientific knowledge, the development of the child's abilities and skills, and the ability to use them in practice. The upbringing function involves the utilization of education content, the instructional forms and methods, and the interaction between the teacher and the child in order to develop his cognitive and conscious motives for engaging in learning activity, his moral attitudes. The developmental function of the instruction consists of the integrated development of the sensory, emotional and volitional, motor, and motivational spheres of the individual personality. In consideration of the integrated character of the tutor's activity, we

submit that all the functions noted here are in keeping with the process of instruction and upbringing in the home. However, they are quite generalized. The practical activity of the tutor requires that they be made concrete and specific.

From the viewpoint of S.V. Kupriianov, tutorial practice today:

(1) is called on to provide comprehensive, good-quality education, upbringing, and socialization for the child, either autonomously or in interaction with other educational systems;

(2) models the conditions of a harmonious family and environment in the system of relations between tutors and children;

(3) incorporates as a part of the logic of the pedagogical process parents' requirements as to the instruction and upbringing of their child, and it makes them a component part of the pedagogical technology;

(4) has an active influence on the pedagogization and humanization of upbringing in the home.

The development of the practice of instruction in the home can also be facilitated by the situation that is taking shape in this country's system of education. In the opinion of specialists, the educational school today is about at the level of the 1960s in regard to many parameters. As Frants Sheregi has pointed out,

The backwardness of the system is evidenced in particular, by the 'tutorship institution,' which has been transformed today into a well-organized system for the market-oriented alienation of one function of the school, namely vocational guidance. [13, p. 7]

There are other factors that are linked to the social context and are of some importance in regard to the pedagogical autonomization of the family: a worsening criminal climate; interethnic conflicts; and political and religious tension. Parents not only want to guard their children against negative influences of society but also to inoculate them with a "sociopsychological immunity" to protect them in the future. As parents see it, it is education that is capable of helping in this regard. To put it another way, the situation that has taken shape in Russian education today is that the family not only has the right to choose some particular method for the education of their children, but they also have the real resources to accomplish this.

It is essential to train consultants in the field of education in the home. This is a very broad term or concept, one that includes assistance when it comes to planning the educational itinerary of the child as well as the implementation of that itinerary as represented by the role played by the tutor or home teacher. The home teacher is called on not only to teach the child general elementary learning skills but also to help parents map out the child's educational itinerary and find the sociocultural and psychological resources that will help parents function in the role of competent socializers of their children. That will avoid any alienation of the teacher from the parent, such as when the parent turns the child over to the teacher and then keeps out of it. It is essential to take and hold a fundamentally different position: the teacher comes into the family in order to detect any psychological or other problems and to help resolve them. That kind of preparation will help tutors find out how things are in the family's internal situation, to see the strong and weak aspects and map out a program for the child's development.

And so, in today's Russia, home education is acquiring new scientific and practical prospects. To some degree, society is attempting to experiment in the selection and creation of alternative ways to educate its citizens. This can be made easier both by finding new sources for self-education and by gradually reorienting parents and teachers toward a different kind of educational paradigm: education is increasingly coming to be a continuous, variable, and genuinely individual system.

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