

Moral and Values Crisis: Some Possible Educational Remedies

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This paper focuses on the problems of moral and values education within the last decade in Russia. The author describes the collapse of a system of values and several proposed "value remedies," based on Family, Russian Orthodox Church, and Freedom of Values. The concept of an "authorial school" is introduced to the Western reader.

Every year I have a lecture for the first-year students about the United Nation's Declaration of Human Rights and enumerate the main ones (many of which are usually unknown to university freshmen!). This last school year I received extremely disturbing feedback after my lecture. One of the students came up to talk confidentially afterwards. I listened in numb silence how his German lecturer was explaining to the group that the right to be respected belonged only to schoolteachers (they were discussing the topic of "School"). She was sure that school students needed to work hard to get their teacher's respect, and of course, many would never get it. The young man tried to persuade the elderly lecturer that everyone had the right to be respected and in response, he got only her irritation and neglect. What to do, he asked me in despair. What to do, I asked myself, as I knew better than he that there would be hundreds of Russian teachers who share the same opinion.

It's a historical fact that Russian mentality has been forced into a collective, one which dominates its culture by a denial of personal freedom and individual respect. Karl Marx called it "communism with the constant denial of individual personality." That kind of collectivism was utopian in its nature; it needed leaders and was ready to approve any kind of violence. No wonder the country created a "Stalin's cult" with millions of victims. Different historians who tried to analyze Russian mentality of the earlier period, shortly before, and immediately after the Revolution, have come to understand that absolute royal power and slavery couldn't help but form certain types of behavior, social norms and values. It's no wonder that the attempt to cover the tremendous gap between absolute power and true democracy in a very short period of time has ended in failure. Freedom, as understood by the people who lived under the pressure of absolute totalitarian power, is total denial of any discipline, disrespect of other's opinions and ideals. The conscious adoption of certain social and behavioral norms, moral values,

and the understanding of one's own responsibility towards the society were never developed and are still underdeveloped in much of Russia today.

In Soviet times, the term "social justice" easily corresponded with the norms and principles of group morality: "everyone gets equal parts of the common cake"; "everyone gets anything in accordance with one's achievements". The Soviet propaganda supported the myth about "the only possible just reality" and very much succeeded in its myth building. One of the most powerful proofs of that "justice" was thousands of people who gave their lives for the victory of the revolution, civil war, etc. Mass heroism of the Second World War was built on the same basis of community feeling: a fraternity of the people who were fighting for the "right". One of the last signs of that community feeling was demonstrated during the 1991 détente in Moscow.

Values Collapse and the Suggested Remedies

The first and most tragic change is the total breakdown of our former system of values. New democratic values are still in the process of being developed, and in the hard economic circumstances there came yet another system with its total denial of morality and decent behavior. One of the most dangerous and painful for millions of common people was to learn the truth about their former Communist party leaders, and to understand the depth of our betrayal. Such a betrayal in itself is enough to cause mass pessimism and cynicism, an almost total moral vacuum. Of course, no one is suffering more than our children.

The last ten years have shown a growing tendency towards children's illnesses and disabilities. Some doctors talk of the children suffering from post-traumatic stress-disorder. psychotic and neurotic diseases have grown to 20%. During the 1990s, we've been witnessing a number of

illnesses connected with drug abuse, which are now 3.7 times higher than in the 1980's and the number of drug abusers has risen to a proportion of 1 for every 15 citizens, and the number of chronic alcoholics has doubled. The number of in-birth illnesses has gradually risen to proportion of 1 to 2.5. (Baranov, 1999). Drug taking has become a real threat for the system of national security, announced President Putin in September 2001.

On the whole, our society is getting further and further into a deep pit of aggressiveness, antisocial selfishness, and total denial of any appropriate social forms of behavior which will finally bring us to a collapse, either in the form of national conflicts, civil wars, or ecological disasters. In this situation the worst thing that we can do is to look for enemies, outside ourselves, especially in the West. The reason is much closer and is rooted in us and in our consciousness and mentality. No wonder, in this situation the problems of morality, values, and citizenship education are becoming critical for the nation. Looking for remedies, politicians and civil workers, educators and psychologists suggest different ways:

1. There is a certain group of people who consider "the family" the most productive way of moral and values education. I can't agree with this point of view. Radical changes of value orientations have increased "the generation gap" and the misunderstandings between children and parents. The family itself as a social institution needs help and support. The following statistics are the most illustrative of the problem: 600,000 children were left by their parents and formed numerous groups of social orphans; 500,000 children annually are left by one of the parents because of the growing rate of divorce; 300,000 children (1 out of every 4) are given birth by single mothers; 160,000 live in families of refugees from the former Soviet republics; 12 million children live in families where the monthly income is below minimum living standards; 20 million live in low-income families; 2 million are drop-outs from middle and high schools; 2-4 million are homeless street beggars. (Federal Report about the State of Children in the Russian Federation, 1999).

2. Another suggested remedy is the Russian Orthodox Church because of its moral influence. But historical facts prove the opposite. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Russian church was one of the most (if not the most) influential powers within the Russian society but the historians declared a moral crisis and denial of the former traditions. I don't speak about the total denial of any religion. I'm sure that teachers and educators should at least be sensitive to what religion means and how it can cultivate moral children. But at the same time, in our public secular schools morality and citizenship education should not be based solely on religious teachings.

3. There is also a tendency to avoid teaching any values at all and to let pupils develop their own ideals with the explanation that the democratic society should not indoctrinate pupils in any way. The best arguments against

such a point of view are the words of Lesslie Newbigin (quoted from Rodger, 1982, p.20): "No society, and certainly, no democratic society, can cohere without some common values, which are shared and therefore – to some degree – enforced. If education does not have the effect of transmitting these values to the coming generation, then it can only have a socially disintegrating effect... the teacher has a duty to encourage children to adopt some kinds of "stances for living and to avoid others".

4. Finally, there are voices for using a traditional secondary school as the main influential source of bringing moral values into children's lives, and making them more explicit. Of course, any school itself is far from being a remedy, but it seems that in the situation of moral chaos only the schools can unite the efforts of different institutions and help the children to physically and morally survive. To solve this problem and to meet the most critical needs of children and society, schools must adopt new approaches to moral education and especially to values education.

Main Dimensions of Values Education

To summarize all the more or less effective approaches, used in school theory and practice, one can suggest the following dimensions of values education:

Knowledge construction and values clarification processes. The first describes how teachers help students to understand, investigate, and determine how the perspectives within the discipline influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed within it (Banks, 1996). Values clarification process helps to investigate different value systems and find the way they fit one's own individuality (Raths, Harmin, Simon, 1966; Simon, 1974).

Positive value orientation and prejudice reduction. These combine both classes and extra-curricular activities to help students establish such values as respect, patience and tolerance, as well as to develop positive attitudes toward different racial, gender and ethnic groups and to overcome their misconceptions (Banks, 1996).

Pedagogy of cooperation and cooperative learning instead of competition. This exists as a pedagogical movement in Russia and unites teachers and educators who believe that all school pupils should have an equal status in the group and in inter-group interactions; and that all the pupils should be given a "credit of trust" and should go into specially developed "situations of personal success" etc. (Ivanov, 1990; Karakovsky, 1995).

Democratic decision making (Mosher, a.o., 1994). Who involved in such a process, school pupils acquire a critical insight for today's life experience – the experience of true democracy. They also acquire a different (in comparison with Communist) sense of community that allows them both – respect each other's opinions and to remain autonomous in their daily activities. (Colesante, Smith, Biggs, 1996).

Peer culture reconstruction. In accordance with Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1991), there exists both internal and external reconstruction of a child's appropriation of culture.

and cultural values. Through acquisition and use of the language, children and teenagers come to reproduce an experience of prior generations. In other words, children make sense of the world to the extent that they are allowed to enter through a micro-culture of peers which enable them to produce collectively the social order of their society (Corsaro, 1985).

An empowering school culture and social structure. Certain positive values could be formed when the culture and the organization of schools are transformed in ways that enable students from all income families, and diverse ethnic and gender groups, experience equality and equal status. It presupposes that the whole environment of a school, starting with its values, should be transformed (Banks, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1992).

School Culture and "Authorial Schools"

For around ten years, I've been investigating the field of humanistic "authorial schools" which produce genuine moral culture and in this way create all the necessary conditions for a child's growth and stable moral development. I will briefly provide some findings of this research (Tsyrlina, 1995; Tsyrlina, 1999; Tsyrlina, 2001).

The term "authorial schools" (from the word "author", founder) came into Russian pedagogy only in the 1980's. The Russian journalist and educator Alexander Adamsky created it. At its core the idea of authorial schools is rather close to such western terms as "effective schools", "magnet schools", "key schools", etc. But they also differ from them largely because they combine in themselves two meanings: the concept itself and the name of the author: Lawrence Kohlberg's "just communities", for example (Power, Higgins, Kohlberg, 1989). The specific nature of authorial schools and its unstable position in the field of pedagogy doesn't permit us to give it any strict definition. But it does allow us to give the following description, which makes the picture of such a school rather vivid.

An authorial school is an educational establishment which has its own unique culture and which has been created by its founder or his/her followers on the basis of the original concept. The latter is accepted and followed by the teachers, school students and their parents which provides the school with long lasting and positive educational results (Tsyrlina, 1999; 2001).

Authorial schools have existed in the past, since ancient Greece and Rome. Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum were authorial schools, as well as Comenius schools, Pestalozzi institutions, Leo Tolstoy's school and others. All of them could be called "houses of happiness and joy" for the students. The death of the schools' founder typically meant the simultaneous demise of the school itself. Only in the 20th century has the situation radically changed. Now, such schools not only do live and survive but also find followers, which produce schools with common philosophical and strategic design. More than that, authorial schools have appeared which are the basis for authorial models,

movements, and paradigms.

The research shows that during the 20th century authorial schools have become a dominant factor in the development of educational establishments and in creating pedagogical reality. They have been performing the following functions:

1. Demonstrating humanistic values and personally-oriented education;
2. Being an attractive analogy which allows newly-created schools to compare their own activities with high standards;
3. Playing a role of an "engine" for building creativity and professional development of teachers;
4. Illustrating the future of education, showing how schools might look like with certain innovations;
5. Defending the children and their childhood and helping the teachers to preserve their creative potential within the boundaries of international organizations.

The analysis of these new phenomena gave us a chance to theoretically analyze and model authorial schools, as well as to formulate the conditions, which are most favorable for the appearance of such schools.

Such conditions could be divided into several types: (a) Social - Appearance of the social order and the new social expectations. Comfortable historical, cultural and social "soil", the existence of certain traditions; (b) Pedagogical - Educators' and teachers' capability to accept new and non-traditional ideas. Potential readiness to work in a certain authorial school; (c) Personal - Existence of a charismatic school leader, who possesses such traits as humanism, optimism, creativity, empathy, and a clear vision of the future.

Humanistic attitude of the parents towards their children, respect of the children's rights and freedom; (d) Financial - Relatively high level of funding such a school.

Peculiarities of authorial schools could be better analyzed if we use "school culture" as their main integrative characteristic. We believe the culture of authorial schools to be a function of the following:

1. Specific culture of the school principal, which combines his/her good manners and high common culture with a democratic management style, high level of humanistic orientation, as well as his/her readiness to cooperate with teachers, students, and their parents.
2. A common system of humanistic values, shared by the principal, teachers, students and often their parents. This system is the main indicator of school ethos as well as it dictates main approaches of teaching and learning, defines norms of behavior for teachers and students.
3. Common creative orientation of school activities, which concerns everybody, including teachers, students and their parents. It also demands the use of play and games as a method of organizing any school activity, as a peculiar niche in which children feel themselves most comfortably.
4. Atmosphere of cooperation and partnership, which

concerns all levels of relationships: principal – teachers; teachers – teachers; principal – students; principal – teachers – students' parents. In a one – to – one relationship the most common form of communication is dialogue (Bakhtin, 1990).

The analysis of authorial schools makes it possible to define different criteria and to determine different school types. One of the most important criteria is the scale of real implementation. In accordance with this criteria all authorial schools could be split into:

1. An authorial school as a single phenomenon. This is a school of one principal (or one "school building"). It is characterized by a unique culture and the absence of any mechanism of reproducing it in other circumstances. Besides, such a school totally depends on its founder (Pavlyshskaya School founded by a famous Soviet educator Dr. Vasily Sukhomlinsky) or the place of its existence ("Ethical Culture School" in New York).

2. An authorial school as a model. This is a cluster of schools, working on the basis of the concept of their founder. The concept is flexible enough to be used in different historical situations and in different geographical circumstances. In a school-model there is a conceptual value core, which while being used by different people, still preserves the peculiar traits of the original concept. As an example we can mention "just communities" founded by Lawrence Kohlberg in the 1970's and then spread all over the world.

3. An authorial school as a movement. This is a majority of schools, which function on the basis of a certain concept. It's strategically and technologically so well developed that it could be used in different time-space spheres and different geographical zones. These schools possess a very high level of adaptivity and a capacity to foresee the future (Waldorf schools of Rudolf Steiner as an example).

4. An authorial school as a basis of a new paradigm. This is a system of the primary conceptual guidelines of a certain educator, which have a clear value basis, a high level of adaptivity and high potentials of being used by a great number of teachers. (For example, John Dewey's Chicago laboratory school).

I've been analyzing concepts and the work of forty authorial schools of different time periods and in different geographical and political situations within the 20th century. It allowed me to come to the conclusion that the capacity of an authentic authorial school to develop into a model, movement or finally to become a basis of a new paradigm, depends on the following:

"Rigid – flexible" dependence on the founder's personality. If the concept is very closely connected with the specific traits of the founder, then the implementation of his/her ideas by other people is hardly possible.

"Radical – adaptive" value core. When the school concept is based on the absolutely new ideas and values,

hardly connected with the existing school practice, then the implementation of such ideas in other schools is practically impossible.

"Technological – unique". The future would belong to the schools, which have a highly developed strategic and technological component, which, in its turn, will allow using the concept in different time and space circumstances.

As we see, the analysis showed two most important factors in establishing and developing humanistic authorial schools, is a solid system of humanistic values, and a certain character and professional position of the school leader. Here the founder's role is critical. Alongside with traditional management functions, he/she is also fulfilling the following tasks:

- Creating the common school "value core," value priorities and professional teachers' value orientations, as well as the types and forms of their representation in school culture. Such main values concern understanding and comprehension of children and childhood; essence of moral and character education; main education goals and tasks; purpose of their professional activities and its main functions.
- Initiating teachers – children's community within the school with the atmosphere of cooperation and partnership.
- Defining leading types of activities, characteristic for this school and giving it a creative character.

In short, these are some of the changes which might be brought into schools if we have more humanistic "authorial schools."

Kursk Project

Finally we briefly turn to the problems of education and youth in my native Kursk region.

Kursk region is, in a way, - a "mirror" of all Russian social evils and problems. It's both an industrial and a rich rural area with the population of 1.3 million people. As with Russia itself, the Kursk community is experiencing a growing rate of juvenile delinquency¹, and all the interconnected problems. Among which the following are the most critical:

- Commercializing of school education. Federal Law "On Education"(1992) which allowed teenagers not to finish high school and to leave school at the age of 15 (!) with all the consequences of doing nothing. During the last ten years, fifty secondary schools were closed in the region. Technical colleges (similar to US community colleges) are more and more inclined to stop providing a free education, which prevents teenagers from low-income families from getting jobs as their parents can't cover any of the educational expenses.
- Family problems. The poor economic state of many

families and lack of resources lead parents to commit different crimes and brings children into the criminal world. The divorce rate is around 50%. Cases of family physical abuse are reported daily and are gradually increasing in number. Kursk police have registered more than 2,000 parents who produced a negative influence on their children. Out of all the crimes committed, teenagers who live with single mothers commit 30%. The importance of a loving and caring father in a child's life is abundantly clear.

- Problems of spending free time and leisure. As is commonly known, when teenagers have nowhere to go and no place where they can meet their needs, they will look for entertainment anywhere they can. This will usually lead to crimes, disorder, drug taking, etc. Russia's economic conditions made it impossible to attend sport clubs and swimming pools that had been threatened with closure because there was no money to pay trainers and technical staff. Free in the former Soviet days, all sports grounds and clubs are now private, as most after-curricular activities (even within schools) have become "pay for play."

All the above-mentioned cruel realities of our life have made us (a group of administrators and lecturers of Regional Open Social Institute) think of possibilities of how to help the Kursk population cope with these terrible problems. One of the most important contributions is the idea of support and youth defence. It's a wide term, which includes moral, physical, political, juridical and other forms of defence. It has never been of prime importance in Russia and only now is it being considered [Some pilot projects have been launched by Department of Juridical provision, Ministry of Education.]

We never planned big changes but we always thought that we, as Kursk citizens, should do something to solve our problems. As our most developed school is the Law School, we started providing legal help and support, first in the form of "legal enlightenment", teaching "Street Law" to high school students, and then growing into a Law Clinic which was supported by the Ford Foundation (Moscow office). To further develop these legal activities we've applied for and got a grant from TEMPUS-Tacis Foundation, together with the Higher School "Mercator"(Gent, Belgium) and Napier University (Edinburgh, Scotland).

Gradually we came to the understanding that to become really effective any defense and support should be complex and systematic. So we established contacts with the Psychological-medical-educational center called "Harmony" which deals with consulting children, teenagers, and their parents on the problems of physical and sexual abuse, school violence, etc. We are also raising the question of how to increase the number of school psychologists, and medical doctors.

What do we suggest? First and foremost, we suggest changing two things:

- The ideology of the work with children-at-risk and teenage delinquents, from punishing a teenager who committed a crime, to helping him not to commit it, and to support and defend this group of children and teenagers.
- The methods of work, from separate efforts of different institutions to the union of all of them involved into this kind of work.

In the Kursk region the "Commission on the activities of the teenagers" does not (although it should) serve as an integrating factor of this kind of work. Being an educational institution and having specialists, lawyers- and psychologists-in-training, we plan to provide the region with the following services:

- educate lawyers who will be specialists in juvenile law and psychologists with the deep understanding of children's legal rights;
- provide extra-courses and continuing education for psychologists and educators who work in different institutions for juvenile delinquents;
- develop a number of teaching materials, guide-books, manuals, and leaflets for middle and high school pupils on human rights and different aspects of law;
- publish a special "encyclopedia" for youth with most common questions in law and the related fields, and the answers to them;
- develop federal curriculum standards specially for training lawyers and psychologists who work with juvenile delinquents (until now we don't have any);
- provide local schools with legal education in the form of special classes and organized extra-curricular activities;
- work together with the students from the Teacher's Training University in the regional jail for juvenile delinquents (with the total of 160 teenagers, who stay there for around 3-4 years).

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Information Type	1991	5 months of 2000
Most severe crimes	194	554
Registered second crime, committed by the same teenager	84	41
Participation in criminal groups		
Number of criminal teenager's groups, registered by police	180	300
Teenagers, registered and taken special care of in police quarters	2,816	4,218

On the whole, the number of teenagers active in criminal activities has grown from 874 in 1989 to 1,355 in 1999. For every ten thousand teenagers who live in Kursk region, there are 198 crimes reported per year, for adults – the number is 165. The "criminal age" is getting "younger." Every year there are 500 teenagers under 14 committing crimes. What is most dangerous is that two-thirds of all crimes are committed inside adult groups, in comparison with the year 1989. That's a 300% increase. These are only a few facts but they speak for themselves.

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Footnotes

¹Below one can find several figures about crimes committed by Kursk teenagers (ages 14 to 18). [Data, used with permission from official Kursk police reports, Kursk, 2000].