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**SCHOOL REFORM: PROS AND CONS**

*Essay*

Suddenly the whole society realized the necessity of a school reform. We clasped our hands with great surprise and exclaimed: “Why, but we have to change it!” There's no smoke without fire. If we inspect the issue more profoundly it will be clear that the idea emerged not so accidentally.

Investigations prove that almost 90% of school students have developed health problems or are now behind the norm of their age in mental and physical maturity. The reason for that can be found not only in poor economy of the state and hostile environment, but also in the conditions at school in which students spend ten years. The load of new subjects and the growing depth of learning are the basic reasons for health problems.

Striving for a prestigious status of gymnasiums or lyceums some schools introduce new subjects, include them into their curriculum and make them compulsory. They may teach logic, psychology, and culture of thought, ecology, economics and what not! Frequently it is done at the cost of a reduced number of hours intended for such disciplines as physics, biology, literature, history and others. The norms, standards and demands remain on the same level though school children lack the time necessary to learn the subjects successfully. At the same time they normally spend over six hours at school and over four hours doing their homework. Hence the workweek of a regular high-school student is sixty hours!

Specialized schools, which put special emphasis on humanities or sciences or languages, are reputed to be highly professional. They double the number of hours of specific subjects thus aiming at the quality of students’ knowledge. The result is two faceted. On the one hand the volume of acquired knowledge is overly increased together with the load of intensified process of learning, on the other hand we face a catastrophic fall in the condition of students’ bodies and minds.

One more nerve-wrecking factor is an independent examination commission. Specialized schools introduced exams at each year beginning with the fifth grade. School students strain every nerve to please the commission to simply pass from one grade to another and then find themselves in breakdowns. There’s no ground for that. Final control testing is proved to be sufficient except for graduate years.

Transformations will be first of all done in the educational standards and the curriculum. It is necessary to create new standards, to give expertise and to discuss and criticize them. Those teachers who are really interested in their students’ performance and health should participate in this discussion.

If we assess the whole educational system of Russia critically, successes of the past were linked to the skill requirements of a planned economy, not to the demands of an unplanned labor market and an open society. Capital investments in education have been declining for the last decades. Buildings have deteriorated, libraries are antiquated, and laboratory equipment is becoming unusable.

Russia's curricular traditions are ill-suited for an economy where problem-solving ability and occupational flexibility are of great importance. Soviet curriculum tended to emphasize the acquisition of factual material and to underemphasize the skills necessary for applying this material to unfamiliar circumstances in other words, problem-solving skills.

Teachers’ staff constitutes one more task for the government. There is hardly any teacher in Russia who would be satisfied with his or her salary and working condition. Therefore not so many people, young girls mostly, are willing to acquire this profession. Experienced school teachers say that today teaching is based on pure enthusiasm. Only those who feel their natural predisposition to teaching are still loyal to the profession. Teaching is neither well-paid nor prestigious.

Defining the problems we may come to the corollary that Russian educational system has so many burning issues that it is hard to imagine how this system still manages to survive. The bundle of problems seems to be tightly knitted. The much discussed school reform should deal not only with twelve-year education and curricular changes but also with financing as well as legislation. The budgeting process should be revised accordingly. The number of issues is immense but we have to bear in mind that our future depends on education of the young generation who is the future of the country.