NEOLIBERALISM AND EDUCATION IN RUSSIA:
GLOBAL AND LOCAL DYNAMICS IN POST-SOVIET EDUCATION REFORM

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the socio-cultural underpinnings of neoliberal educational reforms vis-à-vis the national educational settings in Russia. The Russian education modernisation reform, ongoing since 1991, has been facilitated financially and conceptually by global educational stakeholders and driven by domestic political and educational elites. The reform process has led to a number of ideological tensions, which prompted fierce resistance from various segments of society. Despite extensive administrative restructuring, de-centralisation and commercialisation of the educational sector, public attitudes and educational practices have proven largely impervious to change, prompting international and domestic observers to conceive of the reform in terms of 'crisis' and 'failure.'

By drawing upon NVivo-aided Discourse and Frame analysis as a methodological path, this study critically examines a corpus of state laws on education and official government statements from 1991 to 2012 in contrast to contemporary societal discourse on education, where novel and indigenous educational meanings have been contested and re-negotiated. This thesis shows how the conceptual mélange of global neoliberal ideas has been interpreted, institutionalised and resisted in Russia by exploring the semantics of key neoliberal reform ideas - 'quality assurance,' 'educational standards,' and 'commercial educational service' - at the micro-level of policy texts, political debates and public discussions.

This thesis shows that having heralded an educational revolution, the official reform narrative rhetorically endorsed neoliberal orthodoxy, while continuing in practice to discursively draw on pedagogical and administrative frameworks which it previously renounced as outdated. In communicating the spirit of radical neoliberal modernisation, the Russian government rhetoric has collectively embraced a number of contradictory concepts, slogans and directives that have never been harmonised in a unified reformatory framework.

The study also argues that the public interpretation of neoliberal concepts has been radically different from the intended conceptualisations offered by the global international stakeholders and conveyed by the Russian educational elite. It shows how, when interpreted through the lens of local pedagogical values, the semantics of global modernisation templates, such as 'educational quality' and 'educational standardisation,' took on unexpected, culturally-specific, meanings. It also finds that the newly introduced principles of entrepreneurship, self-interest, consumer choice, self-responsibility and competition, which underlie the neoliberal economic reform, remained in opposition to fundamental principles of Russian culture, such as communalism, egalitarianism, state paternalism and anti-monetarism. By unpacking opposing ideological and pedagogical frames, this thesis explains the cultural aspects of the widespread public resistance to post-1991 education reform in Russia.

This dissertation seeks to enhance the understanding of the policy formulation process and interpretation of global neoliberal ideas from both top-down and bottom-up perspectives. By advancing a culturalist approach to policy analysis, the present study addresses an overlooked piece of the long-standing puzzle of perceived post-Soviet educational crisis, supplementing the broader scholarly discussion on the successes and failures of neoliberal reforms in the post-Soviet space.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This research is a postmodern inquiry into Russian education vis-à-vis global neoliberal reform. The central question of this study focuses on how neoliberal educational globalisation interacts with local cultures, and the specific case study is post-Soviet education modernisation reform in Russia. The present chapter provides a brief introduction to the scholarly inquiry undertaken in this thesis, situates it within the field of policy studies and outlines theoretical meta-premises underlying the research puzzle.

1.1 Rationale of the study

Contemporary international and comparative education inquiry into national education reforms has identified a striking synchronicity of change over various geo-political and cultural contexts (Giddens 1990, Bennett and Howlett 1992, Marginson 1999, Lingard & Ozga 2006). Sweeping across localities as varied as advanced capitalist, post-colonial and post-socialist, the process of educational modernisation has produced comparable sets of reformatory solutions referred to as 'global templates' or 'travelling policies' (Lindblad & Popkewitz 2004). With the neoliberal ideology underlying the global policy agenda, the standard reform package included raising standards of academic performance, strengthening ties between schooling and economic productivity, enhancing student outcomes in employment-related competencies, reducing state budget expenses and increasing international competitiveness (Carter & O'Neil 1995, Ball 1998). The unifying themes of decentralisation, quality assurance, commercialisation and

standardisation have become the 'new orthodoxy' of educational change (Carter &O'Neil 1995, Ball 1998). The neoliberal educational ethos is said to have gone

> 'directly to the communication hubs and to the economic, cultural and political core of nations; remaking the heartlands where national and local identities are formed and reproduced' (Marginson & Wende 2007: 11).

Driven by a confluence of forces and co-produced by a number of stakeholders, the globalising effect has been by no means homogenous. While the general direction of national educational policies is benchmarked against the global scripts, the latter have been significantly 'affected, inflected and deflected' (Ball 1998: 127) through the prism of national values and traditional structures of meaning. The discursive interaction between internationalisation and indiginisation trends has called forth significant ideological tensions, triggering unorthodox local responses and resulting in multiple, often contradictory, articulations of the global (Fairclough 1992, Carter & O'Neil 1995, Ball 1998, Marginson 1999, Lingard & Ozga 2006). Contemporary global educational order is a complex phenomenon marked by a constant re-configuration and re-balancing of the international, the national and the local. Specific national education policies are, in turn, highly contested terrains where neoliberal values are filtered, re-interpreted, internalised, resisted, and rejected.

Contemporary thought in international and comparative education has highlighted three theoretical meta-premises that prompted the research puzzle addressed in this thesis. The premises are as follows (copied from Lingard & Ozga 2006: 69):

> '1. (…) at international level a coherent set of policy themes and processes (globalised policy discourses) has emerged, through which policy makers (at national, international and transnational levels) seek to reshape education systems.
> 2. (…) that there has emerged a globalised education policy field situated between global pressures and local vernacular education policy responses.

> 3. (…) these globalised policy agendas and processes interact with traditions, ideologies, institutions and politics that have developed on national terrains, resulting in vernacular education policy outcomes.'

While these premises are generally recognised in educational literature, the dynamics between the globalising and vernacular forces remain under-researched (Taylor et al. 1997, Ball 1998, Jones 1998, Dale 1999, Henry et al. 2001, Tikly 2001, Lingard & Ozga 2006). Dale (1999: 2), for example, states,

> '(...) while it is widely acknowledged that globalisation does affect national policies in a range of areas, precisely how is rarely questioned, let alone analysed. There is increasing recognition that national differences remain despite the spread of globalisation, and accompanying doubts about tendencies towards convergence.'

Similarly, Taylor et al. (1997: 71) write,

> 'There is no essential determinacy to the ways in which globalisation pressures work, since for various globalisation pressures there are also sites of resistance and counter movements.'

Ball (1998: 119) concurs,

> 'One of the tensions which runs through all varieties of policy analysis is that between the need to attend to the local particularities of policy making and policy enactment and the need to be aware of general patterns and apparent commonalities or convergence across localities (..)'

As neoliberal globalisation continues its 'epidemic' (Levin 1998) spread across national educational policies, researchers argue for an urgent need to 'open up the black box of mechanisms through which globalisation affects national policies' (Dale (1999: 15).

One unexplored angle deals with the local 'policy inflection' (Alexiadou & Jones 2001) of the global scripts, i.e. variations in how the global articulates differently in specific cultural contexts. How does educational globalisation relate to cultural identities in national symbolic systems? How are the global scripts transformed and mediated as they travel from the international policy

agenda to official national policy statements and further to the public discourse? How does the global become discursively integrated and imbedded within national policy agendas? Another angle to consider is how local discourses accommodate for the globalised templates and how modernising forces 'play out and are made real in people's lives in schools, communities, universities and education systems' (Lingard & Ozga 2006: 66). What roles do historically embedded values play in the process of translating global policy pressures? How do design and delivery of national policy agendas respond to and re-balance against globalising pressures? In light of these considerations this study looks at educational change through the lens of broader cultural transformations and conceives of globalisation as a 'tendency to which there are counter-tendencies' (Hay & Marsh 2000: 6), rather than an end-state. Concerned with both dimensions of neoliberal globalisation outlined above, this thesis seeks to capture the totality of changes situated between exogenous pressures and national aspirations for education.

The specific research context chosen for this study is post-Soviet Russian education modernisation reform. A 'living laboratory' of change (Polyzoi & Dneprov 2003: 14), Russia's case presents abundant material for the study of reformatory transformation. Historically, the Russian educational system represents a curious blend of various traditions. As a direct successor of the Soviet model of education, it straddles two antagonistic socio-historical antecedents: the tsarist practice and welfare Marxism (Bereday 1960). Underlying both is the continuing traditional model of the 17th - 18th centuries, based on the principles of centralisation, hierarchical organisation, equality of opportunity, moral upbringing (*vospitanie*) and collectivist ethos (Judge 1975, Sutherland 1999, Elliott & Trudge 2007). The recent arrival of the market economy with the concomitant Western values is believed to have brought about significant socio-economic

and axiological restructuring (Nikandrov 1995, Kliucharev & Muckle 2005, Gounko & Smale 2007). Traditionally regarded as a 'public good,' Russian education has been reconceptualised by neoliberal reformers as a 'competitive private good,' with its organising principles shifting towards decentralisation, privatisation, differentiation, diversification and competitive individualism.

Having embodied both imperatives of the neoliberal market and contingencies of the socialist past, the modernisation reform has prompted a major renegotiation of educational values within Russian society. As I demonstrate in this thesis, the reformers' aspirations for a 'market economy with a social face' did not always resonate with the public vision of national education. Tenaciously pursued by the Russian government, the ongoing neoliberal reform has generated a colossal degree of public discontent and institutional resistance, mobilising enduring grassroots resistance.

As a result, while major neoliberal economic and administrative transformations have taken place in Russian education since the early 1990s, the 'software' of the educational process, including educational standards, curriculum, testing and instruction are believed to have not substantially changed since the Soviet times (World Bank 1999, Elliott & Trudge 2007). Despite extensive privatisation and commercialisation of the educational sector, public attitudes and informal practices have proven impervious to change, prompting some observers to characterise the outcome of the reform as a 'catastrophic failure' (Collier 2011: 2).

The phenomenon of failed post-Soviet social transformation attracted significant scholarly attention. The standard set of explanations for perceived reform failings included all-engrossing corruption, misguided 'big bang' economic policies imposed by Bretton Woods institutions, lingering Soviet legacies and institutional inertia (Holmes et al. 1995, Sutherland 1999, Webber 2000, Eklof et al. 2005). Many observers have argued that the combination of these factors rendered Russian society irreversibly incapable of Western-style modernisation (Balzer 1994, Kerr 1994, Holmes et al. 1995, Polyzoi & Dneprov 2003). In conceptualising the socio-cultural component of the puzzle, contemporary scholarship has often been confined to the discussion of 'cultural confusion' and 'moral maze' (Kluchariev & Muckle 2005) faced by Russian society following the downfall of communist ideology.

1.2. Research objectives

I argue in this thesis that, in conceptualising social change, post-Soviet thought on Russian education is yet to account for some important culture-specific variables. In addition to the socio-political and ideological explanations offered by other scholars, I seek to furnish an alternative account of neoliberal education reform in Russia vis-à-vis Russian national character. Having advanced a culturalist stance, I explore the effects of the national character on the successes and failures of reform alongside other, better established, factors, such as politics, economy, corruption, and governance. By centering the analysis on how global reformatory ideas are modified to accommodate for local specificities, this study attempts to capture the discourse of contemporary Russian education in a 'critical discourse moment' (Chilton 1996: 38) or a 'moment of social change' (Fairclough 2007: 12).

In broader cultural terms, I look at how institutions of educational capitalism correlate with the spiritual makeup of Russian historical culture. Specifically, I investigate how the principles of quality control, entrepreneurship, self-interest, consumer-choice, self-responsibility, and competition have interacted with Russian communalism (*sobornost'*), egalitarianism, state paternalism and anti-monetarism. I expose the ideological schisms brought on by post-Soviet reforming in Russia and explore how those have been negotiated in the Russian culture code.

By applying fine-grained textual analysis, this research aims to 'disarticulate' (Luke 1995: 20) the multi-layered discourse of the reform and to expose its rootedness in various ideological sources. I explicate how the conceptual mélange of the modernisation doctrine is construed from the inside; which ideologies are driving the reform; and how the domestic and the borrowed are reconciled in the reform narratives. In doing so, I attempt to unravel some of the conceptual contradictions in the officially endorsed educational paradigm and to explain public resistance to change.

In order to explore the dynamic interaction between the global and the local in the process of educational transformation, this study adopts a culturalist perspective on education borrowing in the context of globalisation. While remaining in the area of policy research, it advances a post-structuralist approach to the study of reform process through the prism of social meaning. It positions itself within interpretative policy analysis and develops a conceptual framework that links linguistic, textual and policy analyses.

Building upon these methodologies, I engage with contemporary public debate on education as a major site of contestation for securing socio-cultural meanings. The source materials for this study include contemporary public and policy discourses, transcripts of parliamentary debates by Russian policy-makers, official written and oral policy statements, and public discussions advanced in the media. I draw on these texts as discursive instances of wider social practices to identify continued points of tension between the novel and the indigenous, supplying a rich cultural commentary on the origins of those tensions.

I seek to offer an original account of educational globalisation in Russia as a combination of ideas and an interactive two-way process, rather that a homogenised condition or a one way socio-economic force. While fully addressing the policy-making dimension of reform, this research offers a unique perspective on the cultural embeddedness of educational systems, as well as on the reciprocity of the global and the local at the ideational level. In embracing the idea of socio-economic reality being made up of ostensibly non-economic cultural practices, this research bridges the disciplines of educational studies, post-Soviet studies, anthropology, economic sociology and social policy. It feeds into the broader discussion of Russia's ambiguous relationship with the West and considers an often overlooked piece of the long-standing post-Soviet puzzle.

1.3. General organisation of the study and chapter summaries

Chapter I explains the rationale of the study, introduces the problem statement and provides chapter summaries.

Chapter II sets the broader context for research, introduces research questions and contextualises the study within the field of social sciences. In setting the context, the first part of the chapter provides a brief overview of the area of 'post-socialist' studies. The chapter argues that despite a voluminous body of literature on post-Soviet educational change, the complexity of multivariate educational change has not been sufficiently addressed. A critical review of existing literature reveals a tendency to focus on economic and structural aspects of the reforms, leaving out its socio-cultural variables. Having problematised the socio-cultural dimension of reform, the chapter introduces societal debate as a crucial component of the reform process and outlines parameters of the public discussion. The role of language in framing the reform narrative is highlighted and problematised. The chapter concludes with a discussion of practical and theoretical contributions of the study, with an emphasis on theoretical benefits of incorporating a 'linguistic turn' into contemporary Russian educational research.

Chapter III outlines the overall theoretical framework (discourse analytical) and methodological approaches (textual analysis) adopted in this study. The first part of the chapter provides an account of Discourse Analysis as a specific area of scientific inquiry and addresses theoretical and methodological challenges of contemporary discourse-informed research. Special attention is given to methodological challenges to be addressed within the present study. In positioning the study within a variety of discourse-analytic approaches, the chapter places the analysis within cultural, anthropological and linguistic milieux, in that it is interested in *discourse-through-language* as characteristic of cultural systems of meaning, attitudes and values. The second part of the chapter details levels of analysis (linguistic, metaphorical and conceptual) undertaken in

this study, as well as explains the role of fine-grained linguistic analysis in understanding the policy process.

Chapters IV, V, VI and **VII** present empirical findings of this study. Each chapter explores a particular theme of the reform agenda that has been problematised within the reform narrative. The organisation of chapters on the basis of individual reform concepts is both theory- and material-driven. Theoretically, this study is concerned with local interpretations of a ready-made set of global reform policies. From the theoretical perspective, therefore, I am interested in those global templates that, through mediation by the official discourse, have trickled down into the public discourse, where they have been absorbed and re-interpreted within the Russian culture code. In order to locate points of tangency I have juxtaposed key neoliberal policy ideas with popular themes in the public debate. The three consistently challenged and debated issues I have identified in the public debate have proved to be congruent with the three 'pillars' of the neoliberal reform package. These are: educational quality, educational standardisation and education as commercial paid-for service. In bringing together theoretical tenets of the study and empirical findings, I have designed the empirical chapters around these three principal themes.

In addition to the three overarching themes, there is a range of associated ideas, including curricular choice, performativity, equality, competition, diversity and choice. I have established in the course of the analysis that these issues are conceptualised and interpreted within the three broader themes outlined above. Thus, the concept of 'educational equality' is commonly discussed under the umbrella of 'standardisation' and is positively or negatively assessed within one or another interpretation of 'educational standard.' Similarly, the concept of 'competition' is

an integral part of the broader interpretative frame of 'commercial service.' These important sub-themes are discussed within broader corresponding chapters.

The table below provides a summary of the juxtaposition of global neoliberal ideas, key reform directions, and themes of the societal debate. The left column represents broad decontextualised global neoliberal concepts as they emerge from the neoliberal worldview. The middle column represents the same set of ideas in relation to education reform in Russia, as they appear in policy recommendations by international educational stakeholders and in the official reform agenda adopted by the Russian government. The right column represents key themes and topics discussed in the societal debate on Russian education modernisation reform. The table serves to illustrate the 'global → official → public' route of migration of neoliberal ideas.

Table I: Neoliberal ideas in global, official and public domains.

Global neoliberal concepts	**Key education reform ideas**	**Key themes in the societal debate on education reform in Russia**
Quality improvement through quality assurance	Quality as a stakeholder-relative concept. Diversified quality criteria. Quality assurance system through unified educational standards.	Redefinition of quality as a stakeholder-relevant multi-criteria concept. Introduction of Quality Assurance System through a set of unified educational standards.
Standardisation of curriculum, instruction and assessment	Unified educational standards, including core and elective curricular components. Independent outcome-based assessment through standardised national test. Result-oriented instruction, outcome-based curriculum and performativity targets. Equity and equality of educational opportunity.	Introduction of federal national educational standard for general and higher education. Introduction of core and elective components of the national curriculum. Introduction of a Unified National Test in core school subjects.
Commercialisation and marketisation of educational services	Institutional devolution. Commodification of educational sector. Reduction of government cost to education. Involvement of business into educational process. Market-based principles of choice and diversity. Institutional intra- and inter- competitiveness.	Commercialisation of education sector. Introduction of the concept of education as a commercial paid-for service. Introduction of the principles of institutional competitiveness and choice.

Analysis undertaken within each empirical chapter is presented in the following way. It begins with a historical overview of how each concept was developed, elaborated and re-interpreted at various stages of the modernisation reform. It then proceeds to the synchronic analysis, departing from the micro-level of lexical meanings and moving to the higher order of ideologies and socio-

cultural meanings. Throughout the chapter, the analysis compares and contrasts global neoliberal ideas, their representation in the official government narrative and their re-interpretation among the Russian public. Moving back and forth between these domains, the analysis traces the sources of conceptual contradictions encoded in the reform debate, unravelling their origins and providing rich cultural commentary.

Chapter IV explores the national account of 'educational quality.' It begins with the analysis of the concept of 'novel quality' embraced by the official reform narrative. The analysis finds that, while explicitly claiming to be building on the Soviet legacy in 'modernising' and 'renewing' the quality of the Soviet educational system, the official discourse creates a strong antagonism between the past and the present at ideological, symbolic and metaphorical levels. Lexically, 'contemporary' becomes a contextual synonym for 'principally new.' While overtly arguing for a well-planned incremental educational change, the official narrative implicitly creates a sense of emergency and a need for a dramatic revolutionary change in the direction of the 'principally novel,' stakeholder-relative and outcome-based quality of education. I further argue that, in contrast with the rhetoric of novelty, in practical use the official quality paradigm continues to draw on the absolutist all-or-nothing notion of quality. Used in an aspirational way, in the sense of 'desired quality' and 'utmost quality,' the concept continues to signify a homogenous characteristic of the educational system pertaining to a particular input-based proxy (economic, social, pedagogical, etc.) at any discursive moment. The official quality framework appears to be dichotomous rather than stakeholder-relative, with quality being opposed to 'non-quality.' 'Quality education' characterises the new system in general, while the 'non-quality' refers to isolated instances resulting from poor institutional management or personal negligence. The

analysis in this chapter traces the development of the concept of educational quality over the course of the modernisation reform, arguing that, despite the rhetoric of quality assurance, the official quality framework has undergone a major discursive shift from quality *assurance* to quality *control*. By assuming the role of a 'protector' from 'non-quality' education, the state has implicitly reclaimed control over the liberalised educational sector.

Chapter V explores the concept of educational standardisation. It begins with a historical note on the 'three generations' of educational standards and the analysis of the official representation of the concept. It highlights mass public confusion in the perception of the state-endorsed concept and proceeds to investigate the lexical dimension of the debate in search for interpretative cues. The chapter uncovers a number of conceptual tensions in the interpretation of the idea of 'educational standard,' including the oppositions 'curriculum vs. programme,' 'old vs. new,' 'standard vs. non-standard' and 'whole vs. fragmented.' The chapter explicates the roots of lexical confusion and highlights conceptual sources of resistance towards the concept.

Chapter VI explores controversies surrounding the newly introduced concept of education as a 'commercial service.' Through an extensive discursive analysis of the official policy I show how the concept of service in the meaning of 'philanthropy' has been discursively merged in the official narrative with that of 'paid-for market service.' Turning to the interpretation of the concept in the public discourse, I probe into various socio-cultural cues for the persistent rejection of the concept by the public. I identify and unpack a conceptual clash embedded in the two derivatives of the same root for 'service' in the Russian language: '*usluga*' (commercial service) and '*sluzheni*e' (selfless pedagogical service). Through a rigorous analysis of these two

conflicting frames as well as a rich cultural exposé, this chapter unearths deep-seated conflicts between the neoliberal and the traditional Russian worldviews.

Chapter VII draws the findings together and contextualises them within the broader historical and socio-philosophical context of Russian culture. The implications of discursive struggles for the formulation and implementation of a social reform are discussed. The chapter suggests that a re-conceptualisation of key reform ideas is needed in order to render them better tailored to the cultural context.

Chapter VIII provides a conclusion summarising the answers to research questions posed in thesis.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND TO RESEARCH AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

This introductory chapter provides background to research and a detailed rationale for the study. It maps out the field of inquiry, introduces research questions and situates the study within policy research. Literature review is provided as part of setting the study in context. The chapter specifies research questions of the study and discusses its contribution to the field of policy analysis and Russian studies.

2.1. Background to research: Russian education modernisation reform

A 'living laboratory' of educational change (Polyzoi & Dneprov 2003: 14), Russian education modernisation reform, which commenced in 1991 and is currently ongoing, represents a complex assemblage of reformatory ideas and provides rich grounds for the study of the interface of the global and the local. Firmly rooted in the Soviet pedagogical tradition, facilitated by financial sponsorship of the world's major international stakeholders, and exposed to unrelenting pressure from domestic civic society, Russian education modernisation reform is a contested domain, where politics, history and different cultural traditions are intertwined and conflicted.

Launched under the slogan 'More Democracy!' educational reform was widely accepted and long awaited at all levels of society (Eklof et al. 2005), with the shared societal vision for reform being that of 'renewing' and 'updating.' While recognising the strengths of the Soviet model, the

society and the pedagogic community called for an all-round reform of the system stifled by a high degree of centralisation, rigid bureaucratic structure, strict ideological control, authoritarian and inflexible teaching methods, poor educational facilities and outdated curricula. Holmes et al. (1995: 19) summarise the initial rationale for reform in the following way:

> 'In terms of international discussions and trends, the Soviet system in 1985 was informed by unacceptable aims; it was administered undemocratically; its emphasis on the natural sciences had been at the expense of the humanities; teaching (designed to promote equality of achievement at the expense of individuality) had failed to recognise individual needs and had neglected to cater to them.'

In a search for a new rationale for educational organisation, a powerful grassroots movement of 'teacher-innovators' proposed a reform strategy based on the foundations of democratic citizenship and the local tradition of 'pedagogy of cooperation' promoted by the Russian Academy of Pedagogical Sciences. In the spirit of Gorbachev's *perestroika*, the reform movement championed a move away from the authoritarian and dogmatic principles of collective education towards 'democratising' and 'humanising' the learning process. In his historical account of reform, Ben Eklof (2005: 7) describes early public aspirations for reform:

> 'For a brief period, education was a topic of genuine public interest, and in the rhetoric of reformers the belief grew that new schools could transform society. Through learner- and activity-based instruction children would grow into critically-thinking, self-aware, and democratically-inclined citizens, who would replace the 'cogs' and 'drones' of the totalitarian system. Between 1988 and 1990 the reformist platform of decentralisation, differentiation, democratisation, and enhancement of the humanities in a humanised school won the official endorsement.'

As a result of the *perestroika*-era reforms, an emphasis on creativity and independent thinking was added into school curricula, a more democratic working environment was created for teachers and varying degrees of flexibility in self-government of educational institutions were introduced (Holmes et al. 1995).

However, the course of the indigenous reform process was interrupted by the socio-political cataclysms of the early 1990s. The turbulent demise of the Soviet Union and the 'shock therapy' introduction of market economy left the education sector in great distress. Government budgetary allocations were significantly reduced, academic standards declined dramatically, and administrative and academic corruption reached phenomenal levels (Sutherland 1999, Bain et al. 1998, OECD 1999). The ultra-liberal government of the early 1990s upheld a case for a wave of radical reforming and a complete re-shaping of the Soviet model. Having disavowed the Soviet legacies, the Ministry of Education launched a series of reform initiatives known as the 'modernisation reform.'

In the course of modernisation, Russian education has undergone unprecedented reforms in terms of the structure of institutions, curricula and financing. Responsibility for general education and school finance was entrusted to regional and local authorities. The system was decentralised, school curriculum deregulated, and the educational sector was commercialised. For the first time in the history of Russian higher education, individual institutions were allowed to define election procedures, set up certain admission regulations, create new structural units and administrative positions, develop their own curricula, as well as introduce new degree programmes and enrol fee-paying students. While secondary education nominally remained free-of-charge, the reform of higher education was marked by a sweeping commercialisation of the sector. By the beginning of 1991, 85 private (non-state) schools had been registered, rising to 386 by 1994 (Sutherland 1999). In contrast to nil in 1990, by 2005 a striking 62% of all the

incoming undergraduates in public universities were fully or partially paying for their studies (Sutherland 1999, stat.edu.ru).

Since 2000, further drastic changes have taken place. In 2001, a new reform strategy was developed by the Putin administration. The strategy included three major 'pillars of modernisation' (Gounko & Smale 2007): the implementation of the Bologna Declaration, the development of a unified national test for university admission, and the introduction of a new higher education financing scheme. By signing the Bologna Declaration in 2003, the government of Russian Federation committed to aligning the traditional tertiary education to the Bologna model and transitioning to a two-tier degree structure. In 2007 the commitment was consolidated in a law that replaced the traditional five-year degree of a 'Specialist' with a two-tiered model: a four-year bachelor degree followed by a two-year master's degree. Introduced in 2001 and made mandatory in 2009, a single, nationwide standardised Unified National Test for school graduation and university entrance replaced the traditional system of oral examinations. The new exam was designed to ensure educational standards nationwide, introduce external quality control tool into secondary education, fight corruption and increase access to higher education for students from rural areas and low-income families. The test was centrally administered in high schools nationwide, allowing prospective students to apply to multiple universities without the need to pass entrance examinations in person. The new higher education financing scheme included the 2004 introduction of student vouchers, the so-called 'Government Individual Financial Obligations' (GIFOs). Tied into the Unified National Test scheme, the voucher system was envisaged as an innovative subsidisation mechanism allocating resources to high school graduates on an outcome-based principle. The new standard of budget allocation, ranging from

14,500 roubles (USD 500) to 1,200 roubles (USD 40) per student, was the first attempt to link budget funding to individual students rather than educational institutions (stat.edu.ru). In addition to subsidising best performing students, the new funding scheme was meant to encourage universities to compete for best students. Unlike the two other key measures, the GIFO project did not pass the experimentation stage and was abandoned in 2005[1]. In its presentation of the modernisation programme for higher education, the 2005 National Educational Policy Doctrine for the first time prioritised the *economic* function of higher education and the role of education in the transition to market economy (Federal Strategic Programme 2005). The main policy goals for Russian higher education for 2006 – 2010 were defined as the introduction of market mechanisms into the sphere of education and the promotion of global competitiveness, efficiency, innovation, accountability, transparency and equity.

In summary, within the space of a few reformatory years, a highly centralised, politically and ideologically controlled educational system, oriented at rote learning, collectivism and conformity, had to rapidly accommodate new educational values: regional differentiation, student-centred learning, standardisation, institutional accountability, educational equity and quality assurance. By the late 1990s, educational reform agenda was almost exclusively defined by Russian political elites (Birzea 1994), and 'learning from elsewhere' (Phillips 2000) became the primary strategy for the modernisation.

It has been established (Silova 2011, Birzea 1994, Bray & Borevskaya 2001, Gounko & Smale 2007) that neoliberal globalisation has played a determinant role in shaping the direction of post-

[1] Resistance to the reform initiative on the part of university rectors' community and higher administration at an early stage of reform is commonly named as the main reason for the termination of the project (Smolin 2005).

Soviet Russian education reform. In summarising the apotheotic role of neoliberal forces in post-Soviet societal transformations, Collier (2011: 12), for example, maintains,

> 'In what sense can Russia's post-Soviet experience be linked to neoliberalism? The answer to this question may seem self-evident; it has certainly been taken for granted by observers of post-socialist transformation. (...) As Bruce Kogut and Andrew Spicer have shown in a comprehensive review of relevant literature, post-Soviet transformation has overwhelmingly been understood as the product of a "Neoliberal Economic Ideology" that (…) framed foreign aid strategy in post-communist countries.' (…) And the Russian experience during the 1990s - particularly policies of structural adjustment and shock therapy, unleashed in a triumphant dismantling of Soviet socialism - marks the neoliberal apotheosis.'

Policy experts (Silova 2011, Bain 2011, Birzea 1994, Bray & Borevskaya 2001, Gounko & Smale 2007) have also observed that the bulk of reform measures implemented in post-1991 Russia conforms to what has been labeled in comparative education literature the 'post-socialist educational reform package' (Silova 2011). Since late 1990s, the national strategy for modernisation adopted by the Russian government has been based on technical, financial and conceptual assistance provided by international financial organisations, mainly the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. The standard package advocated by these international financial organisations (IFOs) centred around the concepts of cost-effectiveness, market-driven quality control, educational standardisation, outcome-based education, decentralisation of governance and finance and privatisation of higher education. Studies by Bray & Borevskaya (2001) and Gounko & Smale (2007) have illustrated that post-1991 educational policy pursued by the Russian government chronologically and conceptually complies with the educational agenda recommended by IFOs. For instance, the new financing scheme, a subsidisation mechanism based on individual student performance, directly corresponds with the World Bank's and the OECD's policy recommendation to introduce the 'money follows the student' principle in order

to enhance consumers' freedom of choice and ensure the effective use of financial resources (Gounko & Smale 2007, World Bank 2004). The Unified National Test, an external tool for school leavers' performance assessment, complies with the World Bank's demands for an independent quality control mechanism aimed at enhancing school-leavers' mobility and eliminating corruption (Gounko & Smale 2007, World Bank 2004). The Bologna Declaration and the introduction of the two-stage system of higher education conform to the international agencies' recommendation to foster competitiveness of Russian education on the global market (Gounko & Smale 2007). Besides providing regular policy recommendations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have directly sponsored major reform initiatives, most notably the design and implementation of the Unified National Test. Over the period of 1991 - 2005, the World Bank alone provided the Russian government with a USD 71 million loan to facilitate the modernisation reform (World Bank 2004). In accordance with the international tendency, 'the new orthodoxy, the market solution' has become the 'new master narrative, a deeply fissured but primary discourse' of social reform (Ball 1998: 126). The post-socialist reform package appears to have been unproblematically accepted as a blueprint for modernisation reform.

Measured against the benchmark of neoliberal reform vision, some aspects of reform, including decentralisation of educational management, diversification of educational programs, privatisation of educational institutions and liberalisation of curriculum were assessed as being relatively successful (OECD 1999, Smolin 2001, World Bank 2004, Bray & Borevskaya 2001, Gounko & Smale 2007, Mau et al. 2009). However, despite substantial technical, financial and ideological investments, the bulk of reform measures has prompted overwhelmingly negative

assessments locally and internationally. Especially disappointing has been the appraisal of the 'software' of reform, including such aspects as curriculum content, academic standards, pedagogical approaches, quality of student learning and routine classroom practices. These domains of schooling have not been significantly affected by the reform process (Smolin 2001, Elliott & Tudge 2007, Alexander 2001). As noted by a prominent Russian pedagogue and policy-maker Efim Rachevsky, 'non-Soviet pupils continue to be educated in a Soviet school' (Moscow Echo Radio, 2006, echo.msk.ru). Similarly, Western observers Elliott & Tudge (2007: 98) noted,

> 'Despite the intense social, economic and ideological changes within wider society, there appeared to have been little impact upon everyday school practices, and the majority of schools appeared essentially to be identifiable in the terms described by earlier writers (e.g. Bereday et al, 1960; Grant, 1972).'

The initial reformist euphoria was quickly tempered by the sobering realities of the new millennium: Russia's disappointing performances on international academic tests, corruption scandals surrounding the nationwide launch of the Unified National Test, demoralisation of the teaching profession and widespread public resistance to the introduction of national academic standards. While earlier developments were enthusiastically received by both experts and the general public, mid- and late 1990s brought a sense of an institutional crisis and a dislocating effect of the socio-economic change on educational structures (Cerych 1997). Similar to perceived post-World War II educational crises in the UK, US, Japan and France, an increasingly widespread perception was that of educational system 'failing' to meet the nation's educational demands and the entire nation being 'at risk.' A statement by one of Russia's leading pedagogues and reformists Alexandr Abramov illustrates the sentiment:

> 'It's time to call a spade a spade. We are having a most serious crisis of national educational system (...). What Ancient Rome underwent over centuries we have done within the space of twenty years. This is a truly national catastrophe and the nation is at risk.' (Gorbachev Foundation Round Table, 2010, gorby.ru)

Promoted by the government as a panacea to the ills of Soviet-era education, the modernisation reform has paradoxically come to be perceived as anathema to the indigenous system of education (Polyzoi et al. 2003). Despite universal dissatisfaction with outdated educational infrastructures and practices, the neoliberal reform package met fierce resistance in various societal circles, from school teachers and parents to university administrators and the intelligentsia.

Oscillating between discontent and resistance, public perception of educational reforms has been commonly framed in terms of 'destruction' of domestic tradition. Reform debate has divided educationalists and political elites into two polarised camps: the ultra-radical reformers who denounced the domestic system as the last vestige of totalitarianism and ultra-conservatives for whom reforming the traditional system was 'a barbarity on the order, for example, of straightening the Tower of Pisa' (Kiselev 2003: 6). A widespread perception among the conservatively-inclined public has been that of the educational system losing the strengths of the Soviet system while failing to acquire the new contemporary quality the government had promised to deliver. A sense of institutional crisis has been accompanied by a perceived lack of vision for education and a crisis of educational values. As stated by 2011 'Education Reform From the Perspective of The Civic Society' round table of Russian educators,

> 'There is no answer to the question that is crucial to this country's present as well as future: what is our vision for education, what is the direction for its development and what are the national goals for education?' (September the 1st Newspaper, March, 2011)

International observers have also expressed deep dissatisfaction with reform outcomes. Collier (2011: 2), for example, argued,

> 'During the 1990s, the Russian case and the battles over 'transition,' the

> Washington Consensus, shock therapy, and structural adjustment, stood as emblems of the neoliberal project's grandiose transformative ambition - and catastrophic failure.'

With regard to higher education modernisation reform 2003 Carnegie Report (25) stated,

> 'Russia's educational system is also in the process of radical transformation. The reform of the higher schools of learning in the 1990s had been performed inconsistently, with few good results as a consequence. (...) Overall, the domestic system of higher education failed to effectively embrace marketplace relations and ended up beset by numerous hardships.'

International reform financers have unambiguously condemned the 'software' reform as slow, inefficient and undemocratic, warning of 'impending disaster' (World Bank 1999: 9). Both locally and internationally, the discourse of 'change' has gradually given way to that of 'identity crisis' (Smolin 2001: 15), 'dangerous hiatus' (OECD 1999: 14) and, ultimately, that of 'failure' (Collier 2011:2).

The next sub-section offers a critical review of literature, both academic and policy advisory, on post-Soviet education developments in Russia. It provides a brief review of the trends, issues and limitations of academic perspectives offered by Russian and international observers. The purpose of the analysis is twofold: to discuss existing conceptualisations of post-Soviet educational change and to outline gaps in the understanding of the perceived reform failure. This chapter offers a critique of the transition paradigm that dominates the existing scholarship and argues for a broader socio-cultural approach to the research puzzle.

2.2. Post-Soviet educational change in literature: mapping the field

Two decades following 1991 have brought a boom in Russian and international scholarship, in

terms of both documenting and understanding the reform process. The bulk of the literature has conceptualised educational developments in post-1991 Russia within the area of 'Post-Socialist Studies[2],' (Silova 2011) which included both academic research and policy advice. Systematic studies by such renowned Russian education experts as Stephen Webber (2000), Harley Balzer (1994), Ben Eklof (2005), Stephen Kerr (1994) and others provided an in-depth account of reform, while trying to grasp the scope and character of change. In Russia, where academic tradition in educational studies is not particularly strong[3] (Webber 2000, Smolin 2001), the reform has been critically examined by policy-makers, education practitioners and the mass media. In particular, the 'Russian Education and Society' journal, a product of cooperation between leading Russian and Anglo-American scholars, has been closely monitoring educational developments at the micro level. At the transnational level, international stakeholders, mainly the World Bank and the OECD have been consistently furnishing policy reviews, recommendations and predictions.

As indicated in the very name of the field, the analytical inquiry within the field has been informed by an appreciation of the unique socio-political nature of post-socialist setting. Broadly speaking, post-socialist studies of Russian education can be reviewed under two headings: 'What happened?' and 'What went wrong?' In regard to 'what happened?' many observers have acknowledged that modernisation reform in Russia is a phenomenon qualitatively different from its counterparts in the West and similar to those experienced by other countries with shared socialist past (Bain 2011, Birzea 1994, Polyzoi & Dneprov 2003). Russia's

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[2] Sometimes called 'Post-Socialist and Post-Colonial,' implying a transitional nature of change.

[3] Although Russian scholarship has a world-renowned pedagogical tradition, research in such fields as Educational Studies, Comparative Education and Sociology of Education is scarce. The official classification of academic disciplines by the Ministry of Education does not single out 'Education' as an independent discipline. Educational research of the past two decades appears in the academic literature under the rubrics of 'Economics,' 'Pedagogy' or 'Philosophy.'

experience of educational reform was documented as particularly chaotic and controversial. The uniqueness of the Russian condition was seen in the unprecedented scope and speed of change. Affecting the entire architecture of educational system, the change has often been compared to the cataclysmic 'big bang' style of implementation of market reforms (Smolin 2010). Polyzoi & Dneprov (2003: 13), for instance, described it as 'a dynamic, interactive picture of change - one that is much more complex and multivariate than either model could offer alone.' They maintained that the configuration in which the global neoliberal agenda played out in Russia does not sit well with any of existing models of educational borrowing. A number of concepts was introduced to capture the Russian specificity. These included *mutation*, *deviation*, *retardation*, *fragmentation, selective filtering* and many others (Karpov & Lisovskaya 2001, Cerych 1997, Mitter 2003, Silova 2011). A widely-cited study by Karpov & Lisovskaya (2005), for example, analysed adaptive structural reactions of educational institutions to modernisation. They concluded that in order to accommodate to the new socio-economic environment, educational institutions underwent a number of spontaneous micro-level historically pre-determined structural adjustments, or 'educational mutations.' These included such unintended reform outcomes as virtual de-statisation of schools in the course of de-centralisation, the establishment of informal rules of operation, including pseudo-specialisation and private sources of funding, within state-run institutions, and the entrenchment of pedagogical traditionalism in the classroom (Karpov & Lisovskaya 2005).

The late 1990s saw a surge of international academic literature attempting to understand 'what went wrong' in the reform process. Explanations, often compiled under the heading 'issues of implementation,' included narrow technocratic orientation of the reform, economic stringencies, weak educational legislative base, controversial government policies, lack of democratic culture,

demoralisation of teaching profession and general socio-economic decline following the collapse of the Soviet Union. A number of domestic experts have criticised national policies for their 'narrow economic' (Dneprov 1998) and 'technocratic-conservative' (Karpov & Lisovskaya 2005) orientation, whereby nominally proclaimed democratic values were not commensurate with the economically-driven agenda adopted by the government. In their typology of specific government reform initiatives from 1991 onwards, Abramov & Grabilenkov (2001) identify two types of reform action: group A comprises initiatives targeting the economics of education, such as commercialisation, standardisation, marketisation and optimisation of educational services; while group B comprises reform initiatives related to educational structure and content, such as educational standards, streaming mechanisms in secondary school, two-tier university degree schema and textbook reform. Economic cost analysis carried out by the authors 'suggests an undeniable priority given to group A, which is not surprising as economists have played a determinative role in the education modernisation process in Russia' (Abramov & Grabilenkov 2001: 5). The first post-communist Russian Minister of Education Eduard Dneprov reaches a similar conclusion on the basis of a qualitative policy analysis. He argues that excessive technocratism and culturally insensitive policies are responsible for the ultimate 'profanation' of reformist ideas, whereby the subtle fabric of the national educational system, 'deeply humanitarian by nature,' was utilised as a 'mechanical piano' in the orchestration of reform (Dneprov 1998: 416).

Along the continuum of positivist explanations, other researchers have emphasised legislative inconsistencies, the lack of political will and self-contradictory government policies (Eklof & Dneprov 1993, Holmes et al. 1995, Kiselev 2003, OECD 1999). Designed amidst the turbulent

transition to a post-communist order, the modernisation agenda has been criticised as lacking unity of vision. The official government's reform rhetoric presented a curious patchwork of newly introduced Western values, revolutionary pathos and residuals of the Soviet *langue de bois*. Oscillating between neoliberal and neo-conservative, reform proclamations were not properly backed up by institutional, legislative and administrative bases. Some of the legal and policy documents produced in the early 1990s, such as the 1992 Law on Education and 1991 Decree No.1 proclaiming education the top national priority, are considered by policy experts as most democratic ones in the world (Dneprov 1998), yet the lack of political will did not allow for the implementation of democratic principles into educational practices (Dneprov 1998, OECD 1999). In regard to Decree No. 1, for example, Eklof (2005: 7) states,

> 'Decree No. 1 proved to be empty verbiage, often cited in later years to be egregious example of a pious rhetoric of a government unable to back up its proclamations what Americans call an 'unfunded mandate.'

The OECD (1999: 17) has repeatedly highlighted lack of institutional capacity as a major setback of the reform:

> 'The problem is neither in level of knowledge about the needed reforms nor in the commitment to change. The problem is in the lack of capacity – leadership structures, political will and financing – to give direction and urgency to change. As a result, change is happening but largely by default and neglect.'

OECD economic surveys have also emphasised a continuing decline in the share of GDP devoted to education, starting with a severe recession of the early 1990s onwards, from 3.8% in 1991 to 3.4% in 1992, and from 4.4% in 1994 to 3.9% in 1996, before stabilising around 3.7% in the mid-2000s (OECD 1998, World Bank 2004). Despite government proclamations of priority, such GDP expenditure does not meet sufficient preconditions for a successful social reform, indicating a low financial priority in global comparison (OECD 1998).

Several observers have problematised the lack of support by civil society in the reform process (Webber 2000, Froumin 2005, Holmes et al. 1995). It has been argued that the reform was stonewalled by widespread public resistance produced by a moral crisis following the collapse of the communist ideology. Although no systemic research on the public perception of post-Soviet education reform has been conducted, observers suggested that the de-ideologisation of the society and de-politisation of school curricula (Smolin 2001, Sutherland 1999) had created a moral vacuum where traditional values collapsed and the newly proposed ones were not internalised. Sutherland (1999: 80), for example, described what he saw as complete loss of moral compass within the society:

> 'The depolitisation of schools, the demise of the Komsomol and the Party left a vacuum in moral education, and the upbringing process, which for many years served as the guideline for schools and teachers, had been lost.'

Other commentators argued that, faced with a 'moral maze' (Kliucharev & Muckle 2005) the more conservative segments of the society resorted to the Soviet-era system of beliefs, opposing innovation (Eklof & Seregny 2005, Nikandrov 1995). A special attention within this strand of literature was paid to teacher conservatism and the lack of teacher advocacy in school curricula reforms (Eklof & Seregny 2005, Holmes et al. 1995, Elliott & Trudge 2005, Froumin 2005, Mitter 2003, Polyzoi & Dneprov 2003, Schweisfurth 2002). Some argued that consistently low teacher salaries and chronic under-financing had led to utter demoralisation of teaching profession, creating a sense of 'colossal pessimism' (Nikandrov 1995: 47) among teachers and preventing them from acting as agents of change. Closely bound to long-established methods and practices, teachers responded to reform with a variety of tactics, from 'shallow copying' to evasion and resistance (Eklof & Seregny 2005). Many resorted to paying lip-service to the

reform agenda while reinforcing old practices in their everyday teaching routine (Schweisfurth 2002, Polyzoi & Dneprov 2003).

The issues of reform implementations were also discussed in broader socio-philosophical terms of revolutionary, reactionary and stagnatory forces (Smolin 2010, Alexander 2001, Elliott & Trudge 2007). A concept of institutional inertia was widely utilised in sociological literature to account for the persistence of outdated educational practices. Ben Eklof (1995: 2), for example, discussed,

> 'The culture of the school is notoriously resistant to change and many scholars insist that schools are more likely to *reproduce* than they are to *transform* society. So it should come as no surprise that the reform movement [in Russia] in education has encountered obstacles and resistance in its path.'

While overall system inertia was said to be one of the main obstacles for change, it was also seen as a stabilising factor preventing revolutionary changes from filtering down to the micro-level of individual schools and classrooms amidst major socio-economic upheavals (Elliott & Trudge 2007). Elliott & Trudge (2007: 98) elaborate,

> 'Rather than being disrupted by the social turbulence of the early 1990s, it appeared that schools were acting as a set of microsystems in which long-term continuity and stability of educational practice offered a degree of respite from external pressures at the macrosystem level.'

Domestic experts have also emphasised the preservative and constructive role of tradition in post-1991 educational developments. In his extensive analysis of reform, Bibkov (2010) demonstrated how a chaotic and ill-planned deregulation of the education market paradoxically produced 'an effect of a retrograde conservation' (5) of the degrading Soviet system. A number of other analysts (Webber 2000, Smolin 2001, Dneprov 1998, Froumin 2005) have suggested that the immediate outcome of the modernisation reform exacerbated, rather than alleviated, the

ills of the Soviet system, including the ‘residual’ principle of educational financing, low social status of the pedagogical profession, excessive scientism in curricula and overproduction of higher education graduates.

In summary to this sub-section, I have identified two overarching trends in how post-1991 educational dynamics in Russia has been approached in the literature. Stressing the uniqueness of the Russian case, the majority of studies immediately following 1991 offered positivist-oriented clarity-seeking historical accounts with a pronounced descriptive and ‘sense-making’ (Bain 2010) orientation towards ‘what happened?’ As dissatisfaction with the progress of reforms grew locally and internationally, by the late 1990s, the scholarly focus shifted to critically deconstructing the new educational configuration, unravelling issues of reform implementation and searching for an optimal reformatory formula. In incorporating the Russian condition into existing frameworks of global convergence theory, academic literature tended to ‘measure the progress of change’ (Eklof 2005: 2) in the direction ‘from post-socialist towards neoliberal.’ The post-socialist market-oriented educational reform package has been implicitly accepted as a blueprint for change. Assessed against neoliberal targets, the reform has been widely critisised for a variety of implementation errors. The next section provides a critical assessment of the literature reviewed above and locates the present study within the field of inquiry.

2.3. Critique of the mainstream approach to post-Soviet change

This study fully engages with historical and sense-making accounts provided in the literature reviewed. Certainly, such variables as ill-conceived policies, chronic under-financing, lack of

institutional capacity and system inertia have hampered the implementation of the modernisation reform. However, this study challenges the overall theoretical framework in which the existing literature has conceptualised post-1991 educational developments in Russia. Drawing on the recent scholarly critiques of the transition and convergence paradigms (Silova 2011, Fimyar 2010) I suggest that the analysis of reform has been limited by an implicit ideological bias in-built into the theoretical grounds of existing research. As suggested by the prefix 'post' in the title of the discipline, the analysis undertaken in the literature has been positioned within the transition paradigm, which entails desirability of a particular reform trajectory. Borrowed from political sciences, 'post-socialist' implies a linear transition from authoritarian socialism towards neoliberalism. As such, the transition paradigm tends to conceptualise the West as a 'zone of normality' and the rest as 'abnormality' or even 'pathology' (Fimyar 2010: 62-63). As I have demonstrated in the previous sub-section, measured through the lens of 'normality,' Russia's education reform has been commonly conceived of in terms of 'curing' the system of the 'legacy of Soviet mentality' and 'catching up' with the progressive West. To signal the abnormality of the Russian condition, it has often been described in the language of *mutations* and *retardation*, with local educational features commonly labeled as communist 'residuals' and 'complications' on the way to 'recovery.' The West, in turn, has been seen as the moderniser called for to divert 'impending disaster' (World Bank 1999: 9). Within the transition paradigm, 'modernisation' has gradually become merely a fashionable synonym for 'westernisation,' in the sense of convergence to the Western 'one-size-fits-all' educational configuration (Cohen 1999, Welch 2004).

While westernisation frameworks have been useful in measuring the reforms successes and failures vis-à-vis the policy blueprint, they present a one-sided account of change, which does not leave sufficient room for local visions of modernisation. As argued by Silova (2010: 9),

> 'When we take divergence and diversity as a starting point of comparative analysis (leaving convergence theories behind), westernisation frameworks lose their explanatory power, failing to recognise sufficiently the essential ambiguity of post-socialist change.'

In engaging with Silova's argument, I suggest that, in regard to the Russian case, transition-oriented literature paradigm has overlooked several important dimensions of educational change, in terms of both 'what happened' and 'what went wrong' in the course of reform. I will summarise my critique under three inter-connected sets of argument: a heavy teleological bias, a 'formulation - implementation' dichotomy, and insufficient attention to the genesis of the reform.

Firstly, most of contemporary transition-oriented research has been informed by a rigid teleological focus. The linear transition paradigm creates a discursive divide between the past and the future, orienting itself towards the utopian future. In doing so, it often overlooks the *hic et nunc* of the transition process as it unfolds in a particular socio-cultural setting. While recognising the reciprocal relationship between *restructuring* and *reculturing* (Fullan 1993), contemporary thought on Russian education tends to focus on either reculturing *from* ('the Soviet legacies') or reculturing *to* (the global neoliberal identity). As noted by Holmes et al. (1995: 285),

> 'Many conservative educators are concerned that Russia is seeking to acquire the end products of Western liberal political culture without experiencing the intervening processes of evolution and inner understanding.'

This bias is manifest in the 'transitional' future-oriented titles of major publications on contemporary Russian education, such as 'Legacies and Prospects' (Eklof et al. 2005), 'The Past

and the Present' (Eklof 2005), 'Change and Resistance to Change' (Elliott & Trudge 2007). In fact, the name of the field itself, conceptualised in either economic (*post-Socialism*), ideological (*post-Marxist Space*) or geographical (*post-Soviet Zone*) terms, lends itself to the critique of its teleological grounds, as 'one cannot remain "post" something or other indefinitely' (Bova 2000: 131). Such rhetoric has served to normalise the discourse of crisis in economic, cultural and moral terms, calling to 'emancipate or transform Russia' (Eklof 1995: 2).

Viewed through the prism of a linear transition model, Russian education, which has up to date largely preserved the traditional culture of schooling, has indeed failed to acquire a global identity. However, a view from outside of the transition framework might suggest that post-1991 Russian society has been engaged in a meaningful process of negotiating its national educational identity. Indigenous values and attitudes underlying societal change are known to be crucial parameters of the process:

> 'The ideological breaking away has in some ways been even more problematic because it addresses the values, attitudes and mentalities of the Russian people. Pedagogical models that emphasise conformity, the collective, and centralised control are inconsistent with those that emphasise individual choice, self-development, and independent thinking.' (Polyzoi & Dneprov 2003: 30)

While mainstream scholarship on modernisation reform locates these tensions, it does not explain their workings on the cultural level. Specifically, it does not sufficiently address the question of how the tensions highlighted above are resolved within Russian cultural system. Such engagement is unmissably one-sided in that it has only been concerned with the 'international into Russian' route of translation (Bain 2010). There has been almost no 'Russian

into international' translation, in terms of educational ideas and practices[4]. The post-1991 move away from the local specificities within post-Socialist studies has been so dramatic that the discipline could well be described by Cohen's (1999: 37) ironic reference to 'Russian studies without Russia.'

Secondly, typically for the transition paradigm, the existing literature relies overly on the 'top-down formulation/bottom-up implementation' dichotomy, where formulation and implementation are seen as two unidirectional stages of a reform process. Education literature tends to conceptualise the reform framework in terms of 'centre' and 'periphery.' The center comprises authored texts as intended by policy makers and transmitted to the population in a 'top-down' fashion. These include education laws and official policy statements by highest-ranking policy-makers and education officials, legislators and pro-reform education administrators. The periphery comprises practices and behaviors, or what is known as 'policy outcomes,' by regional education administrators, teachers and the general public (Froumin 2005). The center is perceived as a 'think tank' for the reform, and the periphery as 'regional executors,' with educational policy largely seen as a final product rather than a continuum (Ozga 1999).

I argue that local and international reform assessments have been overshadowed by an excessive focus on implementation issues, in particular institutional, legislative and technocratic fallacies. While highlighting 'much conflict and confusion' (Kerr 1994: 69) occurring in between the two

[4] Rare examples are the concept of humanisation and developmental education developed within modern Russian pedagogy. Humanisation (*gumanizatsia*), approximated in English as 'child-centred learning,' is a cooperative learning and activity-based approach developed by Russian pedagogues Elkonin and Davydov. The approach, based on Vygotsky's zones of proximal development, has been incorporated into the international pedagogical research and practice.

stages, the literature tends to isolate the centre from the periphery and overlook the pivotal role of human agency in shaping national educational policies (Johnson 1997). Having focused on the issues of implementation, the literature has largely ignored the crucial dimension of *policy interpretation* in the reform process.

However, within international social policy research there has been an increasing recognition of policy reality being primarily a socially interpreted process (Yanow 2000, Ball 1994, Trowler 2003, Fullan 2009, Hargreaves & Shirley 2009). While the acts of foreign advisers, legislators and top national policy-makers are central to formulating educational policy meanings, the interpretations of the official or legislative language are made by grassroots-level agents, including teachers, parents, students and educational managers. Within the national educational discourse, context-specific interpretations made by these agents feed back into the policy formulation and vice versa. Thus, policy reality is made up of not only 'authored' texts with clear-cut meanings intended by policy-makers but also of 'constructed texts,' i.e. 'possible variant and even incommensurable meanings made by the grassroots educational players' (Yanow 2000: 9). In this respect, a growing body of research has shown that persistent intractability of certain educational issues is often rooted in contestations over symbolic meanings made by the interpretative community in a particular policy space:

> 'As implementation problems are often created by different understandings of policy language, it is as important for analysts to access these other interpretations – the local knowledge held by communities of meaning in constructed texts.' (Yanow 2000: 10)

In embracing the 'bottom-up' perspective, the present research seeks to offer a 'thick description' of the global-local interaction of ideas as reflected in the post-Soviet national debate

on education reform. In order to capture the nuances of local meanings, this study employs the domain of societal debate - unique yet unexplored cultural material.

The history of the societal debate, as it unfolded since the early 1980s, has been highly reflective of the interpretation of policy meanings in the reform process. Freed from the Soviet era censorship and initiated at both grassroots and official levels, in the late 1980s - early 1990s, a large-scale societal debate was initially a major driving force of reform (Webber 2000, Holmes et al. 1995). The society as a whole saw the aims of reform as democratising, humanising and individualising the system of education as well as integrating it with the society's spiritual and industrial needs (Holmes et al. 1995). Statements such as 'the system is not on par with the changing society,' 'the quality of Russian education has deteriorated and needs upgrading,' and 'academic curricula need to be reviewed' were a type of comment common for both public discussions and official reform manifestos. Webber (2000: 14) writes,

> '(...) the educational community, politicians, the mass media and the public seemed to have been convinced, according to the research findings of Soviet and Western analysts, that the problems of the schools were extensive, and fundamental reform was required.'

The consensus among reformers, educationalists and parents provided educational officials with the 'public mandate' to carry out the reform (Webber 2000: 29). Since the early 1990s educational debate has been advanced in the mass media, on-line discussions, pedagogic press and academic forums in both bottom-up and top-down manners. The opening up of top-down lines of communication, as well as the transition from a censored to open debate, has allowed for a free discussion of the national strategy for educational development and public articulation of their educational needs and concerns.

Eliciting varying degrees of adaptation, support and resistance, the societal discussion has been unprecedented in scope and depth. Its participants included parental groups, the pedagogical community and the intelligentsia, school and university administrators, politicians and policy-makers as well as high-rank educational officials. Discussions of educational issues on nationwide popular television and radio shows such as "*Pust' govoriat*!" (Let them talk!) on the most popular national channel (Channel One) and call-in radio show "*Roditelskoie Sobranie*" (Parents' School Assembly) on the "*Echo Moskvy*" (Moscow Echo) radio station have consistently enjoyed top media ratings. The format of these shows, which involved an open debate between reform proponents and opponents, engaged leading policy-makers, rectors of prestigious educational instituions, Duma representatives as well as the general public and lay commentators, with the critical feedback provided by participants often reflecting first-hand familiarity with policy texts. Such influential teacher publications as *"Uchitelskaya Gazeta*" (Teachers' Gazette), "*Pedsovet"* (Pedagogical Council) and *"Zavuch.info"* (Head Master's Info) have re-emerged in the mid-1990s as venues for educational debate and gained significant influence among the reform-conscious citizens. In addition to providing talking space to various representatives of the community, these editions have initiated a series of open letters to the Russian Government, offering critical feedback for the reform, publicising official Government's responses and provoking highly-charged discussions in the society. For the first time in the recent civic history, the discussion engaged such segments of the society as the intelligentsia, largely marginalised after the demise of the Soviet Union, and parental groups whose critical voice was virtually non-existent during Soviet times (Webber 2000).

Additionally, in the last decade, top-down lines of communication have opened up. Having conceptualised the population as their 'educational client' (Mitter 2003), educational and political elites have made attempts to accommodate clients' demands into educational policies, as well as to clarify reform policies to lay observers. Highest-ranking government officials, including the President, Prime Minister and Minister of Education, have repeatedly encouraged the debate by providing on-line and mass media platforms for discussion. Examples are the education section on the official Kremlin's website (*kremlin.ru)* and regular postings on educational issues by Dmitry Medvedev in his personal video-blog (*blog.da-medvedev.ru*). One of the most significant manifestations of the government's commitment to an open debate was its handling of the 2010 draft Law on Education. Following the publication of the draft law, an online discussion was initiated on a specially designed government-run website (*zakonoproekt.ru*). Following fiercely negative feedback from the public and the pedagogical community, then Prime Minister Putin officially announced that no law was to be adopted without being first approved in a public debate.

Upon the arrival of the neoliberal turn in the early 1990s, the revised reform agenda met an increasingly mixed reception, gradually spiralling into a mass public resistance by the late 1990s (Bucur & Eklof 2004). The continuing debate has consistently failed to produce a consensus on both the general direction for the reform and specific modernisation strategies. Oscillating between discontent and resistance, public perception of neoliberal policies has been characterised by an extreme polarisation of opinions, mass public resistance and confusion with regard to the interpretation of key reform concepts. A series of surveys conducted by Russia's largest polling agency, the Public Opinion Fund (*Fond Obshestvennoie Mnenie*), indicate that the educational

developments of the past decade have been largely assessed in ‘fair’ (around 40%) and ‘unsatisfactory’ (around 40%) terms (fom.ru). While the need for change continues to be widely recognised, the impact of the ongoing modernisation reform is evaluated by the society as either ‘nil’ or ‘negative’ (fom.ru). In the 2010 estimate of *Levada Centre, an* independent non-governmental polling and sociological research organisation, 77% of Russians thought that the Priority National Projects, of which Education is in the top four, were bound to fail due to a lack of vision, bad governance and misallocation of resources (levada.ru).

Surveys also reveal a continued perception of modernisation reforms as ‘imposed from the outside’ and ‘hostile’ to the indigenous system (levada.ru, fom.ru). The neoliberal agenda for modernisation is commonly described as a ‘threat’ to or ‘destruction’ of the Russian education. As one school teacher observed in a 2010 teacher on-line discussion, ‘the concentration of destructive absurdities persistently enforced on the system from the outside has been off the charts’ (pedsovet.ru). Public resistance is accompanied by a suspicion of conspiracy by Western agencies to colonise the country through the imposition of neoliberal social reforms. Questions are often raised about the hidden agenda of the reform: who the unknown bureaucrats masterminding the reform are and what constitutes its ‘real’ objectives. The following preamble to a 2002 round table discussion of education reform by Russian education experts is illustrative of the overall reform framing in the society:

> ‘Another round of reforms threatens to sweep through the educational complex of Russia (...) In this country ‘reform’ has become a buzzword. There are many who have an apoplectic fit over it, because the preceding stage of the reform was, on the whole, devastating to the country.’ (Reform of the System of Education 2002: 5-6)

Amidst the spirit of non-acceptance, almost all major reform concepts have taken on negative meanings in the so-called 'folk etymology,' i.e. local modifications of a novel term that reflects its popular, albeit linguistically false, rationalisation. For example, by acoustic association, the Bologna process (*Bolonskii protsess*) is commonly referred to as '*obolvanivanie*,' meaning 'stupefying' or 'making dumb.' The Unified National Test (UNT), one of the major innovations introduced by the reform, is often called 'a three letter outrage,' by analogy with a three letter Russian taboo word. The word 'modernisation' itself, being an abstract singular-only noun, is commonly used in the public discourse in plural (*modernizatsii*) to convey a derogative attitude. In addition, the key policy terms, such as 'equality' and 'standardisation' receive drastically different interpretations in the official and public discourses. For example, the word '*ravnyj*' ('equal, 'egalitarian') has produced two derivatives within the reform narrative: '*vyravnivanie*' and '*uravnilovka*.' While the general lexical meaning of both is principally the same ('make equal' or 'level out'), the evaluative frames of reference of the two are diametrically opposed. The concept of '*vyravnivanie*' is perceived as borrowed from Western discourse of educational modernisation. In a value-neutral context, it corresponds to the concept of equality, unification, or leveling out of educational opportunities. '*Uravnilovka,*' in turn, is an indigenous concept denoting adverse aspects of unified educational provision, such as 'averaging out,' 'impersonalised uniformity,' and 'one size fits all.' '*Vyravnivanie*' is mainly employed in official discourse as a progressive concept denoting equity and equality of educational opportunities. As such, it is construed in opposition to '*uravnilovka*,' which in the official discourse is portrayed as grey uniformity of the Soviet times. In the public discourse, the paradigms are reversed. The two terms are used with opposite evaluative judgments: contemporary reform initiatives are castigated as '*uravnilovka*' ('one size fits all') and '*vyravnivanie*' is equated with fair educational

provision of the Soviet era. A similar conceptual clash can be observed in the two derivatives of '*standart*' ('standard'): '*standart*' as guaranteed provision of first-class educational quality by the Soviet state and '*standartizatsia*' ('standardisation') as 'assembly line' or 'cut and dry' production. Yet another example is two derivatives of the word 'service' ('*sluzhit*'): '*usluga*' in the meaning of 'petty favour' or 'a paid-for service' and '*sluzhenie*' in the meaning of 'philantropy' and 'selfless servicing.'

As a result of these conflicting interpretations, the debate between the public and policy-makers lacks conceptual clarity, with pivotal reform terms remaining vague and open to a variety of interpretations (Webber 2000, Holmes et al. 1995). Webber (2000: 17), for example, observes,

> 'The extent of the variety of interpretation of the reform aims which exist in the system, and the degree to which confusion and the lack of clarity still remain, are issues which, if left unaddressed, will serve in the long-term both to act as a brake on the reforms and to hinder the development of the system as a whole.'

Indeed, stalled by the intractability of conceptual categories, the reform discourse has been characterised by an extreme polarisation of opinions with little room for middle ground between the pro-reformers and the 'old guard' (Holmes et al. 1995, Kiselev 2003). The reformers rely on Western reform models as a basis for the renewal of the outdated system, enthusiastically welcoming the neoliberal concepts of 'standardisation,' 'free market' and 'knowledge-based economy.' In contrast, the 'old guard' is adamant in their opposition to borrowed ideas, calling for the return to the 'authentic' Russian system. Under the nostalgic banner of 'Soviet education is the best education in the world,' the 'old guard' appeals to the historical role of the Russian nation-state in ensuring quality and equity. Their narrative is construed in opposition to the Western influence, with an emphasis on Russia's unique historical course of educational development.

In order to capture the totality of socio-cultural meanings within the discourse of the reform, in addition to official policy documents, I have incorporated two other discursive domains: public and lower level policy-making. The official domain, traditionally used in the analysis of reform, is made up of laws on education and other constitutive policy documents, as well as official statements by key reform ideologists and implementers. As the ideological source of reform, the official discourse is pro-reformist, technocratic and highly prescriptive. The lower level policy-making domain is represented by parliamentary debates and statements by those called upon to administer the reform at federal and regional levels. This includes both reform opponents and proponents. The public domain is represented by the intelligentsia, educators, students and a parental community, the majority of whom appear to be against the official course of the modernisation reform. With the mass media serving as an interlocutor between the three, these discursive domains are closely intertwined and are mutually penetrating. Together, they constitute a single, albeit often self-contradictory, framework of the modernisation reform. Fraught with controversies and ambivalences, the reform debate is a rich, yet under-explored, source of information about how traditional values and local pedagogical practices interact with neoliberal ideology. By incorporating the 'bottom-up' theoretical perspective into the research design I hope to offer a unique insight into the conceptual confusion and persistent public resistance surrounding modernisation reform. By looking at the reform process in terms of a two-way interaction between the top and the bottom, this study accounts for the pieces of the puzzle missing from the existing conceptualisations of the reform process.

Thirdly, the analysis offered by the transition-oriented literature often neglects to take into account the genesis of the modernisation reform. The literature tends to treat the fall of the Soviet Union as a point of analytical departure, conceptualising reform as a revolutionary break from the Soviet past. However, it is important to recognise that socio-cultural conditions for a major educational transformation were created long before 1991 (Dneprov 1998, Froumin 2005, OECD 1999). Building on the momentum of the late 1980s, education reform in Russia is a direct inheritor of a large-scale grassroots reform movement of the *perestroika* period (1978-1989). The reform movement was initially stimulated by community pressure, particularly by the bottom-up 'social-pedagogical' movement, or 'Pedagogy of Cooperation,' which comprised an influential group of progressive Soviet pedagogues demanding greater respect for students' individualities and seeking to liberalise curriculum and humanise teaching methods. Kerr's insightful historical account highlights the grassroots origin of reform:

> 'In the mid-1980s, at the gloaming of the Communist epoch, there emerged in Russian education a group of teachers, scholars, and intellectuals intent on remaking the schools in a new and different image. The 'social-pedagogical movement,' as its founders came to describe it, grew out of a diverse set of circumstances -- the work of academic psychologists and social psychologists who studied the increasingly dysfunctional ways in which teachers and students interacted in schools, the 'organizational-activity games' of clinical psychologist-practitioners who worked with entire cities and regions to chart institutional and social problems, the critical stance of journalists who saw the personal ruin created in many schools by thoughtless and authoritarian teachers, and the seminars, workshops and demonstrations staged by an intrepid group of "teacher-innovators" around the country.' (Kerr 1997: 1)

A powerful force for renewal, Pedagogy of Cooperation provided current educational reform with its strong liberal thrust, as well as laid pedagogic foundation for the modernisation reform to follow (Polyzoi & Dneprov 2003, Eklof 1993, Kerr 1997). A cursory glance at the language of the *perestroika*-era manifestos, such as 'More democracy,' 'Democratisation of the Personality,' 'Methodology of Renewal,' 'Pedagogy of Cooperation,' and 'Integration of School with Society'

- reveals a powerful internal pull in the direction of educational democratisation and humanisation. Under these guiding principles much of the school curriculum was de-politicisied, an emphasis on the 'humanistic learning environment' was added to class routine, and democratic principles were introduced into educational management as early as in the late 1980s. 'The movement flourished, contracted, transmuted itself through several incarnations, - writes Kerr, - and remains a potent force for renewal in Russian education today' (Kerr 1997: 1). Fuelled by decades of tradition of pedagogical innovation, such indigenous concepts as humanisation (*gumanizatsia*), diversification (*diversifikatsia*) and 'accelerated development' (*operezhaiushee razvitie*) have remained influential in both Russian pedagogy and the public mind.

In the course of the post-1991 reform the indigenous concepts were gradually replaced with the international catchwords: 'renewal' turned into 'modernisation,' 'democratisation of personality' became 'competency-based learning,' and 'pedagogy of cooperation' merged with 'student-centred instruction.' Some of the original reformist keywords have conceptually merged with the newly introduced, while others underwent processes of selective interpretation or local 'filtering' (Silova 2010) of the international agenda. As a result, Russian education modernisation reform represents a 'peculiar symbiosis' (Bain 2011: 38) of new (revolutionary) and domestic (evolutionary) strands of educational policy. While the genesis of reform is amply addressed in historical literature, it is often overlooked by policy-oriented research. What are the dynamics between tradition and innovation vis-à-vis the global script? To what extent has the original vision of modernisation been incorporated into the modernisation programme? How have the newly borrowed concepts been conceptualised vis-à-vis existing ones? How have conceptually

similar notions been re-interpreted? Do global and local discursive formations 'talk about the same thing' (Lemke 1995:31)?

In summary, mainstream post-1991 inquiry into Russian education appears to have been carried out within the framework of transition and global convergence. The field of post-socialist educational studies has been guided by an excessively pragmatist and structuralist orientation with little sensitivity to social meaning. Anchored in the 'West versus the rest' and 'formulation-implementation' categorisations, the transition framework has over-emphasised the 'substantive' (Yanow 1996) aspects of reform policies, i.e. policy as *practice,* leaving under-conceptualised some important 'symbolic' (ibid.) dimensions, including *policy as discourse* and policy as *process*. In its multivariate framework of educational change, existing literature has overlooked a crucial variable: policy as a *socially interpreted* phenomenon.

On the basis of the critical points advanced in this section, this thesis engages with a call for a reconceptualisation of the discipline expressed by culture-oriented researchers of post-Soviet transformation:

> 'Clearly, it is necessary to move away from a linear conceptualisation of the 'transition' process, which is characterised by a gradual replacement of 'the old' socialist policies, practices, and values with the "new" Western ones. Instead, it is important to account for the complexity of the post-socialist transformation processes and examine how patterns of thought move through different layers of the global and local systems and are transmuted when encountering local spaces. Under which conditions educational borrowing hybridises, replaces, or reinforces existing practices is a key issue for understanding educational transformation processes, and should therefore be placed at the centre of comparative education research.' (Silova 2009: 316)

In summary of this sub-section, I have argued that positivist enquiry into Russian education modernisation reform should be complemented by qualitative policy research employing a wide range of interpretive techniques.

2.4. Research questions

With the theoretical premises above in mind, broad research questions advanced in this thesis are:

How is the global educational agenda adopted by national governments contextualised in particular socio-cultural contexts? How is the programme of neoliberal modernisation interpreted vis-à-vis local visions of change? How are cultural and ideological contestations negotiated and resolved?

Specifically to the Russian context, I have defined research questions as follows:

• **How has educational modernisation been conceptualised in the official and public discourses?**

What are key concepts of the modernisation reform programme? To which extent is the repertoire of reformatory ideas rooted in borrowed modernisation discourses? To which extent does the idea of educational renewal draw on domestic reformatory ideas?

• **How have the novel concepts been contextualised and interpreted in the Russian culture code?**

Which novel reformatory ideas have been internalised and which ones have been contested? What is the socio-cultural logic behind those contestations? What are the symbolic meanings and

ideological significances of public resistance in Russia's historical, political and ideological contexts?

• **How have domestic and imported versions of education modernisation been reconciled in official and public discourses?**

How do conflicting frames of reference co-exist in the official and public reform narratives? How have domestic visions of change played out in the course of the reform? Have the ideological tensions between the local and the global been resolved?

2.5. Contribution to the field of policy studies

This study seeks to contribute to the scholarly reflection on educational change. In particular, it aims to shed light on the dynamic between the local and the global in educational policy-making. With this ambition in mind, I see the contribution of this study to the field of educational policy research as twofold. Firstly, this study aspires to enhance our understanding of the complex realities of the Russian education reform, including the cultural, political and ideological conflicts, as well as the diffusion of conflicting ideologies within the narrative of the reform. Emanating from post-structuralist epistemology, this study is unique in its focus on how educational agents and actors make sense of change 'from the inside,' in their socio-cultural utterances and practices.

In addition, by conceptualising change outside of the transition paradigm this research seeks to fill in the gap in post-Socialist studies on Russian education. Designed at the intersection of policy analysis and discourse studies, this study will broaden our understanding of education

reform vis-à-vis neoliberal globalisation. As the field of comparative education continues to be conceptualised primarily within the globalisation theory (Crossley 1999), I hope, in the long run, to contribute to the 're-narrativisation' (Hall 1996: 250) of the globalisation account in a way that incorporates vernacular perspectives.

Finally, by combining a range of congruent socio-cultural and linguistic approaches within a single analytical framework, this study aims at fostering transdisciplinarity within the field of policy analysis. In particular, in seeks to make a contribution to theorising the links between the social and the linguistic in the area of textual politics and policy discourse analysis. Pursuing post-structuralist questions with analytic tools of linguistics in the educational domain has a weak tradition in Russian social sciences, and the proposed research has an ambition of setting out a new direction in this area. As noted by Lemke, most contemporary theories of discourse are linguistic and not social (Lemke 1995, Bain 2003). Therefore, 'the shift of the focus to the social construction of meanings and their translation back into practices has the promise to further refine theories of educational change as applied to the post-socialist region' (Bain 2003: 31). This study will contribute to theorising educational change through the application of various strands of Discourse and Textual Analyses to a largely unexamined domain of Russian policy language and Russian educational discourse. Stemming from the theoretical considerations above, the practical significance of the study is to enhance our understanding of the factors that foster or hamper educational reform, as well as to provide policy-makers and practitioners with practical advice for developing more informed culture-tailored educational policies.

CHAPTER III

THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

The present research lies at the intersection of policy analysis and discourse studies, with its methodology drawing on theoretical propositions established within both fields. This chapter describes theoretical and methodological tenets of the present thesis. It begins with introducing societal debate on education as a textual representation of public discourse as well as an indicator of change or resistance to change, paying particular attention to theoretical links between educational policy and its socio-cultural interpretation. It then proceeds to address the phenomenon of discourse as a source of socio-cultural, political and ideological meanings. It provides an account of Discourse Analysis (DA) as a specific area of scientific inquiry and addresses theoretical and methodological challenges of contemporary discourse-informed research. The chapter positions this study within the multiple approaches of the discipline and outlines specific levels of analysis to be undertaken. Special attention is given to theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of the framework selected as well as methodological challenges to overcome. As I will show in this chapter, there is no single theoretical basis or a holistic methodological paradigm within the field. The purpose of this chapter is therefore to outline the boundaries of DA-related approaches within common epistemological and ontological claims, to position a theoretico-methodological approach embraced in this study within the field and to demonstrate its suitability for research tasks at hand.

Lastly, this chapter outlines the methodological framework adopted in this study. Being essentially a study of educational policy, the present research is different from mainstream social

policy research in that, in addition to operating traditional policy concepts, its methodology encompasses a fine-grained analysis of the language of reform. Drawing together a Foucauldian perspective on constructive features of discourse, Critical Discourse Analysis and Textual Politics, the unique methodological framework has been designed to investigate the language of education reform as a form of socio-cultural action.

3.1. Theoretical foundations of discourse analytic inquiry

Discourse Analysis is an internationally established area of scientific inquiry encompassing a plethora of approaches with distinctly different methodologies and research agendas. The geography of DA is eclectic and theoretically multi-layered, incorporating theories of different levels: from epistemological theories, grand theories, and general social theories to middle-range theories, microsociological, psychological and linguistic theories (Meyer 2001). Partly by force of the academic tradition and largely due to the specifics of historical and geographical evolution of the field, DA has come to encompass disciplinary spaces as diverse as Discursive Psychology, Ethnomethodology, Critical Discourse Analysis, Critical Linguistics, Discursive Psychology, Ethnography of Speaking, Critical Literacy, Ethnography of Communication, Interaction Sociology, Social Semiotics, and Post-structural Feminism. They penetrate various academic traditions, for example, Anglo-American and French streams of DA. They often revolve around intellectual contributions of individual prominent thinkers, such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel Foucault, Harold Garfinkel and Norman Fairclough. They have their roots in a variety of established disciplines including Classical Rhetorics, Anthropology, Linguistics, Literary Studies and Psychology. They are framed within various schools of thought such as positivism, social

constructivism, interpretivism, Marxism and post-structuralism. As noted by Threadgold (2000), the area of DA remains up to this day a highly contested milieu that is marked by 'uncertain authorship and delayed transmission' of ideas and concepts (40) and that should be regarded not as a field but rather 'a global space of migration and hybridisation [of ideas]' (41). Approaches and techniques vary and definitions are difficult to grasp, yet there is a certain 'discursive grasp' or scent of a [discursive] notion' (MacLure 2003: 20) that unifies various streams of DA.

The common ontological premise within all methods of inquiry in Discourse Analysis is a dialectical relationship between language and societal structures. In other words, social meanings are made with words. The immediate objective of DA-oriented research is to establish connections between language-as-discourse and extra discursive realities in a single theoretical and analytical framework that involves a methodologically consistent interaction between social and linguistic theories, in order to examine how socially produced meanings are discursively construed and maintained (Hardy & Phillips 2002).

Some approaches within DA are framed within constructivist epistemology with an emphasis on how language constructs and not merely reflects socio-cultural and institutional phenomena. Others lean towards the 'linguistic turn,' with the view of language as reflective, representative and constructive but mainly constitutive of social realities. The common ground of all approaches also embraced in this study, is adherence to a discourse-based view of language where analysis is situated at the intersection of *text, context and discourse*. McCarthy & Carter (1994: 38) theorise the relationship in the following way:

> 'A discourse-based view of language involves us in looking not just at isolated decontextualised bits of language. It involves examining how bits of language

> contribute to the making of complete texts. It involves exploring the relationship between the linguistic patterns of complete texts and the social contexts in which they function. It involves considering the higher-order operations of language at the interface of cultural and ideological meanings and returning to the lower-order forms of language which are often crucial to the pattering of such meanings.'

Thus, the discourse-based view of language adopted in this study presupposes that any given language is inextricably intertwined with the socio-cultural context the language operates in, making it possible to systematically analyse written and oral texts for insights into the discourses within which those texts are imbedded.

3.2. Approaches to discourse

Distributed across social sciences, the notion of discourse is used in 'vogue and vague' (Widdowson 1995:158). Inspired by experimental findings of Harold Garfinkel, Erving Goffman, Harvey Sacks, Emmanuel Schegloff et al., the Anglo-American tradition of DA takes on interactional and ethno-methodological perspectives, concentrating primarily on naturally occurring language phenomena, such as mundane conversations, everyday face-to-face interaction as well as institutionalised talk. It attempts to provide systematic accounts of how phenomena such as power, status and authority are revealed, distributed and maintained at the micro-level of verbal exchanges. Consequently, the methods employed within this stream are borrowed from or developed within areas such as Classical Linguistics, Interactional Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, Speech Communication, Speech Act Theory and Pragmatics as well as various strands of rhetorical, argumentation, literary and anthropological theories.

The French tradition of DA, following poststructuralist thinking of Mikhail Bakhtin and Michel Foucault, focuses on the interplay of broader social phenomena, such as institutions, power relations and knowledge, and examines the role of discourses in defining knowledge-power relations, shaping institutional hierarchies, as well as creating and sustaining 'truths' about the social world. This stream of DA deals with institutional and political texts and cultural artifacts drawing mainly on methodologies from Textual Semiotics, Philosophy, Historical Sociology and Narratology.

Further ramifications occur within these large academic traditions. The demarcation of boundaries between approaches within the field is often driven by the 'critical vs. post-structuralist' dichotomy (Wetherell et al. 2001, Threadgold 2000). One of the most powerful and methodologically grounded movement within DA is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as represented by works of Teun van Dijk and Norman Fairclough. CDA segregates itself from other, the so-called 'non-critical' or 'constructivist' approaches, on the basis of its radical 'critical' orientation towards the present socio-political order and its emphasis on the dynamics of language, knowledge, power and ideology surrounding discursive processes. While interactional and ethno-methodological streams of DA are concerned with manifestations of everyday life discourse outside political and ideological categories per se, adherents of CDA regard 'discourse' as a tool for creating, legitimating and institutionalizing unequal power relations (van Dijk 2008). For CDA, social criticism of discourse-shaped political and ideological structures is the purpose of a discourse-based analysis. Within the critical variety of DA, one can further distinguish between the British strand (represented by Fairclough, Kress, Fowler and van Leeuween) and Dutch strand (represented mainly by van Dijk), the former

closely associated with Halliday's social semiotic and Systemic Functional Grammar model, and the latter with the Sociocognitive model of discourse. A number of other smaller scale schools within Foucauldian-informed research focus on understanding constructive discursive processes in the sphere of ideology, culture and politics without the explicit critical drive of CDA.

A classification by Phillips & Hardy (2002) presents a typology of approaches that incorporates theoretical and ideological dimensions of DA inquiry. Phillips & Hardy (2002: 18) propose two classification criteria applicable to all known strands of DA: the degree to which discourse analytic inquiry focuses on the individual *text* or on the surrounding *context* on the one hand and the degree to which the emphasis is put on *power and ideology* as opposed to *processes* of social construction. According to the classifiers, the specific degree of emphasis on the two key dimensions depend on personal interest of the researcher as well as on specificity of a research theme (Phillips & Hardy 2002: 19-20). Juxtaposed across a coordinate axis, these criteria produce four major types of DA: Interpretative Structuralism, Social Linguistic Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, and Critical Linguistic Analysis. However inclusive, Phillips & Hardy's classification, together with other proposed typologies do not address methodological foundations in distinguishing between DA approaches. To this end, one of DA practitioners (Threadgold 2000) has suggested that DA should not be regarded as a field *per se* but rather as a 'global space of migration and hybridisation' (41).

As intra-disciplinary boundaries remain blurry, the notion of *discourse* has become somewhat of a 'semiotic hybrid,' its definitions manifold and conceptualised at different levels of scientific abstractness. Specific definitions are anchored within a particular research tradition and depend

largely on the degree to which a particular stream of DA is theoretically affiliated with formal linguistics (Mills 2004: 119). Thus, the Anglo-American academic culture tends to define discourse as concrete written and oral *texts*, while the European linguistics-oriented tradition refers to discourse as specific rhetoric and pragmatic *language-in-use*. Within the Foucauldian approach and Critical Discourse Analysis discourse is perceived as an institutionalised *form of knowledge* and a form of social practice. A recent trend in social sciences is to use the term in the meaning of an overall intellectual framework. The term migrates from one theoretical framework to another, often without being properly theorised in a particular framework (Wodak 1996, Widdowson 1995). A particular view of discourse depends on the epistemological stance of the researcher, and their personal adherence to a particular stream of DA studies, research material and objects (for example, rhetorical narratives, political processes, pieces of oral communication or written texts), available sets of data (ethnographic observations, case studies, large written corpora, policy documents), research agenda of particular disciplines within which CA is practiced as well as the nature and purpose of concrete research projects (Wodak 2003). The ambiguity is reinforced by the fact that DA is used to denote a field, a method, a theory and, most often, simultaneously all of the above.

In summary, while theory formation and methodological reflection have been on DA agenda for several decades, as of yet, no single theoretical basis or a holistic methodological paradigm has been established. The need for theoretical grounding remains as pressing as ever, as criticism of the field abounds (Stubbs 1997, Van Dijk 2008). In light of these considerations I will situate the present study within the field by defining its broad theoretical premises and outlining its specific research parameters. Rather than adhering to one or another stream of DA, I will focus on

common epistemological and ontological claims I have found across the discipline and embraced in this particular study. Having covered theoretical grounds, I will introduce analytical tools within the individually-tailored methodological framework of this study.

3.3. Theoretical premises of the study

The theoretical framework embraced in this study draws together a Foucauldian perspective on the socially and institutionally constructive features of discourse and a critical linguistic analysis that examines features of text as a socio-cultural action. As such, it engages with the following set of theoretical premises:

- Discourse is a form of social practice. It is in a mutually constructive relationship with the socio-cultural world: it shapes the social reality and it is shaped by it.

Isolated social realities and objects are vague and ambiguous. They are made meaningful through discourse, and their meaning is a product of historically specific socio-cultural discourse configurations. The relationship between the world and discourse is that of a dialectical nature: describing, reflecting, constitutive and at the same time normative, formative and constructive (Fairclough 1995, Luke 1995, Wood & Kroger 2000). On the one hand, discourses have a constitutive role in social structuration and are seen as forms of social practice (Weiss & Wodak 2003) or aspects of social action (Lemke 1995). For instance, the notion of shabby classrooms in a provincial school is not a social construct in itself, it is how the situation with educational facilities in a contemporary school is made sense of and discussed in a particular narrative that renders it socially or politically meaningful. Thus, discourses play a major role in structuring our

social experiences and constructing 'truths' about the social reality that are perceived as given, natural and taken for granted. Discourses are tightly woven into the dynamics of knowledge-power relations, shaping and categorising hierarchies of power, social structures and institutional frames, to both symbolic and material advantage of certain actors at the expense of others (Weiss & Wodak 2003, Foucault 1972). On the other hand, discourses are also endowed with performative power over the world in that they bring into existence the very realities they describe and 'systematically form the objects about which they speak' (Foucault 1972: 49).

- Discourse is shaped by the participants of its interpretative community and by the institutions within which it operates, which are further shaped by the discourse.

Located within the domains of larger social institutions such as mass media, church, school, family, etc., discourses are also 'technologies of the self' (Foucault 1980) for individual members of those institutions. They are internalised by the members of the interpretative community rather than imposed on them. Discourse is the platform for individuals to engage in the negotiation of identities, meanings, knowledge and institutional relations. Meaning-making as social practice is done by a certain community rather than its individual members and is inseparable from the social historical, cultural and political dimensions of the community. In this respect, politics and policy-making is essentially negotiating, defining and attempting to control the nature of shared inter-subjective meanings within the community. All meanings inherently function to either sustain or challenge the present social hierarchies and relationships of power within that community (Lemke 1995). Thus, discourses can be seen as both tools of top-down ideological manipulation and meaning-making tools individuals use to construct their version of the world and position themselves in it.

• Discourse is realised through written and spoken text.

'Texts record the meanings we make' (Lemke 1995: 1). Discourses are constructed, mediated and interpreted through language and it is possible to 'disrupt' (Rogers 2005: 376), 'disarticulate' (Luke 1995: 20) or 'demystify' (Wodak 2001: 10) and reconstruct discourse formations from everyday spoken and written texts that draw on them. Discourse and texts are in a complementary relationship with each other: individual texts are unique realisations of discourse and reveal information about specific events or occasions, while discourses reveal patterns, commonalities and relationships that embrace a number of inter-connected texts (Lemke 1995, Wodak 2009). Social and power relations, systems of meanings, identities, cultural representations and constructions of knowledge are articulated through texts and imbedded in the linguistic texture of a particular discourse (Foucault 1972). Luke (1995: 12) elaborates,

> 'Texts are moments when language connected to other semiotic systems is used for symbolic exchange. All texts are located in key social institutions: families, schools, churches, workplaces, mass media, government, and so on. Human subjects use texts to make sense of their world and to construct social actions and relations required in the labor of everyday life. At the same time, texts position and construct individuals, making available various meanings, ideas, and versions of the world.'

Discourses consist of recurrent statements across texts (Foucault 1972). Discourses can be identified through the analysis of the linguistic texture for recurring wordings, nominalisations, modality, lexical, grammatical and rhetorical choices, narrative and metaphorical patterns (Fairclough 2003, McCarthy 1994). Particular configurations of those linguistic choices can be systematically traced to larger political, social and ideological formations. A discourse-based view of language, therefore, involves 'exploring the relationship between linguistic patterns of complete texts and social contexts in which they function' while 'considering the higher-order

operations of language at the interface of cultural and ideological meanings and returning to the lower-order forms of language which are often crucial to the patterning of such meanings' (McCarthy & Carter 1994: 1).

- Discourse is historically and situationally located. It interacts with other discourses produced previously, synchronically and subsequently.

Social constructs do not evolve in a historical vacuum. Any particular discursive reality is made up of a confluence of discourses that draw from, influence, adopt and adapt to, re-interpret and internalise adjacent discourses (Parker 1992, Weiss & Wodak 2003). Linguistic meaning in discourse is not static or given but changes in the context of a paragraph, text, social situation, cultural frame, textual genre, pragmatic orientations and expectations of the recipient, and other social, cultural, historical and cognitive variables (Lemke 1995). Similarly, discursive narratives result from a particular configuration of discourses from and about the past, present and future:

> 'Strategies [of social agents and agencies to sustain or transform structures] have a discursive moment - part of what distinguishes one strategy from others is its particular configuration of discourses and narratives, narratives which connect the present and the past with predictive or prescriptive imaginaries for the future.' (Fairclough 2007: 12)

Discourses are not isolated from one another but are dynamic, idiosyncratic and confluent with contemporary and past discourses in a particular field of knowledge or ideology. Each particular discourse is constructed in a certain relation (opposition, juxtaposition, inclusion, etc.) to adjacent discourses and can be an affiliated version of a larger discursive formation. To borrow Bakhtin's terminology, no discourse is completely autonomous, there is always an implicit dialogue with other systematically inter-related discourses or 'voices' about the same topic (Bakhtin 1981). Institutional and elite political discourses are not insulated from but draw from

other socially constructed discourses (Wodak 2002). For example, a persuasive argument for modernising a system of education must combine elements of a pedagogical discourse ('How does public education ensure an all-round and the progressive development of student's natural abilities?'), an economic discourse ('How do we optimise educational investment-outcome ratio?'), a progressive discourse ('How is education made into a formative agent of social change?'), etc. The aims of education will be viewed differently depending on a particular discourse narrative that is evoked: individual fulfilment through rewarding employment, social well-being and economic prosperity of a particular society, combating illiteracy and developing human capital, etc. Everyday discourses are both a source and product of concepts, values and representations for the elite discourses. Everyday texts in which discourses are articulated are inherently heteroglossic and multi-discursive, and any analysis of a discourse is a continually shifting approximation (Bakhtin 1981).

- Any significant social change has a semiotic dimension and involves a certain recontextualisation or shift in the semiosis of socially constructed phenomena.

Fairclough (2007: 10) maintains,

> 'The emergence, consolidation, reproduction and transformation of all social phenomena involves dialectical relations between meaning (hence, culture, interpretation, subjectivity and agency) and materiality.'

In the process of social change, the dialectic relationship between meaning and causality, interpretation and explanation, culture and materiality, subjectivity and objectivity, agency and structure is bound to transform. Further, as argued by Chouliaraki & Fairclough (1999), this transformation involves colonisation or appropriation of one discourse by another and recontextualisation of policies and strategies from one context to another. Fairclough (1992)

provides an example of such recontextualisation in the contemporary academic culture: the wide spread of market values and commodification has caused ‘metaphorical transfer of the vocabulary of commodities and markets into the educational order of discourse’ (208) which has been ‘colonised by the advertising genre’ (210). According to Fairclough (2007: 12-13), some of the essential questions to be asked when researching a moment of social change include,

• How and where did discourses (narratives) emerge and develop?

• How and where did they achieve hegemonic status?

• How and where and how extensively have they been recontextualised?

• How and where and to what extent have they been operationalised?

As follows from these theoretical positions, this study shares major theoretical assumptions and concerns of mainstream DA research. It attempts to put forward a particular approach to discourse theory, which brings together two broad traditions of intellectual inquiry: Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Linguistic Analysis. It is ‘critical’ in the Faircloughian sense, for it seeks to unveil ‘connection and causes that are hidden’ (Fairclough 1992: 9) and ‘disarticulate’ (Luke 1995: 20) the workings by which ideologies are legitimated, debated, disguised and maintained by certain socio-political entities. However, unlike most research under the umbrella of Critical Discourse Analysis, this study is not explicitly aimed at being critical of the present social order and is not necessarily focused on how power works towards unequal distribution of symbolic and material resources. Instead, this research project is more concerned with understanding and interpreting socially produced meanings in the sphere of contemporary education. It aims to examine how ideology and the rhetoric of the educational reform is construed against a particular linguo-cultural backdrop as well as to explicate how discourse is symbolically and linguistically created, revealed, reproduced, institutionalised and objectified

from the 'inside,' through the micro-dynamics of policy texts. While acknowledging and drawing on sociological theory and Critical Discourse Analysis, this research is primarily positioned in the cultural, anthropological and linguistic milieu in that it is interested in *discourse-through-language* as characteristic of cultural systems of meaning, attitudes and values. Through incorporating the 'linguistic turn' into contemporary Russian educational research, this research represents a qualitative culturalist model of understanding educational change and providing a 'thick description' (Geertz 1973) of social phenomena. Although it does not fall neatly into existing classifications of discourse-based approaches, it is most closely associated with the 'interpretative' variety of DA, in particular with Critical Linguistic Analysis[5] in Phillips & Hardy's taxonomy of DA described earlier in this chapter. While mainstream DA relies largely on sociological theory, relating discourse to socio-political formations, Critical Linguistic Analysis draws more on linguistic, socio-cultural, cognitive, semiotic and anthropological studies, providing a mediating level of analysis between socio-political discourses and cultural systems of meaning, attitudes and values (Gee 2005, Wertsch 1995). This sub-section addresses issues of methodology. It sketches out methodological criticisms levelled at discursive analytic inquiry and discusses ways of overcoming them within the present study.

3.4. Methodological limitations of Discourse Analysis

Mounting criticism faced by the discipline in recent years (Pennycook 2001, Wodak 1996, Fowler 1996) necessitates a brief discussion of its limitations as well as strengths. In general

[5]A recent tendency is to use the terms 'Critical Discourse Analysis' and 'Critical Linguistics' interchangeably (see, for example, Wodak & Meyer 2001).

terms, the main points of criticism towards DA have been centered around two issues: the interaction between social and linguistic theories and interpretative nature of analysis within the field. I will briefly outline the critical arguments and discuss how they have shaped the research design of this study.

In regard to the first issue, critics have pointed to an unequal balance between the two within various strands of DA and the resulting excessive methodological eclecticism. It has been argued that the plurality of theory and method used in DA creates tensions between approaches within the field, blurs its boundaries, and makes it vulnerable to serious methodological criticism (Pennycook 2001, Luke: 2002). The field has been called 'a strange mixture of theoretical eclecticism and unreflexive modernism' (Pennycook 2001: 87), its research object humorously labelled 'disorder of discourses' (Wodak 1996), its methodologies 'competing and uncontrolled' (Fowler 1996: 12). Furthermore, critics maintain that the lack of theoretical grounding of linguistic analysis within social theories prevents DA practitioners from linking systematic analysis of local discourses to larger political and socio-cultural formations and, most importantly for some critics, from elucidating the substantive ideological consequences of language use (Gee 1990).

In arguing their case, discourse analysts have maintained that interdisciplinarity and theoretico-methodological eclecticism are precisely the driving forces for the development and dynamics of the discipline, where macro level sociological theories benefit from the linguistic perspective and where theory and method are inseparable and mutually informing (Wodak 2002, Chouliaraki and

Fairclough 1999. In describing the eclectic nature of the discipline, Chouliaraki and Fairclouch, for example, (1996: 16-17) have stated,

> 'We see CDA as bringing a variety of theories into dialogue, especially social theories on the one hand and linguistic theories on the other, so that its theory is a shifting synthesis of other theories, though what it itself theorises in particular is the mediation between the social and the linguistic – the 'order of discourse'; the social structuring of semiotic hybridity (interdiscursivity).'

From this perspective the synthesis of DA theoretical positions and its method is a strength rather than weakness of the field in that both are mutually informing and mutually elaborating.

While emphasising the importance of theory formation on an inter-disciplinary basis many discourse analysts (Fairclouch & Wodak 1997, van Dijk 1997, Eisenhard & Johnstone 2008) have acknowledged a pressing need for the development of a holistic social theory that would bring together a number of DA approaches, both structuralist and post-structuralist, and maintain a methodological consistency allowing to shift back and forth between socio-cultural and linguistic categories in the analytic process.

In light of this objective, the emphasis of DA studies has recently shifted from 'inter-disciplinarity' to 'trans-disciplinarity,' where logic of one theory is 'put to work' within a logic of another theory without reducing one to another (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999: 2). However, the issues of methodological consistency persist. As noted by one of the most prominent contemporary discourse analysts Ruth Wodak, 'the way interdisciplinarity is activated [within the field of DA] depends on the aims of the research, which are not ultimately discipline-dependent but thematically motivated' (Wodak 2001: 54). As a result, the heterogeneity of the field and the application of various methodologies are often thematic, and not inherently inter-

disciplinary (Wodak 2001). In developing Wodak's line of thought, Gouveia has argued that the heterogeneity in-built in the field and the resulting defragmentation is a 'valuable' feature, for 'rather than being a result of personal histories of research interests and motivations on the part of CDA researchers, the varying approaches are the outcome of different configurations and patterns of interdisciplinary actions' (Gouveia 2003: 54). Gouveia sees the very emergence of a discipline as transdisciplinary and heterogeneous as DA as a reaction to the once dominant rationalist and positivist paradigms. He views DA as both a result and a way out of the crisis in post-modern research (Gouveia 2003). As a discipline that critically draws on Marxist, social constructivist and interpretative approaches, Gouveia argued for DA as 'the continuum of an essentially disciplinary trend of a discursive nature' (Gouveia 2003: 53). As such, it represents a new move in post-modern research where knowledge, called to account for the multifaceted realities of late modernity, is common sense itself, 'a new common sense with new sense, though less common;' and where validity and internal consistency of science goes hand in hand with its usefulness and utility (Gouveia 2003: 53, 47-48). Building on those principles, Gouveia treats thematic heterogeneity problematised by Wodak and many DA critics as a matter of operationalisation, or 'migration of local concepts and ways of reading to other contexts in a localised but total and interconnected description' (Gouveia 2003: 55).

The other major point of criticism concerns the subjectivity of interpretation or what Widdowson (1995) called 'partial interpretation,' wherein meanings and ideologies are read off and into political and social texts on the basis of the interpreter's subjective perspective (Widdowson 1995, Stubbs 1997). The problem is closely tied into the theoretico-epistemological predicament outlined above and is often framed within the modern-postmodern opposition. For example, in

an attempt to untangle the DA epistemological dilemma, McLure (1994) points out a conflict between two implicit missions of DA research: the emancipatory deconstruction of social truths through rational linguistic disarticulation of dominant discourses on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the hermeneutic pursuit of unravelling the elusive and ever-shifting ‘dispersions of meaning’ within discourses through their intertextual chains. In discussing the dangers of linguistic deconstruction within discourse-based research practice, MacLure sees a certain analytical paradox: how is one to apply the deconstructive logic ‘outward,’ towards public and political discourses, without superimposing it on the researcher’s own paradigm and findings? (MacLure 1994: 284). MacLure concludes that some rhetorical deals with the devil are inevitable in order to preserve the core of the analytical paradigm, whether it is sidestepping the traps of meaning-making or deliberately falling into them.

Discourse analysts have addressed the issue from various philosophical stances. Fairclough (2001: 11-12), for example, has argued for open-endedness of the analytic results as well as for subjectivity and plurality of meanings, not necessarily as ‘grounds for consternation’ but rather as opportunities for exploring multi-layered social meanings. Following Thompson’s (1984) argument, Weiss and Wodak have insisted that discourse as language realised in writing and speaking is an act of making sense of the world. As such, it is an interpretation *per se*[6]. Thus, any

[6] As Fairclough (1996: 49) has suggested in his reply to Widdowson’s critique, it is sensible to distinguish between two kinds of interpretations: ‘Interpretation-1 is an inherent part of language use, which analysts, like anyone else, necessarily do: make meaning from/with spoken and written texts. People make meanings through an interplay between features of a text and the varying resources which they bring to the process of interpretation-1. Interpretation-2 is a matter of analysts seeking to show connections between both properties of texts and practices of interpretation-1 in a particular social space, and wider social and cultural properties of that particular social space. Notice that interpretation-1 is part of the domain of interpretation-2; one concern of interpretation-2 is to investigate how different practices of interpretation-1 are socially, culturally and ideologically shaped.’

‘interpretation’ by an analyst’s mind of a discourse is inevitably a re-interpretation of a domain pre-interpreted by someone else (Weiss & Wodak 2003: 56).

Thus, in applying the deconstruction logic ‘outward,’ the task of a discourse analyst is to discern relationships or interconnections with yet other relationships or interconnections (Gouveia 2003: 55). ‘Discourse’ is seen by DA researchers as a ‘probability pattern of a continual exchange of meaning in an inseparable web of relationships that include language, people, events, situations, institutions, social structures, and so on’ (Gouveia 2003: 55). In this sense, any interpretation of a discourse is bound to be ‘partial, ‘biased’ and ‘subjective’ as its explanatory power lies precisely ‘in between readings, or observations and measurements’ (Gouveia 2003: 57).

Whether interpretative nature of analysis and theoretico-methodological eclecticism are to be viewed as strengths or weaknesses of the field is an ongoing debate[7] (Wodak 2002, Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, Weiss & Wodak 2003). As noted by Faircough (1995: 20), the discipline has ‘passed the first flush of youth and is embarked upon the maturation process.’ In this process, discourse analysts are yet to resolve a number of epistemological contradictions in negotiating between the discourse theory and social science theories, fully incorporating the ‘linguistic turn’ within social sciences and the ‘discursive turn’ in linguistics, as well as arriving at a ‘principled and transparent shunting back and forth’ between the language and social meanings (Luke 2002: 100).

[7] Other criticisms levelled at DA concern its selective and unsystematic integration of critical and poststructuralist theories, varied understandings of what constitutes power and ideology, over-emphasis on ‘micro’ level of analysis, individual researcher’s preference for either written or spoken genres and a lack of demarcation between ‘text’ and ‘discourse’ (Luke 2002, Widdowson 1995, Pennycook 2000).

3.5. Operationalising analysis through contextual models

In light of the methodological tensions outlined above, this study has embraced the principle of conceptual pragmatism in developing its analytical framework (Mouzelis 1995, Weiss & Wodak 2003, Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999, Wodak 2001, Van Dijk 2001, Wood & Kroger, 2000 Hardy & Phillips 2003, Howarth 2000). Originally introduced by Mouzelis (1995), the principle holds that DA is, by definition, 'a theoretical synthesis of conceptual tools' (Weiss & Wodak 2003: 7) and that its principled methodological eclectism is a unique strength of the discipline allowing for 'innovative and productive theory formation' (9). As such, it provides a wide repertoire of tools for developing a research analytical framework that is both method-driven and theoretically-framed as well as tailored to the specific research questions being asked. The practical application of the principle are varied, including Reisigl & Wodak's discourse-historical approach (2001), Chouliaraki & Fairclough's version of Critical Discourse Analysis (1999) and Wodak's analytical operationalisation of contextual models (2003). In seeing DA as a 'shifting synthesis' of theories, particular analytical frameworks developed by these researchers shift the point of departure within DA from adhering to clear-cut grand and middle range theories to designing heterogeneous conceptual tools that are relevant to the specific research problem and that can be integrated at the same conceptual level (Wodak 1996). Within this approach, a DA practitioner synthesises a set of research-tailored conceptual tools based on the pragmatics of the research (van Dijk 2001, Wodak 2000). The goal of such pragmatically oriented approach is 'to relate questions of theory formation and conceptualisation closely to the specific problems that are to be investigated' (Wodak 1996: 12). Similar to the technique

advocated by Grounded Theory, the model of conceptual pragmatism does not enforce theoretical constraints on the material but co-constructs analytical categories at a number of levels, including text, context, researcher, academic community, culture, society, etc.; whilst remaining sensitive to how participants of discourse themselves construct and employ those categories in speaking and writing (Wood & Kroger 2000 Hardy & Phillips 2003). There are no 'algorithmic' methods and procedures of operationalising the logic of DA concepts. Therefore, individual discourse theorists modulate their concepts in the context of a particular research problem to create a holistic research-tailored methodological framework by incorporating various linguistic, sociological, cognitive and anthropological tools (Howarth 2000).

Following this scholarly trend, the present study embraces the view of DA as a field of inquiry the specificity of which lies in the selective application of methods 'borrowed' from other qualitative fields for the purpose of explicating the role of discourse in creating, constituting and shaping extra-discursive realities (Phillips & Hardy 2002, Fairclough 2001, Meyer 2001). In designing the framework of this study, I have drawn on Wodak' (2003) and Fairclough's (2001) analytical frameworks. Wodak's model distinguishes three steps in the operationalisation of research tools. The first step precedes the actual text analysis and involves clarifying theoretical assumptions of the framework designed to reconcile the sociological and the linguistic levels. It conceives of and defines such notions as text, discourse, social structure, institution, etc. The second step comprises the development and mutual adaptation of conceptual tools from different theoretical traditions on the basis of the principle of pragmatism, usefulness and plausibility of a particular combination of tools in solving a specific socio-linguistic research question. The third step is refining categories and analytical concepts in the process of empirical research as well as

combining them into a single framework individually tailored to unpack the phenomena in question. These categories depend principally on the object of research and can include such notions as identity, ethnicity, legitimacy, power, racism, etc. The logic of the three-step approach is to mutually adjust conceptual tools and the social categories under scrutiny.

In his version of the three-dimensional approach to analysing discourse, Fairclough (2001, 2003) proposes a systematic analysis of specific instances of discourse for vocabulary, grammatical and morphological patterns, structural cohesion and linguistic features. Departing from *discourse-as-text*, the analysis then proceeds to *discourse-as-practice* that focuses on discursive strategies, such as speech acts and intertextual allusions that link individual texts to a larger socio-political context. The final step of analysis is looking at *discourse-as-social practice*, focusing on the use and impact of the discursive means found in the *discourse-as-text* in shaping, normalising and hegemonising relations between individuals and institutions.

Drawing on Wodak's and Fairclough's models, I began the operationalisation process by clarifying theoretical assumptions earlier in this chapter. I unpacked the notions of *discourse-as-text* and established a mutual dependency between the linguistic and social phenomena. This roughly corresponds to the first step of the analytical process in Fairclough's and Wodak's approach to conceptual pragmatism. The next step in establishing an analytical framework is to define conceptual tools and levels of discursive analysis on the basis of their usefulness in answering the research questions posed as well as the plausibility of a particular combination of tools within a single research design. The analytical framework adopted here is outlined in the following sub-section. The final step of analysis involves distancing from the analytical

framework and drawing larger implications about *discourse-as-social practice* based on discursive-analytical findings. This is achieved in the final empirical chapter of the thesis that draws the findings together and discusses them from a socio-cultural angle.

3.6. Societal debate in the process of social change

This study employs societal debate as a discursive manifestation of social meanings. The relationship between societal discourse and social change has been theorised in a variety of ways depending on the academic discipline and the subject of inquiry (Trowler 2003, Senge 1990, Ball 1994, Fullan 1993, Hargreaves & Shirley 2009). Within the area of policy analysis, there is no clear-cut framework that links theory of discourse to social change. Existing theories of discourse tend to be either linguistic or psychological, as opposed to social (Lemke 1995). For the purpose of discursive analytic inquiry pursued in this study and following the principle of analytical operationalisation, this study has adopted two widely acknowledged premises regarding societal discourse and reform process.

The first premise asserts societal debate through an open public discussion as an integral and necessary process of a democratic reform. As a vehicle of social change, a well-informed debate involving major educational stakeholders plays a pivotal role in translating policy formulations into policy internalisation and further to practice (Senge 1990, Ball 1994, Fullan 1993). In conceptualising change, social scientists (Ball 1994, Trowler 2003, Hargreaves & Shirley 2009, Fullan 1993) distinguish two crucial dimensions of policy in the process of social reform: policy as a prescriptive and legislatively-defined allocation of educational values, or what is more

commonly referred to as policy formulation, and policy as discourse. Policy as discourse is the interpretation, negotiation and re-contextualisation of the policy message by local actors, which may include such groups as regional policy-makers, university administrators, teachers, students and parents. In the process of 'de-coding' policy script, local actors draw on pre-existing cultural frames of reference, ideological preferences and value judgments.

In the course of social reform, mutual adaptation and clarification of terms between the encoding and the interpreting ends is essential to the intended enactment of reform script. Ball (1994: 15) states,

> '[Policy] texts carry with them both possibilities and constraints, contradictions and spaces. The reality of policy in practice depends upon the compromises and accommodations to these in particular settings.'

Trowler (2003) further observes that at the initial stage of social reform, understandings of reform concepts are indivertibly vague and evasive. In order to establish conceptual clarity, the top-down - bottom-up relationship needs to be one of 'dialogue, negotiation and learning from experience' (Trowler 2003: 136). As a two-way exchange between the official and the mundane, social reform process includes such parameters of change as the degree of societal consensus on national aims for education, an inclusive national vision of reform, public engagement into the reform process and personal commitment on the part of the stakeholders (Fullan 2009, Hargreaves & Shirley 2009, Hargreaves & Fullan 2009, Webber 2000). Serving as a system of social checks and balances, communication between the top and the bottom is ensured through decentralisation of educational provision, uncensored mass media coverage of educational issues, civil society monitoring and institutional accountability (Davis 1999, Webber 2000). Vital for a democratic societal dialogue is the presence of such grassroots agents as teacher unions, regional

councils, the intelligentsia, parental advisory groups, professional associations and school boards. Together, these agents provide a representative platform for an open societal debate over educational aims, contents and administration. Ideally, a collective vision-building is seen as a 'reinforcing process of increasing clarity, enthusiasm, communication and commitment' (Senge 1990: 227).

These theoretical considerations are supported by empirical evidence from a number of recent large-scale education reforms (Trowler 2003, Hargreaves & Shirley 2009, Ball 1994, Fullan 1993). It has been argued that a democratic educational reform has been most effective in the form of 'change sandwich' (Trowler 2003: 136), i.e. guided by a unified national vision for change from the top and driven by pressure from the bottom. Societal debate advanced in the media serves a vital role in mediating between the two, synchronising multiple personal visions for reform and creating a consensus regarding national aims for education (Webber 2000, Fullan 1993, Hargreaves & Shirley 2009). Some education practitioners have gone as far as to suggest that societal consensus achieved through an open debate is a prerequisite for any successful social reform (Trowler 2003, Ben-Peretz 2008). The failure of the system of social 'checks and balances' has been shown to result in a miscalculation of local capacities vis-à-vis global demands and the adaptation of a 'diluted' (Webber 2000: 171) national agenda for reform. This, in turn, leads to a variety of regressive reactions on the part of educational stakeholders (Hargreaves & Shirley 2009, Elliott & Tudge 2007, Achinstein & Ogawa 2006, Schweisfurth 2002, Elliott & Tudge 2007). Some develop strategies of reform simulation, whereby reform agents pay lip-service to the reform agenda while reinforcing outdated structures in their

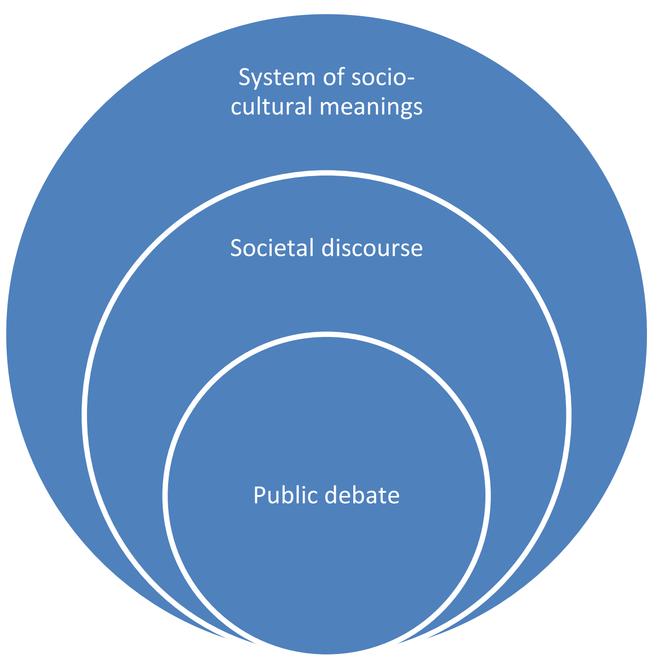
practices (Schweisfurth 2002, Elliott & Tudge 2007). Others may resort to resilience, adversity and resistance (Webber 2000, Elliott & Tudge 2007).

Another premise embraced in this study asserts that societal debate is also an important *indicator* of change (Ball 1994, Webber 2000, Senge 1990, Hargreaves & Shirley 2009, Elliott & Tudge 2007, Achinstein & Ogawa 2006). Together with the official policy discourse, a public discussion reveals the extent to which policy scripts have been internalised by local agents. As a form of discourse, public debate exposes political and ideological contestations within the reform process and brings to light policy errors and alternatives. A lack of shared vision, ambiguity and confusion among reform agents are often indicative of a symbolic contest over broader social meanings in the process of re-negotiating educational values (Ball 1994, Fullan 1993, Hargreaves & Fullan 2009).

In summary, with the traditional distinction between 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' views of reform increasingly in disfavour, this study engages with the conceptualisation of social reform as a 'directed collegiality' (Trowler 2003: 136) and 'synergetic interaction among stakeholders' (Ben-Peretz 2008: 13). In linking the theory of social reform with the theory of discourse, this study sees societal discourse as a reservoir of socio-cultural meanings, a vehicle of social change and an indicator of reform progress. It also recognises societal debate as a pivotal factor in establishing conceptual reciprocity among the reform agents and in ensuring that the reform agents are 'speaking the same language.' In pursuit of social meanings this study employs public debate as a cultural artifact that reflects local policy interpretation.

The table below illustrates the interrelationship between public debate, societal discourse and broader cultural worldviews.

Table II: Public debate, societal discourse and systems of socio-cultural meanings.



3.7. Discursive-analytical framework and levels of analysis

Following the principle of conceptual pragmatism and context-driven analytical operationalisation, I have put forward an analytical framework comprised of four dimensions (levels of analysis): thematic, lexico-semantic, symbolic, and discursive.

Thematic (conceptual) level of analysis includes:

- Identification of concepts that have constituted the core of the modernisation reform, served to build the official discourse of modernisation. These include ‘educational modernization,’ ‘educational quality,’ ‘educational standards,’ among others.
- Identification of themes around which the public discourse of the reform has been framed and cultural realisations of the officially endorsed reform concepts.

Lexico-semantic (textual) level includes the analysis of the linguistic framing of the reform themes and concepts and the specific linguistic features associated with conceptual understandings. These features include but are not limited to:

- Specific lexical meanings of key words, such as ‘reform,’ ‘educational standards’ and ‘service,’ their cultural connotations and semantic associations.

- Pragmatic analysis, analysis of lexical choices and rhetorical figures, analysis of performative acts and argumentation constructs.

- Analysis of grammatical and syntactic features, including grammatical voice, transitivity, mode, modality, passivisation, nominalization, eventuation, deagentialisation and others.

- Analysis of the overall logic and coherence of the reform narrative, tracing rhetorical patterns of texts to ideological and discursive formations.

NVivo-aided analysis

In order to assist interpretative qualitative analysis, the analysis at the thematic and lexico-semantic levels was conducted using software program NVivo7™. NVivo7™ is a content-analysis package that helps indexing text files and research topics, search occurrence of emerging themes through words and phrases in the data corpus, establish lexical and conceptual relations among words and carry out pattern-matching. Within the present study NVivo7™ was used to sort and categorise the course material, identify themes and concepts and code them into analysable units. Firstly, the software was employed to organise and code the material within broad categories for analysis, including official policy statements, educational laws, public statements by educational officials, parliamentary transcripts, media coverage, official statements by teacher unions, on-line public comments, etc. Secondly, key reform themes were identified through close reading of the corpus, yielding three broad motifs that provoked contestation in the societal debate. Thirdly, these themes were coded and cross-referenced, allowing to connect interrelating themes within various domains of the debate, to establish conceptual relations between them and to identify recurrent themes. NVivo7™-aided organisation of material has enabled the researcher 'to make judgments about the meanings of contiguous blocks of text' (Ryan & Bernard, 2000: 769) as well as proceed to the analysis of symbolic and metaphorical representations underlying thematic structure of the discourse. Following machine-aided analysis, critical discourse and frame analysis was used to interpret and make meaning of the coded information as well as provide a comprehensive account of the data. Computer-aided

analysis has strengthened the analytical foundation of this study and enhanced its methodological rigor.

Symbolic (metaphorical) level includes the analysis of metaphorical representations, cultural frames of reference, ideological symbols, semantic paradigms and collective beliefs related to educational values and concepts. As distinct from the lexico-semantic level, metaphors and symbols are treated here not as merely rhetorical devices but as mental representations of educational concepts and practices specific to a particular socio-cultural context. The analysis at this level draws on cultural traditions, historical precedents as well as political and ideological intentions of educational stakeholders.

Discursive (pragmatic) level includes the analysis of policy texts and actions as sites for ideological struggle. It focuses on a higher order of cultural meanings and identifies adjacent or competing discourses simultaneously sustained at meta-level. Examples of questions raised at this level include (Fairclough 1993):

• How has the discourse of neoliberal modernisation come into being and why does it have a particular meaning in education today?

• What other discourse, such as democracy, liberalism, consumerism, etc., does it draw from and feed into?

• How does the dominant discourse empower and disempower certain identities?

• How does it serve to present certain educational practices as desirable or undesirable, preferred or dispreferred, prioritised or downplayed?

It is important to emphasise that these levels are not hierarchical or sequential but inter-connected and mutually penetrating. No single isolated linguistic, pragmatic or discursive feature of the text can serve as a marker of social language. Rather, it is particular configurations of textual features and correlational patterns thereof that indicate allegiance to a particular discourse or ideological stance (Gee 2005, Fairclough 2007). The challenging methodological task of a discourse analyst is to meaningfully navigate those levels while being able to 'stick close to the details of particular texts worrying away at the word-y fabric out of which arguments are woven' while 'moving away from the details of the specific texts - moving back and forwards through other texts, of other times, to try to glimpse the vastly bigger fabric of intertextual associations within which each particular text is suspended' (MacLure 2003: 23). The larger gnoseological approach to data analysis adopted within this study is, therefore, hermeneutic-abductive, implying a constant movement between theory of discourse and empirical data, with sensitivity to language being a consummate skill in analysis.

3.8. Corpus material

Official and public texts, nationally and internationally produced, relating to the modernisation reforms from 1992 onwards have been used to generate a corpus, including government press releases, statements produced by government and university officials, OECD, IMF and World Bank reports, annual Russian Ministry of Education reports, individual project reports, as well as media coverage of the reform process and public discussions. Together these documents have represented a multilateral source of data about the formation of policy language, the construction

of national educational identity and the emergence of ideological contestation within broader discourses and between individual policy actors. The corpus consists of a cross-section of several kinds of texts across a number of written and oral genres, including:

1) Policy statements and official declarations produced by the Russian Government and The Russian Ministry of Education providing and disseminating regulations and information on educational reform and reform policies. These documents have come from three main sources: the Ministry of Education official website (mon.gov.ru), Russian government-affiliated federal educational portal (edu.ru) and Russia's Federal Agency for Education (ed.gov.ru)
2) International policy recommendations, technical papers, reviews of Russian educational policies, primarily issued by the World Bank, OECD, UNESCO and the IMF (available from their respective websites and paper publications)
3) Official press releases and policy statements of individual state and private educational institutions, both elite ones, such as Moscow State University and Higher School of Economics, and mid-range regional universities
4) News coverage of the ongoing reform process in media including federal, regional and local publications
5) Public (teachers,' students' and parents' feedback on educational forums for discussion (such as www.edu.ru and www.ug.ru) and in local media
6) Voices of reform opposition, mainly represented by the professoriate, intelligentsia and political leftists, expressed in paper and electronic publications.

Appendix I provides a list of the main sources used in this study.

CHAPTER IV

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY:
FROM QUALITY CONTROL TO QUALITY ASSURANCE?

4.1. Background to analysis and research questions

The present chapter examines the notion of 'educational quality' in the discourse of the modernisation reform. A central philosophical category of twenty first century Russia (Subetto 2009), the concept of quality has formed the basis of the reform, as well as constituted the core of the reform narrative. It is widely recognised that national accounts of educational quality are inextricably bound up with fundamental educational goals, values, and priorities (Mortimore & Stone 1991, Lagerweij & Voogt 1990). Re-conceptualisations of a national account of 'quality education' at certain historical moments are believed to signify a change in the society's interpretation of its educational needs (Mortimore & Stone 1991). Societal debate on educational quality is, therefore, highly reflective of society's overall vision of its educational needs. In discussing the socio-ontological significance of modernisation reform, The White Book of Russian Education (Belaya Kniga 2000: 199) indicates,

> 'The discussion about the requirements to the quality of educational services and products leads us to the eternal questions of pedagogy: why, what, how, and who to teach? Various answers to these questions determine the ends and means of education, shape the parameters of the [national] search for an optimal balance between general cultural, fundamental, and applied knowledge, as well as largely determine the points of reference for the subjects of the educational process. While in the past the questions posed above were defined exclusively through the dictatorship of the state management bodies, nowadays the role of the state is

> different: federal Ministry [of Education] has taken on the role of a facilitator of the decision-making process and the organiser of an effective system of quality management.'

As illustrated above, the discussion of educational quality in Russia has been framed as an all-encompassing problem intricately intertwined with the issues that have proven most controversial in the course of reform: pedagogy, national curriculum, and the role of the state in educational provision. With this cultural context in mind, I have designed this chapter in a way that foreshadows the analysis undertaken in subsequent chapters: the discursive patterns unpacked here will serve as points of reference for further discussion. In tracing the evolution of the quality framework since 1991, this chapter explores to what extent the local reform narrative has incorporated the global quality imperative. The questions posed in this chapter include:

• How has educational quality been defined in the course of the modernisation reform? What variables have constituted key elements of the new quality framework proposed by the government?

• What are the ideological contestations over national educational goals revealed in the public debate on quality?

• Have any major paradigmatic transformations taken place in regard to the national vision of 'quality education'?

In answering these questions, I will challenge the seeming consensus among educational stakeholders in Russia over what quality means and entails, as well as expose the ideological lens

through which quality has been framed in international policy recommendations and in domestic policy context[8].

Prior to the presentation of analysis an important methodological note needs to be made concerning different approaches to researching the concept of quality. Unpacking a national account of educational quality is a notorious methodological challenge. One of the most contentious issues in the international educational debate, the concept of quality has proven fluid and insusceptible to hard definitions and measurements. It generates little consensus as to what it entails, which proximal characteristics it encompasses, and how it can be measured and compared across contexts (Alexander 2008, Pring 1992, Green 1994). Yet these issues are critical to analysis, as a particular theoretical lens will determine empirical findings (Pring 1992, Green 1994).

One common way of theorising quality is through the application of pre-determined quality frameworks that provide a list of specific variables (or components) used to define and assess quality. For example, frameworks proposed by the OECD, European Council, the World Bank and UNESCO, operate with the notion of quality through such variables as *stakeholder, context, input, process, outcome and performance*. Largely based on commercial industries, these frameworks assume that once quality is broken down into components, it can be assessed and

[8] These considerations carry particular salience for this study as they reflect my personal dilemma of a westernised post-communist intellectual. As a Berkeley-trained sociolinguist carrying out doctoral research at Oxford, I found the secure embrace of Anglo-centrism particularly tempting vis-à-vis the now unfashionable cultural ethno-centrism. Unproblematic acceptance of particular theoretical lens, however, would inevitably skew the research towards one or another quality framework with concomitant cultural and moral value judgements. I have tried to overcome this dilemma by a recourse to critical discursive methodology that allows for alternative readings of cultural material through nuanced reconstruction of meanings.

compared through measurable performance indicators. Once quality components are identified, an international system of quality improvement is constructed on the basis of quality variables and performance indicators. National assessments of educational quality are carried out against the grain of a pre-defined quality model that is de-contextualised from local specificities and learning environments. The nature of educational quality in these models is unproblematically accepted as universal and a single shared meaning of the word 'quality' is often assumed.

In contrast, some argue that the only meaningful approach to educational quality is to treat it as an *inherently relative category* (Green 1994, Harvey & Knight 1996), with the main dimensions of relativity being *culture* and *stakeholder*. Quality models constructed through this theoretical lens include such specific parameters as country goals for education, current national priorities and various degrees of significance assigned to quality variables by social actors and stakeholders. Rather than defining quality within a single multi-variate framework, a relativistic approach seeks to unravel the socio-political underpinnings within which quality is perceived in a particular culture. While heavily influenced by the global quality imperative, local interpretations of quality are primarily grounded in historical trends, current national statutory frameworks, curricular contents, and identified national issues (Alexander 2007). Particular components of quality are singled out and assessed by different interest groups in a given socio-political context. The resulting conceptualisations of quality are varied, including, for example, *customer satisfaction*, *quality as excellence*, *fitness for purpose*, *conformance to standards*, and others (Harvey & Knight 1996, Harvey & Green 1993). Unlike a standardised international model, a nationally contextualised account of quality is inevitably skewed towards one or another particular conceptualisation (Alexander 2008). Construction of a stakeholder-relative

model entails defining key international and local stakeholders, spelling out criteria used by each one of them, and taking into account competing views - all within a single quality framework (Green 1994). In terms of policy-making and implementation, therefore, stakeholder-relative quality frameworks are impractical and hardly achievable compared to standardised models. However, they allow for an in-depth exploration of a country's vision for education.

While supranational agencies are strongly promoting a singular quality framework made up of measurable quality indicators, the academic community has been increasingly sceptical about the very possibility of approaching quality in education as a unitary analytical concept (Green 1994). Recognising the relative nature of the concept, many education researchers prefer to talk about 'ways of thinking about quality' (Harvey & Knight 1996).

In light of these theoretical controversies, it is important to clarify the approach to quality adopted in this study. This chapter does not aim to account for the variety of potential quality models; neither does it seek to develop an optimal quality formula. Instead, in line with the relativist ethno-centric approach adopted in study, I provide an in-depth national account of quality while contextualising it within global quality imperatives.

A related methodological challenge is a conceptual distinction between educational quality and educational standards. By virtue of neoliberal globalisation, quality and standards have long become elements of a single quality assurance paradigm (Pring 1992). It is often implied in contemporary Western educational research that the discussion about quality cannot be methodologically divorced from that of educational standards. In this thesis, however, the notions of quality and standards are discussed in two conceptually intertwined yet analytically

separate chapters. This manner of presentation is dictated by the empirical findings which have revealed that the debate on educational standards in Russia has taken a curious interpretative twist. While the debate on quality is tied into 'a much larger ethical debate about the purpose and the control of education' (Pring 1992: 4), the concept of educational standard has become to be perceived, in the public mind, almost exclusively in the context of school curricular reform. As I will discuss in chapter V, although connected by shared terminology, *quality assurance through standards* and *general school curricular standard* in the Russian education reform draw on different interpretative frameworks, discussed in this thesis in two different chapters.

4.2. Historical overview of the quality reform: legacies and influences

The concept of quality had been an important part of the official state policies for many decades preceding 1991. Traditionally, educational quality was viewed as an inherent feature of the system. Similarly to such concepts as beauty and truth, quality in education was perceived in absolutist terms and seen as indivisible into proximal components. Unlike its international counterparts, educational quality in Russia did not require definitions or benchmarks for assessment. The 'golden standard' of Soviet education was seen as self-evident and uncompromising: one could instinctively recognise quality when one saw it (Harvey & Green 1993). As one lay commentator observed,

> 'Quality is like love - everyone understands what it means but no one is able to come up with a precise formula.' (uchportal.ru)

Although no definitions were traditionally provided, at least two dimensions can be identified in the realm of Soviet educational policy-making. In philosophical terms, the absolutist notion of quality was implicitly connected with the idea of 'excellence' and 'meeting the highest standard.'

Excellence, in turn, was perceived almost exclusively as outcome- rather than process-oriented: 'Whatever the process (by which students learn), the excellence remains' (Harvey & Green 1993: 12). The learning process was conceptualised in terms of 'quality culture,' where participants of the process themselves (teachers, administrators and learners) were expected to exercise personal responsibility in assuring desired quality of learning experience on a daily basis. While quality enhancement has always been a serious concern of the state, the philosophical nature of it was taken for granted. For as long as quality was assured through the 'quality culture,' there was no need to break it into proximal components.

In a socio-political sense, educational quality was seen as a 'pure public good.' Quality was 'subsidised' by the state, and quality assurance was interpreted as a prerogative of the state. This view of quality was deeply moored in the larger context of pre-1991 Russia being a welfare state in which educational excellence guaranteed the desired *quality of life* and living standards. One could argue that, ensured through state-defined standards, quality was implicitly defined as 'fitness for purpose' or 'compliance to standards' (Brennan et al. 1992), with the purpose of producing of ideologically compliant workforce for planned economy (Gladkova 2007). Within this approach, students (*obuchaemie*) were treated as *objects* of quality assessment, the *subject* being the degree to which students' preparedness matched state requirements. Conformance to state requirements was ensured through the procedures of licensing, attestation, and accreditation of educational institutions. Apart from these general guidelines, however, no systemic definition of quality was provided in the official policies until 1991 and no discussion of what constituted quality parameters was purposefully advanced. Such conceptualisation has remained the core of the public account of educational quality, where to date it continues to be perceived as a unitary

non-measurable concept. 'To measure quality of education, - discusses a school teacher, - would be as absurd as to measure the quality of a philharmonic hall or a theatre' (pedsovet.org). In the post-Soviet public discourse, the 'golden standard' of free-of-charge universal fundamental education has remained uncompromised: 'When I think about quality, - states another teacher, - I automatically assume highest educational achievements' (edu.ru). As I will discuss in chapter V, issues of quality measurements and indicators are perceived as irrelevant to the concept, with quality being an antipode to quantity. While the government is seen in the public discourse as a quality guaranteeing body, internal quality assessment carried out by the teacher is perceived as central to defining quality: 'No one can measure quality better than the teacher. The teachers sees [the development of a] student throughout the year. The talk of external quality control is completely irrelevant.' (Teacher quote, zavuch.info).

The first attempt at elaborating the concept was made in the 1991 Law on Education. The law for the first time explicitly connected the idea of quality with educational standards, which were said to both guarantee and control quality. The quality of student training was defined through a set of rather impersonalised inputs, or 'conditions,' necessary for ensuring adequate 'acquisition of knowledge.' These conditions included revised syllabi, renewed educational programmes, modernised technical equipment, and teacher re-training. Educational institutions, represented by managers and pedagogues, were meant to assume the responsibility for meeting these new requirements. The underlying policy idea was that a set of components at the input guarantees the desired renewed quality at the output. The quality of student *learning* did not feature in the 1991 Law. There were no references to quantitative dimensions of quality either.

In the early 1990s quality issues came to the forefront of the educational agenda. As the economic rhetoric of quality gained momentum, the focus began to shift away from ‘the culture of quality’ towards ‘quality management,’ ‘optimisation,’ ‘accountability,’ ‘performance indicators,’ ‘customer satisfaction’ and, by the mid-1990s, increasingly towards ‘quality assurance through standards.’ Extensive policy advice on education quality reform was supplied to Russian policy-makers by supranational organisations, mainly by the World Bank and the OECD. These organisations strongly criticised the Soviet-style model operating on the principle ‘we teach, and we assess what we teach, on our own’ (OECD 1998: 102) insisting that ‘former internal quality assurance mechanisms will no longer be sufficient’ (Word Bank 1999: 20). Both the World Bank and the OECD identified quality reform as a priority. They advocated for a move towards the global quality paradigm and greater convergence of quality criteria through diversifying assessment mechanisms and introducing international quality indicators. A special emphasis was placed on factoring in civil society and business community as well as on implementing a system of public audit and public accountability. The OECD (2007: 137), for example, advised the Russian government to

> ‘reinforce participation by members of educational institutions, state executive agencies, employer groups and the public in the procedure of state accreditation of educational institutions, which assures the integrity, objectivity, transparency and independent assessment of the quality of education.’

The proposed measures were said to be aimed at aligning the Russian system of education with its Western counterparts. To this end, international policy recommendations lodged three sets of demands:

a) a demand for *external* quality assessments mechanisms, including international indicators, and standardised testing;

b) a demand for diversifying the body of educational stakeholders involved in the quality assurance process;

c) a demand for a nation-wide system of quality assurance through a 'new generation' of educational standards.

In placing these demands, the OECD and the World Bank proposed a *federal system of quality assurance* based on federal curricular and performance standards that could be assessed though a variety of indicators and measurements, both qualitative and quantitative:

> 'Modern education systems – especially when resources are scarce – must be able to monitor their progress in meeting standards and reaching national educational goals. For this, they need to measure performance against a set of quality indicators, including national curriculum and performance standards.' (OECD 1998: 91-92)

In addition to international pressures, public discussions of quality indicated a domestic need for an improved quality. In particular, a series of disappointing outcomes in the PISA[9] assessment in the 2000s sparked a nationwide concern over the quality of general secondary education. A perceived stagnation, and a crisis of 'falling educational standards,' generated a strong social sentiment. The key issue of quality improvement was publicly formulated as 'modernising curricula while preserving fundamentality.' Public demands focused on reaffirming the state functions of education, demanding the government's 'return' to education as a quality assuring body. 'Restoring' the bygone quality of the Soviet era was seen as more important than radically redefining the notion of quality. In the area of higher education, however, many educators advocated for a radical revision of the concept. With the establishment of new degrees and reconfiguration of academic programmes within a two-tier system, issues of institutional

[9] Programme for International Student Assessment: a worldwide evaluation of secondary school students carried out across OECD member countries.

accountability and convertibility to international standards came into sharp focus. Parents became increasingly concerned with the issue of ensuring educational quality in fee-paying programmes. In pursuit of commercial profit, higher educational institutions, in turn, sought increased autonomy from traditional state quality control. Additionally, there was an increasing understanding in the academic and managerial community that in order to competitively engage with the quality claims domestically and internationally, serious adjustments to the traditional quality paradigm were to be made.

Thus, in shaping the direction of reform, the Russian government was subject to a variety of influences. On the one hand, the system was under strong institutional pressure to transform the Soviet-era command-administrative structure into a decentralised stakeholder-driven one. On the other hand, the official educational agenda had to meet public demands for the state to resume its quality-guaranteeing functions. Specifically, it had to address public concerns over educational value for money in the area of higher education. Internationally, the government faced the global wave of quality assurance transmitted through policy imperatives dictated by educational lenders. In selecting a set of policy options to balance these demands, Russian post-Soviet policy-makers had their own political agenda of retaining a central control in allocating financial resources, ensuring accountability and defining stakeholder responsibilities (Webber 2000, Smolin 2001).

4.3. Quality reform in the official rhetoric: a diachronic analysis of policies

In response to the policy challenge, the Russian government pronounced the reform of educational quality as the main strategy for modernisation reform. The 2002 General Committee Report of the State Council of the Russian Federation on Education Reform exemplifies the overall discursive pattern of the new quality narrative:

> The primary goal [of the reform] is the attainment of *new, contemporary* quality of education. At the national level the *new quality* of education implies correspondence to contemporary every-day needs for the country's development. At the pedagogical level, it means an orientation of education towards not only acquisition of a certain amount of knowledge but also towards the development of the students' personalities, their cognitive and creative abilities. General school must form *a new system of universal knowledge*, skills and competencies, as well as [encourage] independent hands-on experience and personal responsibility of the learner, all of which constitute *contemporary* key competencies that define *contemporary quality* of educational content. (General Committee Report 2001: 5)

As follows from the statement above, the reform of educational quality has been from the start framed as a radical break from traditional notions. A discursive opposition between the past and the present was created by contrasting progressive contemporary quality model with the 'passive knowledge acquisition' approach associated with Soviet administration and pedagogy. Framed in terms of 'quality revolution,' contemporary quality was presented as a terrain that had never been explored, or scientifically grounded, in either pedagogical or policy domains. A statement from an official policy manifesto below contrasts the traditional notion of quality, described as 'abstract speculations' with the new, 'scientifically designed' one:

> *The new standards of quality* are based on a *new understanding* of quality as a degree of correspondence between the results achieved and the needs of a personality and the family, as well as expectations of the society and requirements of the state. It was necessary to ascertain what the new quality means and what those needs are. It turned out there *has never been any systemic research* in that

area. It was, *for the first time*, carried out by the Institute of Sociology RAN. As a result, we received *not abstract speculations* (...) *but scientifically valid data* about the needs of various social institutions and population groups. (Mr. Kuznetsov, Vice-President of the Russian Academy of Education, kremlin.org)

Throughout the official discourse, the new quality has been presented as original, progressive, and the only scientifically based; while the 'old' quality as outdated, reactionary, and pedagogically unsound. Such rhetorical strategy has been strikingly reminiscent of that employed by the Soviet-era official discourse of pedagogical novelty. Nikandrov (1995: 50), for example, observed,

> 'In teacher training institutions the whole history of education was presented in terms of opposition between 'progressive' and 'reactionary' ideas and thinkers. The emphasis in lectures and textbooks had always been on differences and not on generality. Soviet education and the science of education were considered 'the most progressive' and 'the only scientifically based.'

The principal difference in the construction of the 'novelty' discourse in the Soviet and neoliberal modernisation narratives is the object antagonised: reactionary capitalist education in the former and Soviet education in the latter. Through such temporal markers as 'never before,' 'today,' 'for the first time in the Russian history,' etc., 'contemporaneity' (*sovremennost'*) was positioned as a primary point of departure in the deixis of the reform. For over the decade to follow, the reform has been rhetorically located in the *here and now*:

> '*Never* before has educational quality been understood as a set of specific parameters (...)' (Transcript of parliamentary hearings, 2002)

> 'Let me remind you that *today*, new quality of education is provided in over two hundred and fifty innovation-based institutions.' (Minister Fursenko, mon.gov.ru archive, 2008)

> 'The primary goal of the ongoing reform is to achieve *a new, contemporary quality* of education.' (Our New School, 2010)

> 'I hope that you understand clearly that it is *now, precisely now*, that the society needs a renewed quality of education' (Minister Fursenko, mon.gov.ru, 2012)

The ubiquitous rhetoric of novelty has been so persistent that 'contemporaneity' as the ultimate expression of novelty has become a *synonym* for quality. An abstract from the 2002 General Committee Report quoted earlier exemplifies a pattern of lexical bonding of 'quality' with 'new' and 'contemporary.' Throughout the passage, novelty is universally accompanied by and conceptually defined through contemporaneity.

An NVivo-aided collocation analysis of official policy documents from 2002 to 2012 has revealed an inter-substitutability of the following collocations:

- *contemporary quality* (*sovremennoie kachestvo*)
- *new contemporary quality* (*novoie sovrememmoie kachestvo*)
- *contemporaneity and quality* (*sovremenost' i kachestvo*)
- *contemporary, qualitatively new* (*sovremennoie, kachestvenno novoie*)

These collocations have been consistently used as contextual synonyms in similar or identical policy contexts. Owing to these lexical bonds, contemporaneity has come to rhetorically serve as the ultimate criterion for new quality.[10] At the same time, the portrayal of contemporaneity has been punctuated by an idealistic future-oriented undertone:

> 'The essence of the new quality education is not to catch up with the past but to *create the future*.' (rost.ru)
>
> 'Contemporary school *will* interact more closely with families' (Out New School 2010)

In making a case for a quality revolution, the official narrative has downplayed the political will of the government, objectifying and legitimising the categorical quality imperative. The need for redefining educational quality has been justified through references to the 'demands of the time,'

[10] A criterion that, paradoxically, contemporaneity itself has not begun to meet: consider widespread oxymora such as 'the most contemporary' (*samii sovremennii*) (Our New School 2010) and 'contemporary school of the future' (*sovremennaia shkola budushego*) (ibid.)

‘concurrence of societal needs,’ and ‘ripening of societal consensus’ (the 2010 Draft Law, Prognosis 2009). For examples, Prognosis for the Development of Russian Education for 2009-2011 states,

> ‘The success of the modernisation reform aimed at enhancing educational quality (...) is determined by the *concurrence of target state objectives with the demands and needs of society* in the area of education’ (Prognosis 2009: 240).

Here, and throughout the official discourse, the employment of biological discourses of change (*sprout, ripen, mature*), has contributed to the re-conceptualisation of quality as a natural and inevitable process. The overall framing of *imminent quality revolution* appears to have served an important ideological function in the course of the quality reform. It has allowed for the normalisation of the official vision of contemporary quality, while marginalising stakeholder-relative quality criteria. As a result, different definitions have been subsumed under an allegedly homogenous quality imperative. The rest of this chapter probes deeper into the discourse of quality, and explores the conceptual level of policy documents. Specifically, I will explore the following questions:

- What new parameters of educational quality can be delineated in the official discourse?
- Have these new elements been internalised by educational policy discourse?
- Have the newly introduced parameters of quality constituted a systemic reconceptualisation of the idea of quality?

In answering the first of the above questions, the next section provides a summative account of novel elements as they emerge from the policy statements.

4.4. Quality revisited: the elements of novelty

Among a plethora of reform measures proposed under the general umbrella of 'quality assurance,' I have identified three components of the quality paradigm that are principally new to Russia's educational policies:

a) *external quality assessment,*

b) stakeholder quality criteria

c) *national system of quality assurance*

Echoing the OECD's policy critique, Russian educational policy-makers challenged the traditional system of assessment, claiming that 'those who provide educational services must not assess themselves' (Minister Fursenko, mon.gov.ru, 2001). To this end, a distinction was made between *internal* and *external* quality assessment mechanisms, thus effectively introducing the principle of independent assessment into the quality framework:

> 'External and internal systems of quality assessment are distinguished. The external system of quality assessment is represented by state licensing, attestation, and accreditation procedures with regard to educational institutions as well as by state certification of certain components of professional education. In addition, public institutions of accreditation are being formed on the basis of various scientific and pedagogic associations and unions. Internal system of quality assessment is carried out in education institutions in the forms of final and interim attestation (including self-attestation), systems of psychodiagnostics, and social diagnostics within educational institutions as well as systems of self-assessment and self-attestation of educational institutions themselves as well as their branches.' (mon.gov.ru, 2003)

Internal assessment, i.e., interim and final intra-institutional attestation and testing were made up of policies and practices that allowed schools and academic institutions themselves to monitor and improve the quality of education provision. The external dimension of assessment comprised

a supra-institutional policy framework of quality *assurance*. Traditional state licensing and accreditation procedures were to remain dominant, but not exclusive, mechanisms of quality assessment. In addition to those, the system of quality assurance was said to include such novel elements as academic standards, standardised testing, and various mechanisms of public accountability.

The second added component was a diversified body of educational stakeholders. In addition to the state and educational institutions, the new model included such entities as students, parents, employers and civil society, reconceptualised as *consumers* of educational services. In addressing the international critique of the traditional quality criteria, Minister Fursenko argued,

> 'For the system [of education] to effectively develop, it needs to become more open. *Quality criteria cannot be determined from the inside of the system*. They must be set by the consumers of educational services: the society and the economy. The main efforts of the Ministry [of Education] should be oriented towards the creation of an institution of *external orders*.' (rost.ru)

President Putin also repeatedly stressed that

> 'Principally new quality assessment mechanisms are needed that would be based on the criteria put forward by the society, economy, employers and labour market.' (rost.ru)

The official recognition of an external, non-state, demand for quality education has *de facto* signified an introduction of stakeholder-relative quality criteria into the quality framework. The demands of the state included national security, human capital building and accelerated economic development. The demands of the learner were specified as the 'formation of competencies for a successful career,' 'building potential for self-realisation,' and 'organic development of a personality and its creative potential' (mon.gov.ru). The demands of the market included competitiveness in the job market, independence from state control, and

‘correspondence of the acquired skills to the needs of the economy’ (mon.gov.ru). The demands lodged by employers included worker competence, diversity, and choice. Calls were made in policy statements by the Ministry of Education to adjust the legislation in a way that ‘creates mechanisms for engaging employers in quality management and control’ (kremlin.ru). In addition, in redefining quality criteria through the stakeholder-relative framework, the official policies have been particularly strong on bringing together the socio-economic needs of the *nation-state* and the socio-economic needs of the *individual*. President Putin, for example, repeatedly stressed that

> ‘Quality, contemporary education is *a warrant for a stable development of the country and at the same time for self-realisation of an individual*, as well as the basis for broadening the socio-economic opportunities for all citizens of the country. It [society] is Russia’s crucial strategic resource, which is to be strengthened and utilised to the full.’ (kremlin.ru, 2011)

The final novelty element of the quality framework is a nation-wide system of quality assurance encompassing mechanisms of quality control, quality assessment, and quality management:

> ‘The strategic task of developing a nation-wide system of educational quality assurance is carried out through the implementation of the following key measures:
> - the improvement of the state system of quality management with the aim of ensuring the compliance of educational provision within educational institutions with the demands of the developing system of education;
> - the development of new forms and mechanisms of quality assessment and control in regard to the functioning of educational institutions, including civic and professional unions.’ (Passport 2005)

Comparative review of domestic policy documents and policy recommendations by supra-national organisations clearly indicates full compliance of mainstream government policy with the three sets of international quality demands. Positioned as an alternative to traditional state quality control and intra-institutional quality assessment, the novel elements were essentially aimed at *relativising* the idea of quality, i.e. breaking a homogenous, subjective, and stakeholder-

neutral notion into a multi-variate, more objective and stakeholder-relative one – one that encompasses educational inputs, processes and outcomes. In line with international quality frameworks, the three elements have been presented as conceptually interrelated: through an increased institutional accountability and transparency, external assessment mechanisms and nationwide educational standards were designed to provide the desired standard of quality and render the system accountable to a variety of educational stakeholders.

Consolidating these re-conceptualisations, the 2011 Draft Law on education for the first time defined educational quality as a 'complex characteristic' that involves a variety of dimensions and perspectives. 'If one bears in mind that for almost a hundred years the system was accountable only to the state the importance of this paradigm shift is hard to underestimate.' (Bolotov & Lenskaya 1997: 9) Indeed, the scope of the proposed adjustments to the traditional quality framework has been duly paralleled by the rhetoric of revolutionary novelty and top-notch contemporaneity. However, have the government's claims of a paradigm shift been substantiated in the practical application of the novel concepts? To answer this question, I examine the newly introduced principles of quality in practical use. The first two – external quality assessment and stakeholder quality criteria - are examined through the discursive analytic lens of *stakeholder perspective*. Through the analysis of quality criteria practically employed in the official policy discourse I show how the declared principle of multi-variate stakeholder criteria does not transcend the realm of rhetoric. The third element - a nationwide system of quality assurance - is analysed from the perspective of representation of actors and allocation of responsibilities within the proposed framework. Through the discursive deconstruction of the quality assurance paradigm I demonstrate that the pattern of responsibility allocation corresponds

to the traditional model of state quality control. Bringing together two strands of the analysis undertaken in this chapter, l argue that rhetorical adjustments to the quality framework have not generated a paradigm shift and that the distinct interpretative schema holding together disparate stakeholder-relative definitions of quality has remained that of authoritarian state control.

4.5. Quality criteria through stakeholder perspectives

The first set of argument concerns the application of quality criteria in policy- and decision-making processes. To this end, I have carried out a discursive analysis of official written and oral policy statements as well as parliamentary debates from the point of *stakeholder perspective,* i.e. which particular perspective is employed to pass a judgement, such as praise, encouragement, critique or disapproval, at any particular discursive moment (Kress & Hodge 1993). The analysis has been carried out in two stages. The first stage included close reading of policy texts, and thematic coding of policy statements indicating a value judgement in respect to educational quality. The second stage involved identification of a particular stakeholder perspective of the selected statements. In determining a particular perspective I have relied on a variety of linguistic indicators. These include but are not limited to grammatical modality (*might, could, will*), personal pronouns indicating subjectivity (*I, us, them*), emphatics (*obviously, undoubtedly, evidently*), mental process clauses (*guess, think, err*), modal adjectives and adverbs (*necessary, probably, certainly*), necessity modals (*must, have to, should*), temporal adverbs (*always, rarely, never*), and hedges (*possibly, perhaps, sort of*). Through the analysis of these linguistic resources I have established how stakeholder perspectives are distributed and negotiated.

I have found that despite a rhetorical commitment to relativising the concept, quality continues to be understood as a stakeholder-neutral characteristic of the system. The setting of quality criteria is seen as an exclusive monopoly of the state. Instead of multiple perspectives in use, I have uncovered a polarised discourse of *quality versus non-quality* at the centre of practical application of the concept. The official narrative operates with the absolutist notion of quality within two modes: the quality (*kachestvennii*) and the non-quality (*nekachestvennoie*). Thus, at any discursive moment quality is either properly *provided (obespechivaetsia dolzhnim obrazom)* or *not provided*; either *assured (garantiruetsia)* or *not assured*, either *achieved (dostigaetsia)* or *not achieved*, etc. All associated elements of the quality framework - teachers, students, educational institutions and learning outcomes - are routinely portrayed in black and white colours, as either *quality* (or *good, decent, appropriate*, etc.) or *non-quality* (or *bad, indecent, inappropriate*, etc.). Quality appears to be either *present* or *absent* in the system, and desired quality standard is either *met* or *not met*. The criteria between the two are uncompromising and contingent upon the perspective of the state educational official. While some stakeholder perspectives are rhetorically dialogised, i.e. brought into the narrative as 'the Other's' point of view, their validity claims are assessed against the official perspective. The axiological structure of the policy-making discourse is exclusively monological.

I will reveal the workings of the quality/non-quality dichotomy through the official representation of the three key quality stakeholders: the teacher, the educational institution and the student. The teacher and the quality of teacher instruction are routinely assessed as either 'quality' (*kachestvennii*) or non-quality (*nekachestvennii*). A statement by Isaak Kalina, Director of National Education Policies Department in a Q&A session with the public illustrates the dichotomy:

> Question: (...) Raising teacher salaries is clearly a good initiative. But our children leave school without having received quality education. I don't think that raising teacher salaries is enough to stimulate the teacher to motivate a student to learn. What is the government planning to do to modernise the system of education and specifically to improve the learning process in order to produce a cultured, educated student at the output?
> Answer: Without providing a good salary it's impossible to bring *a good teacher* to the new school. I think that it's useless to raise salaries for a *bad teacher*. We need to raise teacher salaries in order to attract and retain *good teachers*. That is why the new payment system currently being introduced is aimed at raising salaries for *those teachers who demonstrate the most positive results.* Any changes that will not involve a *qualitative improvement* of the teacher body *will not bring good enough results*. (mon.gov.ru)

Discursively associated with 'quality instruction,' 'positive results,' and 'qualitative improvement, the 'quality teacher' is romanticised and portrayed in idealistic and future-oriented terms as a carrier of innovation and a vehicle of the new quality. The 'good teacher' is said to be 'performance-oriented,' 'attentive' yet 'unbiased,' 'acute' yet 'rational.' The 2010 'Our New School' Manifesto describes the desired image of the quality teacher, 'a teacher of the future,' in the following manner:

> 'The new school means *new* teachers, open to *novel* things, skillful in child psychology and the intricacies of student development, knowledgeable about their subject matters. The mission of the teacher is to help children realise their potential in the future, become independent, creative, and self-confident people. Sensitive, attentive and responsive to children's interests and needs, *open to everything new, the new teachers are the key feature of the school of the future.*' (Our New School 2010)

In the spirit of utopian pragmatism, teacher professionalism is often reduced to the notion of 'doing a good job' (Cribb and Ball 2004) and assessed in terms of measurable outcomes. At the same time, in depicting the image of the new teacher, the official narrative extensively draws on the symbolisms of the Soviet propaganda, particularly on the heroic image of a Stakhanotive (*stakhanovets*), a Soviet-era shock-worker and over-achiever. In addition to the ethos of

individual over-productivity, the ideal teacher features a number of ethical characteristics, such as conscientiousness, moral integrity and, most pronouncedly, altruism.

The professional image of the quality teacher is, therefore, construed through two competing discourses: the communist ideology of altruism and selflessness on the one hand, and the neoliberal ethos of detached professionalism, competitiveness, and financial well-being on the other hand. In practical use, the former is often asserted over the latter:

> 'It is necessary to implement as soon as possible and with minimal financing what is essentially unrealistic - a radical modernisation of education carried out by a Teacher-Altruist, one who can quickly retrain and withhold in the face of difficulties, especially financial ones.' (Minister Fursenko, mon.gov.ru)

Thus, the perspective through which the financial and spiritual needs and aspirations of the teacher are assessed is consistently that of a state educational official. While official claims to validity remain uncontested, the perspective of the teacher is conveyed through morally-coated terms, such as 'conscientious,' 'decent,' 'dishonest,' 'unscrupulous,' etc. This serves to establish an implicit form of morality that celebrates managerial altruism and personal conscientiousness while refuting personal pragmatism and entrepreneurship. The hidden moralistic stance embedded in the official narrative runs counter to the rhetorically celebrated principles of profitability, marketability and institutional competitiveness. The Soviet-style 'culture of quality' is implicitly asserted over the neoliberal principle of detached professionalism and self-interest.

With all other crucial conditions for renewed quality in place, including modern technology, government support, and modernised curricula, the shortage of 'quality, contemporary teachers' is presented as the 'missing link' in the quality assurance system. An abstract from a 2007 interview with the Minister of Education illustrates the statement:

> 'Minister Fursenko: The 'Year of the Teacher' put into a sharp relief yet another issue – teacher shortage. I recently heard from a Head of a Charity Foundation, a famous Russian entrepreneur and philantropist, that the Charity had built an elite private school. Modern facilities have been designed to provide utmost comfort and satisfaction for the pupils. Various sports grounds, a swimming pool, amazing spacious classrooms, top-notch computer equipment. Yet, the school has not been opened up to date. Can you guess why?
> Interviewer: I'd guess it's a staffing issue?
> Fursenko: Exactly, They simply cannot find enough *quality, contemporary teachers.'* (zavuch.info)

Instead of addressing the overriding issues of teacher salaries and teacher re-training, the *good teacher/bad teacher* dichotomy marginalises the real-life issues and focuses on the ideal. Ministerial and parliamentary discussions of teacher re-training are reduced to poignant lamentations over the 'system's failure' to 'bring about' the 'modernised teacher':

> 'Deputy Zhilkin: Today, while introducing innovation at the regional level, we're encountering not just staff shortages but *poor quality of teaching staff*. Practice shows that the new pay grade system, useful as it is, does not *bring about a new teacher, one who would be able to work in the new conditions, be adept at new technologies and producing desired results*.' (Transcript of Parliamentary hearings, 2010)

While the 'bad teacher' continues to be the bitter reality, teacher re-training issues are displaced by an idealistic anticipation of the new teacher to emerge. Having 'modernised itself,' the system of education 'awaits the emergence of the quality teacher.' (Transcript of Parliamentary hearings, 2010)

In the same vein, educational institutions and programmes are labelled as one of the two types: quality (*kachestvennii*) and non-quality (*nekachestvennii*). The state's monopoly over the assessment of educational programmes is implicitly established through a distinction between 'the seeming' and the 'reality,' as exemplified by a wide-cited quote by the Minister of Education Fursenko:

> ‘All kinds of *pseudo-education* mushroomed at the time of transition. They created an *illusion of providing knowledge* suited for the new life. *In reality,* instead of needed competencies people were receiving, and are still receiving, only *external paraphernalia*: nice diplomas from *non-quality (nedobrosovestnie)* educational institutions that no-one has heard of. Or from those [educational institutions] that practice traditional approaches which do not correlate with contemporary realities. This is why when I am talking about remodeling [of the educational system] I imply that the old system of education must change in a qualitatively new way and in practically all aspects.’ (zavuch.info)

The criteria between the quality and the non-quality programmes are uncompromising and contingent upon the perspective of the state. Important practical policy-making decisions have been routinely justified in official statements on the basis of whether an institution, a teacher, or a textbook is deemed quality or not. For example, the allocation of teacher bonuses and university grants, administered under the ‘National Priority: Education’ initiative throughout President Putin’s second term (2004 – 2008), has been framed exclusively in terms of ‘quality work’ and ‘quality results.’ Universities providing ‘superior education’ have been celebrated as ‘world-class centres of excellence,’ while the ones deemed ‘non-quality’ were closed down in the process of ‘quality optimisation’ - a common euphemism for closing down regional schools and universities.

Finally, the principle of learner satisfaction, rhetorically declared as a paramount quality criterion, is nowhere to be found in the practical application of the quality concept. I will illustrate the disparity by comparing two quotes by Minister Fursenko portraying student perspective. The first quote is a general declarative statement that presents student satisfaction as a centerpiece of the quality paradigm:

> ‘Quality education is that which produces people in high demand. People capable of self-development. Of course, there are formal indicators [of quality], such as participation in the Olympiads, and the results of the National Unified Examination. I do believe that good UNT results normally indicate a good level of

> education. *But the most important judge of quality is not formal indicators but personal results: if a graduate feels accomplished, and if they have realised their full potential, they must have received quality education*.' (pedsovet.org)

The second quote illustrates the practical application of the quality criteria. Here, the quality of learning experience is declared to be of the utmost importance in theory, but discarded as irrelevant vis-à-vis the criteria set by the state:

> 'We do not aim to reduce the number of higher education institutions and their branches. Our task is different. Assuring quality of student training (*obuchenie*) is of the utmost importance to us. A higher education institution or a branch of a higher education institution that produces illiterates (*neuch*) with state-endorsed diplomas devalues the degree, and undermines public trust in higher education. *The graduates themselves might think that they have indeed received quality education but in reality they have been deceived by dishonest management.* The labour market also does not need these pseudo-specialists.' (mon.gov.ru)

Here, and throughout the official discourse, the perspective of the learner is rendered through the employment of subjective mental processes (*might think, is under the impression,* etc.). The learner is represented as one who 'fails to relate the quality of education to real life issues' and 'does not see how the quality of education corresponds to the needs of the modern society.' (pedsovet.org). An extract from a 2005 speech by the Minister of Education is illustrative of the pedagogical paradigm underlying such statements:

> 'One of the most serious problems for us to deal with in the next few years is the upbringing (*vospitanie*) of young people. Due to the drawbacks of our educational system *our youth do not in any way relate the quality of their education with the successes and failures they experience in life.* However, if learning and life are mutually isolated, the learners are just wasting their time. In the course of study young people *might feel isolated* from the society. Concrete principles connecting the system of education to real life are needed for our children to *grow into normal people*. Another problem is that the *learners' personal goals and the goals set by the country do not correlate*. *Young people think that they are on their own and the country is on its own.*' (mon.gov.ru, 2005)

Such reductionist representation of the learner appear to derive from the 'knowledge acquisition' paradigm nominally denounced by reformers in official policy statements. In contrast to the

rhetoric of learner-centredness, education continues to be seen as ‘preparation for grown-up life,’ learning - as ‘knowledge reception’ and moral upbringing (*vospitanie*) - as ‘integration of personality into the society’ through ‘adequate development.’ The invocation of the ‘knowledge acquisition’ paradigm effectively displaces systemic problems of outdated Soviet-era schooling practices into the ideational realm: just as in the case of the quality teacher, the quality student is expected to ‘emerge’:

> ‘Contemporary market awaits the appearance of a new student.’ (Isaak Kalina, kremlin.ru)

> ‘I am confident that there are all opportunities in place within the system of education to facilitate the inflow of qualified students into science and industries’ (President Putin, mon.gov.ru)

The hyper-emphasis on novelty and contemporaneity in regard to ‘quality teachers’ and ‘quality students’ serves to sidestep the issues of *equity* and *access.* While earlier policy documents (1991 - 2000) treated the issues of educational equity and access as elements of quality, subsequent policy adjustments (2000 - 2012) drove them to the periphery of the policy agenda. Lexical analysis indicates a growing tendency for a conceptual blending of these policy terms. Thus, the collocation ‘*access to and quality of education*’ (*dostupnost’ i kachestvo obrazovania*) has been transformed into ‘*access to quality education*’ (*dostupnost' kachestvennogo obrazovania*), driving the new quality into the linguistic presupposition. Similarly, ‘improving access to education’ (*povyshenie dostupnosti obrazovania*) has been replaced by ‘improving access to quality education’ (*povyshenie dostupnosti kachestvennogo obrazovania*) or ‘improving accessibility of quality education’ (*povyshenie dosupnosti kachestvenogo obrazovania*). As a result, quality education has been positioned as given and taken-for-granted, and the task of multiplying the new quality has implicitly displaced issues of access and equity:

> ‘The more quality education there is in the region, the fewer obstacles to receiving it. Quality education is one of the few resources that becomes more accessible as it grows.’ (mon.gov.ru, 2005)

As the rhetoric of novelty gathered momentum in the mid-2000s, it was extended to other elements of educational system: the new quality paradigm required ‘new contemporary levels of teacher qualifications,’ ‘new quality textbooks,’ and ‘qualitatively new learning outcomes.’ By the late 2000s, the rhetoric of novelty appears to have shifted from the realm of the ‘desired’ into the realm of the ‘achieved.’ A Quality Assurance System was pronounced to have emerged:

> ‘The [Government’s] support of the national education innovation projects at all levels of professional education has played a serious, systemic role in renewing educational quality and forming a nation-wide quality assurance mechanism. Let me remind you that *today, the new quality of education* is being provided in almost two hundred and fifty innovation-based institutions of primary and secondary professional education as well as in fifty eight higher education institutions.’ (Minister Fursenko, 2008, mon.gov.ru)

Through the rhetoric of *eventuation, existentialisation* and *naturalisation* (Van Leeuwen 1995) the new quality was positioned as ‘simply existing.’ The quality narrative has completed a full rhetorical circle. Having settled into the locus of assertion and presupposition, quality once again became an inherent homogenous feature of the system.

While quality has been portrayed as being inherently present in the system, either actively or latently, *bad/pseudo/non-quality* has been presented as isolated instances resulting from poor institutional management or personal negligence. The 2012 edition of the 1992 Law on Education indicatively refers to ‘non-quality education’ exclusively in the context of legal provisions regarding financial compensation ‘in the case of non-quality educational services offered to an individual by an educational institution.’ The frame of ‘institutional malfunctioning’ is routinely invoked by highest-raking officials in oral political discourse.

Consider President Putin's answer to the public concern over deteriorating quality in higher education:

> 'We have been facing shameless price damping on part of certain higher education institutions, so to speak. They are setting tuition fees lower than state-set financial standards. What does this mean? We know that this is done to keep afloat and gain profits. These institutions are intentionally offering *non-quality education* because at those rates [of tuition] it's impossible to hire *quality professors'* (kremlin.ru, 2008)

'Incompetent teachers,' 'pseudo-educational programmes,' and 'factually faulty textbooks' are other common referents of the non-quality frame.

The quality/non-quality opposition is widely invoked to justify federal censorship exercised by the state. The issue of quality enhancement is framed as one of eliminating obstacles en route to universal quality. The role of the government is presented as 'protecting' its citizens from the non-quality elements. The government is assumed to exercise its protective function through the implementation of nationwide educational standards and through censorship procedures:

> 'Federal educational standards are called for *to protect* the learners from non-quality education' (Concept for National Standards 2005).

Together, quality control procedures are said to constitute 'federal quality hubs' designed to 'foster quality' and 'eliminate pseudo-education' (Minister of Education Fursenko, mon.gov.ru). Under the banner of protection, a 'tough approach' to state censorship of educational programmes and textbooks is legitimised. For example, 2009 Minister of Education end-of-year report to President employs the rationale of state patronage to justify a large-scale closure of educational institutions:

> 'I would like to report that we have been exercising a tougher approach to *non-quality education*. In the past half a year we have re-organised or closed down over a hundred branches [of educational institutions]. That said, not one single student has been left on the street, all have been offered places in other, *reliable*

> *and more decent* educational institutions. So, on the one hand, we have been reorganising those *institutions that do not provide good, decent education,* but on the other hand we are supporting those who do.' (kremlin.ru transcripts)

Similarly, censorship of school textbooks is defined in terms of 'keeping non-quality textbooks out of the system':

> 'In 2005, the Ministry approved a [legal] close on textbook inspection procedure for general education institutions. This task has been assigned to prestigious research organisation, mainly to Russia's Academy of Sciences, and Russia's Academy of Education. It's important to note that we have now created *a real mechanism of keeping non-quality textbooks out of the school*.' (Minister Fursenko, Annual Speech at the Ministerial Collegium entitled 'On the activities of Ministry of Education and Science in 2005 and goals for 2006,'mon.gov.ru)

The pervasive dichotomy between quality and non-quality does not account for the middle ground. The dominant perspective of the government is objectified through the use of emphatics (e.g. *it is obvious, definitely, of course*), necessity modals (*should, must, have to*), and modal adverbs (*in reality, in fact, indeed, doubtlessly*). The official assessments of quality are characterised by a strong claim to factuality through the employment of factive verbs (*know, confirm, demonstrate*), present tense (*'these days, the new quality is being provided..'*), as well as through the absence of modalising resources indicating a particular stakeholder perspective through which quality is assessed in each particular instance. In claiming undisputed truth, the official perspective admits no criteria of validity outside of itself.

4.6. System of Quality Assurance: stakeholder responsibilities

This section examines the final novel element - 'The Nationwide System of Quality Assurance.' To this end, I have carried out a lexico-semantic analysis of the key terms employed by the official discourse to describe the quality assurance paradigm: *quality assurance, quality*

assessment, quality management and quality control. I will demonstrate that these individual terms, adopted from international quality frameworks, do not have a clear conceptual base in the Russian context. Although conceptual reciprocity with their Western counterparts is assumed, the Russian terms are largely under-conceptualised and ill-defined. Having explored the lexical dimension, I will turn to *structural-cohesive* dimensions of the official quality narrative in use and continue to explore the practical application of the concept of quality through a different set of discourse analytical tools. The analytical approach presented here is complimentary to the one used in the previous section. While the previous section dealt with the issues of *perspective* in regard to stakeholder quality criteria and external quality assessment, this section explores the *representation of actors* and *the allocation of stakeholder responsibilities* within the proposed System of Quality Assurance (Lemke 1995, van Leeuwen 1995, Fairclough 2003). The central question posed in the rest of this chapter is 'What is the core quality framework underlying practical application of the concept?'

4.6.1. Nationwide System of Quality Assurance: definitions and collocational patterns

Official policy documents distinguish three interdependent but separate aspects of quality assurance: quality control, quality assessment, and quality management. While quality control is an indigenous term (*kontrol' kachestva*), the other three are recent importations from international quality frameworks. Borrowed from the context of business and industries, quality *management* is generally understood as a *principle* of ensuring quality in mass production. As such, it is normally considered an umbrella term for the other three notions (Quality Research International 2004-2012, Harvey & Green 1993, Pring 1992). Quality *assurance* is understood as

a *system* that comprises specific *mechanisms* designed to guarantee the desired quality and prevent poor quality. It is mainly employed in the context of paid-for higher education programmes, where it encompasses a range of policies and practices that ensure accountability *to* paying customers and other educational stakeholders. More specifically, quality assurance ensures 'stakeholder confidence that provision (input, process and outcomes) fulfils expectations or measures up to threshold minimum requirements' (Quality Research International 2004-2012). Quality *control* is normally understood as *one* of quality assuring mechanisms aimed at gathering information, monitoring, and checking performances against set objectives and desired standards. Finally, quality *assessment* is conceived of as a specific measurement of outputs and outcomes, based on predefined objectives. The precise inter-relationship between the elements may vary within a specific national quality framework. In respect to education in the UK, for example, it has been defined as follows:

> '(...) distinctions are made between quality control and quality assurance. 'Quality' is seen in terms of fitness for purpose, that purpose being established partly by the customers of the service but mainly by the Government as the custodian of the interests of the customer. 'Quality control' refers to the particular procedures for ensuring that those purposes are established and that the performances conform to specifications (that, for example, x number of students obtain the grades in different subjects which indicate that the learning objectives have been met). 'Quality assurance' refers to the mechanism for ensuring that the 'quality control' techniques are carried out - the 'audit' of this second tier of performance (for example, the monitoring meetings and the external evaluation).' (Pring 1992:10)

With these considerations in mind, I proceeded to carry out an analysis of the inter-relation of the quality assurance elements within the data corpus. Specifically, I have conducted an NVivo-aided collocational analysis of the terms 'quality assurance,' 'quality control,' 'quality assessment,' and 'quality management.' Having scrutinised the immediate context of each use, I grouped the collocations within three rubrics: a) instances where conceptual definitions were

provided, b) instances where a rhetorical distinction was made between two or more terms but no definitions given (e.g. ‘the new system is aimed at not only quality control but also quality assurance,’ and c) instances where the terms are used, in various combinations, as contextual synonyms (e.g. ‘various mechanisms aimed at quality assurance (quality control),’ or ‘ensuring a system of quality management, quality assessment’). In order to determine whether the terms are terminologically consistent, in respect to groups b and c I focused on their distribution in identical or similar contexts, e.g. in the context of educational standards, standardised testing, institutional audit, etc.

The analysis of definitions (group a) has revealed a pattern of circular definition and mutual cross-referencing, whereby one term is continuously defined through another. The paratactic ordering of the four elements, i.e. the juxtaposition of the elements without a clear connection, is completely self-contained: the new quality is defined through new, although unspecified, mechanisms of quality management, assessment and control, while the new mechanisms are said to provide objective information about how educational quality is assured, managed and assessed. An abstract from the 2005 Federal Programme for Educational Development exemplifies how the quality assurance framework is typically constructed through cross-reference of the terms:

> ‘The strategic task of developing a *system of educational quality assurance* is carried out through the implementation of the following planned initiatives:
> - development of new forms and mechanisms of *assessing and controlling* the quality of activities carried out by educational institutions with the involvement of public and professional organisations;
> - creation of a nation-wide *system of educational quality assessment* agreed upon for all levels and stages of education, which will allow to *assure its quality and access*;
> - creation of a nation-wide state and public *system of quality assessment*, independent of educational management bodies, which will become an effective

> and reliable *instrument of quality improvement*, enhance effectiveness and responsibility (...) as well as provide the state and the citizens objective information about the merits and drawbacks of specific aspects of educational system.' (Federal Programme 2005)

As in the example above, the four terms are typically inter-defined without being individually defined. This tendency is mirrored in the collocational and distributional patterns of identified groups b and c. Analysis reveals that despite a rhetorical distinction, the four terms are used interchangeably. In linguistic terms, the four terms are loosely treated as *contextual synonyms. Quality assurance* and *quality control* tend to be textualised together in the same policy context: the system of quality assurance is defined through the existence of quality control mechanisms, and quality control is defined through its quality assuring effects. Such use maintains a strong semantic ambiguity between the two concepts. *Management*, in turn, tends to be used as a conceptual variation of *assurance*, and *assessment* tends to be used as a variation of *control.* Finally, quality control is used as an umbrella concept for the three other terms. Linguistically, quality control is said to be 'provided' (*obespechivaetsia*) rather than 'exercised' (*osushestvliaetsa*), in the same manner educational quality itself is 'provided':

> 'The provision of state control and educational quality management (*obespechenie gosudarstvennogo kontrolia i upravlenia kachestvom obrazovania*) on the basis of independent assessment of the quality of student preparedness (*na osnove nezavisimoi otsenki kachestva podgotovki*)' (Passport 2005)

Systematic use of *quality* and *control* as agents of the verb 'to provide' (*obespechivat'*) serves to normalise the semantic blurring between the two concepts.

In summary, no clear conceptual base for the National System of Quality Assurance can be traced in government policies. The rest of this section probes further into the discourse of quality assurance. By examining the notion of quality from the perspective of *processes,*

participants and allocation of responsibilities, it aims to unveil the conceptual foundation of the quality framework in use. The findings presented in this subsection are based on the 2010 Draft Law on Education, which legislatively introduces and defines the system of quality assurance in education.

4.6.2. Processes, participants and responsibilities in the quality framework

In this section I utilise a discursive analytic framework developed by van Leeuwen (1995) and Fairclough (2003), which allows to reconstruct discourse-specific representations of social phenomena through particular types of *processes* (normally realised through verbs and verbal constructions) and *participants* (realised through nouns and noun constructions). This technique is instrumental in establishing which stakeholders are effectively presented as taking active part in a social process, and which are excluded, as well as how stakeholder responsibilities are explicitly or implicitly assigned.

As outlined earlier in this chapter, the policy rationale for a national system of quality assurance has been defined as rendering the educational system accountable to a variety of stakeholders. A variety of actors have been rhetorically featured, including state and regional authorities, teachers and administrators, employers, parents and students. However, *the analysis of a grammatical subject* has identified three active agents: a) *the state,* b) *the educational institution and* c) *the learner*. The relationship between these actors vis-à-vis assuring educational quality as well as stakeholder entitlements and responsibilities has been defined as follows:

> '*Educational quality (...) is assured* through the establishment of (*obespechivaietsa posredstvom ustanovlenia*) federal state educational standards

> and federal state requirements, as well as through the implementation of state control and monitoring in the sphere of education and the formation of Russia-wide system of quality assessment. (...) The educational standard (...) set by the state serves as a guarantor, or an indicator of the [desired] level of national development, as well as of the degree of responsibility placed on the learner. Goals [of education], standardised requirements, landmarks, systems of assessment and control are set at the state level. Norms and conditions guaranteeing the fulfilment of educational needs [*of learners*] are established. Educational institutions have been given an opportunity to participate in designing educational programmes and curricula as well in defining educational content, the sequence of courses and [teaching] methodologies.' (2010 Draft Law on Education)

As illustrated above, despite the emphasis on its regulating and quality assuring role, the state is virtually removed from the paradigm as an active participant. The state, which is the *logical* subject of the statement, systematically appears in the grammatical position of an *object* in passive constructions ('educational standards are set by the state,' 'quality is assured by the state'). Through the extensive use of *nominalisation*, the official discourse presents *mechanisms* (assurance, control and assessment) and *objects* (standards and requirements) as *entities*, while agents and beneficiaries are hidden in agentless passive clauses, or altogether absent. In the quote above, for example, *standards* appear as a grammatical subject in place of a human or institutional agency: standards are the entities which both set quality criteria and ensure that the latter are properly met.

Quality assurance paradigm is further *de-agentalised* by a syntactic expansion of objects and mechanisms into *processes* and *procedures*. For example, 'standards' are expanded into 'the establishment of standards' (example a), and 'standard-setting procedures' (example b), while 'state control' is expanded into 'the implementation of the state control' (example c):

(a) 'Educational quality (...) is assured through the establishment of federal state educational standards and federal state requirements' (2010 Draft Law).

(b) ‘The procedure for designing and setting federal state educational standards ensure educational quality’ (2010 Draft Law)
(c) ‘Educational quality is assured through the implementation of state control and monitoring procedures,’ etc. (2010 Draft Law)

Such nominalisations as ‘establishment,’ ‘implementation’, and ‘procedure’ serve to further veil educational actors responsibilities. In addition, they effectively transform potentially contested processes, such as the degree of state control and the practical elaboration of curricular standards, into non-negotiable entities. In simpler words, ‘who is doing what to whom is left implicit’ (Fairclough 1992: 179). As a result, the government, which rhetorically continues to be positioned as a *regulating agent*, is grammatically hidden behind the standard-setting procedures and processes, which play active roles instead of state actors. For example, institutional accreditation and audits are ‘carried out on the basis of compliance with the state-set quality standard’ (the 2010 Draft Law). The constitutive and regulating roles of government (setting and maintaining quality standards) is downplayed and its inspecting role (as ensuring compliance with state requirements) is highlighted. The state accreditation model objectifies standards, rather than the state, as a guaranteeing and evaluating agent. Thus, by virtue of controlling educational quality at the input and at the output, educational standards are effectively positioned at the centre of the quality control paradigm with executive mechanisms of quality *assurance* left unspecified.

While the role of the state is represented through educational standards, the roles of educational institutions are represented through *educational programmes.* By virtue of occupying the position of a *grammatical subject* (in place of a human or institutional agency), educational programmes are implicitly assigned the *executive role* in the process of quality assurance. They are required by the state to ‘ensure the attainment of learning results by students (...), in

accordance with federal state educational standards' as well as to 'create necessary conditions' for the new quality to settle in:

> 'Educational institutions 'must create conditions necessary for the attainment of quality education. (...) In accordance with their own preferences academic and pedagogical staff are free to select methods and tools of instruction that ensure high quality of the learning process.' (The 1996 Law on Higher Education)

The end results are assessed against *the degree of compliance* with the educational standards. The role of the government in this process is, again, reduced to quality inspection at the output.

The final link of the accountability paradigm - the learner - appears in predominantly passive constructions (*knowledge acquired by the learner, responsibilities placed on the learner, etc.*). The learner is typically represented in terms of 'educational outcomes,' 'student preparedness,' or 'attainments of learning results.' These terms appear in active constructions instead of human agent:

> 'State (final) attestation is a form of assessing the relevance of the level and *quality of student preparedness* (*kachestvo podgotovki uchenika*) against the requirements of the federal state educational standard for the learning results (...)' (The 2010 Draft Law)

The appropriate level of student preparedness is to be achieved through 'adequate conditions' created by educational programmes. The quality of the learning process is either left unelaborated, or framed within the 'quality culture' model.

To illustrate the analysis above, I will borrow a sports metaphor used by one public commentator of the 2010 Draft Law. The metaphor visualises the process of education as a mockery of a marathon race, where the student is a sprinter runner, the teacher is a training manager, and the parent is a passive viewer:

> ‘The proposed project [the 2010 Law on Education] looks like a manual for a marathon race. The authors of the project elaborate in detail on the rights and responsibilities of the ‘runners’ (learners), ‘coaches’ (teachers) and even ‘fans’ (parents). [The authors] are trying to map out the entire ‘running track’ on the basis of opportunities and resources of certain participants of the process. Finance mechanisms, and the rights of the ‘head controller’ (*glavnii kontroler*) are laid out in great detail. What’s missing is the main thing: the relationship of this law with the goals for the country’s educational development. The issues of public demand, long-term planning and strategic development (…) are left out [of the discussion].’ (zakonoproekt2012.ru)

The Russian phrase ‘*glavnii kontroler*’ (literal translation: ‘head controller’) here captures the perceived mechanistic nature of the relationship between educational stakeholders. Indeed, the discursive distribution of responsibilities in the official quality framework hinges on the model of *quality control* rather than assurance: quality is understood as *conformance to state-set standards* against which state control is exercised at the input (through institutional accreditation and audit) and at the output (through measurable outcomes). This model effectively matches the nominally denounced centralised Soviet system of command and control. While deriving its rhetorical energy from the critique of the preceding educational order, the discursive constants of the official discourse, as reflected in the relationship between stakeholders and stakeholder criteria, have remained unchanged. The difference between the two models of quality control lies in the allocation of responsibilities. While both present educational quality as a socially guaranteed good, the ‘modernised’ version no longer sees the state as a custodian acting in the interest of the society. Its role has been reduced to audit and control. The responsibility for assuring quality in the classroom has shifted from the government to educational institutions. This authoritarian hierarchical model is, however, hidden by the rhetoric of assurance. By virtue of being ‘provided,’ quality control is essentially disguised as quality assurance.

The difference between the rhetorical and the structural-discursive framings of quality are summarised in the two tables below. Table III represents actors, processes, and quality criteria as they rhetorically emerge from the official policy statements. Table IV represents actors, processes, and quality criteria reconstructed from the practical application of those policy concepts.

Table III: Quality assurance paradigm: rhetorical reconstruction

QUALITY CRITERIA

THE STATE	• Fulfilment of country's economic needs • Building human capital • National security and stability
THE LEARNER	• Personal development and well-being • Individual learning preferences • Comfort and safety of learning environment • Learner satisfaction
PARENTS	• Personal preferences (i.e. parental school choice) • Customer satisfaction • Effectiveness of home-school cooperation
TEACHERS	• Pedagogical freedoms (i.e., choice of methods of instruction) • Professional satisfaction • Safety and comfort of teaching environment
EDUCATIONAL MANAGERS	• Institutional competitiveness in educational market • Financial profit • Effectiveness of intra-institutional governance
EMPLOYERS	• Needs of labour market • Employer satisfaction • Diversity and choice in graduate recruitment

PROCESSES

THE STATE	• Quality assurance mechanisms, including quality control •Guaranteeing and improving quality
THE LEARNER	• Assessment of learning process, including testing • Learner feedback
PARENTS	• Monitoring, evaluation and reviews through parental committees and civic unions • Involvement in institutional audit and participation in mechanisms of accountability
TEACHERS	• Monitoring, evaluation and review through teacher units • Participation in institutional audit and accreditation
EDUCATIONAL MANAGERS	• Internal quality management and assessment through self- regulatory processes • Participation in external quality assurance mechanisms
EMPLOYERS	• Monitoring and evaluation through professional unions • Participation in external quality assessment • Involvement in policy-making through corporate representatives

Table IV: Quality assurance paradigm in practical application

ACTORS	STATE-SET EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS	EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES	EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES
CRITERIA	Degree of compliance To state-set standards	Fulfilment of state requirements	Compliance with state-set standards
PROCESSES	Quality control at the outcome	Institutional accreditation by the state	Standardised testing

4.7. Discussion

In order to highlight the specificity of the Russian case I will conclude this sub-section by contextualising the findings presented in this chapter within a broader comparative perspective. It has been acknowledged in policy literature that as a highly technocratic genre, an official policy statement, written or oral, does not have to necessarily account for all or alternative perspectives within a specific utterance, or a specific policy statement (Lemke 1995, Harvey & Green 1993). As argued by educational theorists, a stakeholder-relative concept *in use* will normally reflect or emphasise one particular perspective at a time. For example, in defining

quality, teachers and students will naturally focus on the micro-level of the learning process, employers will emphasise economic outputs and returns, and state officials will accentuate issues of quality assessment and control (Harvey & Green 1993). Through this theoretical lens, a formal introduction of educational stakeholders into Russia's educational legislation could, in theory, be interpreted as an important initial step in a substantive development of the traditional unitary concept of quality.

However, it is also acknowledged that in re-designing the national quality framework, the main methodological challenge, for both a policy analyst and a policy-maker, is to account for the competing views without losing the overall conceptual unity (Harvey & Green 1993). In practice, the only methodologically sound way of preserving the unity of the concept is by defining quality in terms of a range of parameters, specifying criteria used by each stakeholder and describing the responsibilities assumed by various stakeholders – all within a single quality paradigm (Harvey & Green 1993). In the case of Russia's quality reform, I have traced no systemic re-conceptualisation in either policy documents or oral policy statements. The official verbiage switches between various perspectives of quality, emphasising one or another particular proxy depending on the immediate context of an utterance. For example, teacher commitment and learner satisfaction are featured as quality criteria alongside teachers' professional detachment and learners' inability to assess their own educational needs. The only paradigmatic invariable I have found within the official quality paradigm is the implicit prerogative of a government official in setting quality criteria.

Thus, in practical application, the proclaimed novelty boils down to a rhetorical tug-of-war between the stakeholder-relative, and the uncompromising absolutist notions of quality. Without a consistent quality framework, the very notion of quality collapses and becomes no more than a 'weasel word.' In linguistic terms, 'quality,' as operated in contemporary Russian educational discourse, is a classic example of a 'signifier without reference' with no 'real-life' signifier except for the free-floating notion of marketable quality (Fairclough 1995).

The government-led journey to universal educational quality has been symbolically compared by one Russian intellectual to Alice's predicament in Wonderland: 'if you walk long enough, does this guarantee that you will you get somewhere?':

> 'A crucial problem of defining educational quality arises. Individual researchers and entire institutions have not been able to reach consensus as to what 'educational quality' entails. The problem encompasses the issue of providing quality education to the learner without understanding what quality entails. Until a definition of educational quality is provided, it will be impossible to arrive at it and, consequently, impossible to map out the steps to take on this imaginary journey. Until then, we are facing a situation of 'Alice in Wonderland.' We desperately want to get *somewhere,* which is manifest in continuous reforms in education and multiple definitions of 'educational quality.' However, we keep missing the destination. Or, rather, arriving at places we don't want to be at.' (Dmitry Kovalevsky, Skolkovo Development Fund for designing and commercialising new technologies, Interview to pedsovet.org)

The findings from textual analysis presented in this chapter strongly resonate with recent psychological, economic, and policy studies highlighting controversial trends in the official policies (Kaganovich 2001, Bolotov & Lenskaya 1997, OECD 1999, Forrat 2009). In their review of the 'complex affair' comprising Russian quality assurance policies, experts at the OECD (1999) identify three dimensions of the quality reform. All three concern quality control in the traditional sense: registration and licensing of institutions, accreditation of institutions, and

post factum attestation of diplomas (OECD 1999: 69). Kaganovich (2001) explores the direction of post-1991 state policies from the perspective of educational financing in higher education. Similarly to the argument advanced in this chapter, Kaganovich (2005: 7) argues that

> 'The current developments in education finance and access to education in Russia represent a striking combination of preserving the elements of the inherited Soviet command structure of management and budgeting with a total departure from the principles of basic social guarantees.'

Forrat (2009: 133) explores the issue from a psychological perspective and focuses on the perception of the modernisation reform by the teacher community. He finds that,

> 'In the Russian context, state initiatives aimed at increasing transparency and accountability of universities are interpreted by the agents of the reform not as introduction of market-oriented principles, but as another [wave] of tightening authoritative state power (...)'

Forrat finds that teachers see the government as the dominant authoritarian stakeholder in the educational process. The roles of other stakeholders, especially employers, learners, and the civil society are perceived as 'undistinguishable' or 'blurred' (Forrat 2009: 133). Forrat frames the issue as that of interpretation: what had been conceived of within the official reform agenda as a progressive novelty was interpreted by the Russian public as another manifestation of state authoritarianism.

While engaging with this strand of research, the present study suggests a re-focusing of the issue from policy interpretation and implementation into policy conception. I have argued that quality-related official policies from 1991 to present have not been sufficiently, and consistently, grounded within a single quality framework to allow for a paradigm shift. It appears that the 'quality crisis' originates at the level of policy design, where policy texts continue to display a glaring gap between official rhetoric and institutionalised decision-making practices, a blurring

of traditional roles and responsibilities in the framework of quality provision, and a significant absence of key stakeholders, such as students and employers. A powerful authoritarian thrust goes hand in hand with the withdrawal of the state from its quality assuring obligations.

4.8. Conclusion

In the course of the quality reform, the government has attempted to relativise the traditional absolutist notion of quality by diversifying educational stakeholders, introducing external mechanisms of quality control, and specifying stakeholder quality criteria. Framed in strong opposition to the Soviet-era model, the rhetorical push of the official narrative has been that of revolutionary novelty and a complete break from the local tradition. The reform was presented as an organic process unfolding naturally on a scientific basis and as a result of a societal consensus. New definitions of quality as a complex multi-dimensional and stakeholder-relative characteristic have been institutionalised to signal an alleged paradigm shift domestically and internationally. A new system of quality assurance has rhetorically replaced the traditional system of quality control.

However, the rhetorical adjustments have not brought about a paradigmatic change. The operation of the concept has failed to produce a systemic definition of quality that would bring together multiple stakeholder perspectives within a single framework. Instead, certain isolated aspects and proxies of quality are emphasised in one or another particular context without being rooted in a consistent paradigm. The concept of quality continues to be perceived as a uni-

dimensional self-evident category and an inherent feature of the system. The cult of utmost excellence prevails.

Beyond the talk of relativity, the quality paradigm remains dichotomous rather than continuous. Through the workings of the polarised discourse of quality versus non-quality, quality criteria remain an exclusive prerogative of the state, while non-quality is presented as instances of deflection from the state-set standard. The blame for 'non-quality' is located in institutional malfunctions and is personified in the negligent administrator, or the incompetent teacher. The process of learning remains largely invisible. In its reconceptualisation of educational quality, the official discourse appears to have established an implicit hierarchy of educational stakeholders: the state as the 'ultimate arbiter' of quality, the management of educational institutions as a 'relatively privy service provider,' and the learner as a 'clueless consumer.' The government is positioned as the guardian acting in the interest of the consumer as well as the ultimate judge of the quality criteria. Despite the utopian orientation of the narrative, the technocratic genre of a policy manifesto has allowed for a transformation of the discourse of expert knowledge into the discourse of social policy (Lemke 1995).

Smuggled in under the disguise of 'quality assurance,' authoritarian state quality control model is central to the ministerial policies. Quality management and quality assurance appear to be no more than rhetorical placebos. The institutionalised paradigm that underlies practical policy decisions is that of the Soviet-era command-and-control model through state-set standards. The proclaimed conceptual novelty proves to be skin-deep. None of the conceptual novelties appear

to have found their way into the public discourse. Public interpretation of educational quality continues to draw on paradigms of ‘quality culture,’ welfare state, and government paternalism.

Switching between the overt rhetoric and hidden discursive posturings, the new quality framework is characterised by a lack of direction and paradigmatic instability. Reflecting the complexities of the post-Soviet educational order vis-à-vis the global quality imperative, the paradigmatic turbulences are yet to be reconciled in a single framework.

CHAPTER V

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS: 'WHY DOESN'T THE TELEPHONE RING'?

This chapter probes into the neoliberal idea of standardisation through educational standards and standardised testing. It explores the reception of two standards-based reform initiatives in Russia - national educational standards and the Unified National Test - against the benchmark of local pedagogical practices and preferences. I examine how the notion of standardisation has come into conflict with the indigenous 'educational programme' and traditional testing formats. I demonstrate how standardisation reform in Russia has been interpreted within broader cultural and pedagogical frames of reference pertaining to the perception of 'standard' versus 'non-standard.'

The discussion in this chapter is organised in the following way. I start with a historical note on the development of three generations of educational standards and the introduction of the Unified State Examination from 1991 onwards. I show how both reform measures were developed in convergence with policy recommendations by foreign agents, rather than through consultations with domestic pedagogical community. I proceed to analyse the presentation of the new concepts in the official government discourse, contrasting them with nationally-grounded concerns and aspirations for curricula and testing. Through a comparison of interpretative schemes underlying neoliberal and local interpretations of educational standards I uncover a number of lexico-semantic discrepancies in-built into the public debate over educational standards. Using a variety of discursive techniques I demonstrate how these discrepancies have resulted in a conceptual

confusion in both public and policy-making domains, mobilising public resistance and impeding the policy-making process. I deconstruct widespread resistance to the concept of standard by uncovering cultural metaphors underlying negative interpretations of the two reform measures under scrutiny.

5.1. Background to the standardisation reform in Russia

While educational quality is a familiar concern to Russian pedagogy, the notion of outcome-based standardisation is relatively new. Despite the iconic uniformity of governance, facilities and academic programmes, the system of Russian education has been predominantly input- rather than outcome-based. In Soviet times, desired standards of teaching and learning were ensured through unified curricula content and textbooks, standardised teacher training, strict timetables and a strong culture of personal commitment of teachers and students (Alexander 2000). Up until the introduction of The Law on Education of 1992 (the 1992 Law) the content of the curriculum was stipulated in two normative documents, called 'basic educational plan' (*bazisnii uchebnii plan*) and 'suggested curriculum' (*obrazovatelnaia programma*). The 'basic educational plan' served as a set of minimal requirements for educational content and learner experiences designed for each grade. The 'suggested curriculum' contained a list of themes or topics to be covered within each subject[11]. Educational plans and curricula were not stipulated through legislation but served the function of national educational standards *de facto*. With curricular guides and teaching methods poorly defined, the classroom routine was left to the discretion of individual teachers and university instructors, varying greatly across Russian

[11] Soviet pedagogy made a clear-cut methodological distinction between *bazisnii uchebnii plan* and *obrazovalnaia programma* that is not principal to the analysis presented here. A single term 'curriculum' will be used hereafter to denote curricular content to be covered within a certain amount of time at a certain grade.

schools, districts and regions. Regional disparities created unequal educational opportunities for students from urban versus rural areas, as well as from regional capitals versus small towns, leading to an increasing educational divide and, serving as an instrument of social stratification within the society (Smolin 2005, Bibkov 2009).

Standards of assessment and evaluation procedures were also exceptionally underdeveloped. Atypical of a hyper-centralised system of education, until recently, Russia has never had an all-nation final school-leaving or university admission examination. Traditional school-leaving and university selection procedures were based on a series of competitive oral entrance examinations. The co-existence of separate final school examinations and university entrance examinations created a number of tensions within the system. Separate sets of examination for leaving school and entering a higher education institution over the space of two summer months put school-leavers under a lot of psychological pressure. University applicants were allowed to apply to only one institution at a time, and could apply elsewhere only if they failed to get accepted in their first institution of choice, often missing an entire year in the process. Besides being highly inefficient, such a system put rural and less affluent segments of Russian society at a major disadvantage.

Admission officials at each higher educational facility designed and offered their own exams, with little federal regulation regarding their content and assessment criteria. Although officially the state set admission criteria, individual universities determined their own minimal passing scores and grading scales. This, in practice, meant that university admission committees had a monopoly and discretion over the admission and access to higher education (Osipyan 2007,

Smolentseva 2003). Traditional oral university entrance examinations, used as a basis for admission, were associated with unfair and subjective assessment. A lot of autonomy and discretion was given to individual lecturers and assessors, who were not trained to evaluate student performance, not given clear criteria for grading and not confined by rigid marking schemes (Smolin 2005, Shishkin 2003).

As a result, bribery and corruption were endemic in the system (Clark 2005, Osipyan 2007). According to the 2004 report published by the Ministry of Education and Science, some applicants were paying the equivalent of five years of tuition in bribes (US$35,000 - $40,000) to get into top Moscow universities (Ministry of Education and Science, 2007). Some experts claimed that the turnover of the shadow market in higher education is comparable to that of major Russian oil companies (Kastueva-Jean, 2006). According to the 2000 Higher School of Economics study, around one quarter of Russian families were willing to pay bribes to secure a place in a prestigious university (Levin & Satarov 2000).

While bribery has been the most common form of corruption, corrupt practices in higher education have taken many other forms, including tutor fees, monetary pledges, nepotism, favoritism, rigged examinations, and disclosed exam papers, among others (Ministry of the Interior, 2006). It has become common knowledge that the most popular entrance exam tutors are the same professors who sit on admission committees of higher education institutions. In the context of oral examinations, where grading criteria are vague and subjective, 'tutoring fees' have *de facto* turned into bribes. As a result, criteria for admission often came down to money and social connections rather than academic ability. The system favored graduates of schools

with close university connections or those whose parents could afford private tuition from members of the university examination committee or expensive preparatory courses at that institution. Following the post-Soviet economic crisis, various forms of corruption further penetrated the system and became firmly built into it as part of its internal checks-and-balances system. Not only did corrupt practices contribute to individual instructor's income but also served to reduce state budgetary burden, allowing local municipalities to retain academic staff while keeping academic salaries low. Throughout the 1990s, university professors and staff were grossly underpaid. With the average salary of a full-time starting university instructor not exceeding $200/month, many survived through jobs 'on the side' secured through university connections. In addition, cheating on exams was widespread among students. Cheating was considered part of the routine in a student's academic experience and went virtually unpunished. In light of these worrisome trends, domestic needs for educational standardisation were twofold: to unify educational content across Russian regions and to objectify the process of academic assessment by reducing regional disparities in accessing secondary and higher education on the one hand, and remedying the deficiencies of the traditional system of oral examinations, including cheating and corruption.

In addition to domestic pressures, standards-based reform in Russia was driven by persistent lobbying by international stakeholders who advocated for a 'new generation' of educational standards. The new standards, insisted the OECD (1999) and the World Bank (2004), should be defined in terms of specific measurable outcomes and include an all-nation standardised examination.

Framed as a solution to the 'quality crisis,' the standards-based reform launched by the Russian government in the early 2000s included two principal components: the development of a curriculum framework outlining specific knowledge areas and learner competencies for each academic level and the introduction of a mandatory standardised high-stakes test as a primary measure of student learning. The rest of this section traces the development of the two reforms individually, with an emphasis on the reformers' rationales underlying policy decisions. These will later be contrasted with strikingly opposing popular interpretations of reform.

Educational standards

The idea of educational standards does not have a domestic tradition within Russia. In keeping with a move towards decentralisation in the 1990s, educational reformers adopted a notion of standards based on the standardisation framework of decentralised educational systems[12] (Smolin 2005b). In line with international practices, the Russian government developed a standards-based reform package including such policy tools as curriculum specifications, institutional accountability structures and standardised measures of academic performance. The concept evolved in three stages, domestically known as 'three generations of educational standards' (*tri pokolenia obrazovatelnih standartov*).

The concept of standard was first defined in the 1992 Law, which laid down a three tier curriculum standard, including federal, regional and local components, later combined into a

[12] Although in theory the set of policy tools is standardised, specific conceptualisations of the standards-based reform varies greatly across national contexts. Thus, in the Anglo-Saxon world the discussion on standardisation is often confined to issues of basic numeracy, literacy and measurable outcomes thereof, while in Asian countries, such as South Korea and Japan, it embraces creative thinking and independent learning.

unified national standard[13]. According to the 1992 Law, educational standard was designed to address three major challenges of post-Soviet Russian education: to improve declining academic performance, to preserve uniformity of the educational space between Russian regions and to create unified criteria for state accreditation and quality control. The first summative definition of 'state educational standard' provided in the 1992 Law is a' set of nationally recognised requirements stipulated by the state, which determines a mandatory minimum for the contents of educational programmes, maximum workload assigned to students and performance requirements to be met by graduates of educational institutions' (the 1992 Law, Article 7). This early definition was domestically and internationally criticised for being underdeveloped both legislatively and conceptually (Smolin 2004, World Bank 2004). Legislatively, 'curriculum' was variably defined as 'conditions for delivering educational programmes' in one context and 'requirements for educational results' in another. 'National standards,' 'minimal educational content,' 'minimal requirements' and 'curriculum' were used inconsistently and interchangeably.

In earlier versions of the law, the notion of educational standards appears to be strongly linked to the idea of minimal educational content designed to serve as a judicial criterion for state quality accreditation and control. As stated in the law, 'state educational standards are the basis for the objective assessment of an educational level and a qualification of graduates (…) (the 1992 Law, Article 7). In subsequent amendments (1995, 2009, 2011), educational standards tend to be defined as 'a set of requirements for the implementation of basic educational programmes (…)

[13] There is a distinction between standards for general, professional and higher education. Whilst all levels of education are to a greater or lesser degree regulated by the state, general secondary education is considered its specific prerogative, as defined by Russian legislation. Standards for professional education, in turn, are meant to serve as a basis for performance evaluation and state accreditation of educational institutions.

by state-accredited educational institutions'. As evident from these illustrations, the definition of the concept is vague and the legislative basis is fraught with ambiguities. In addition, the official rhetoric of standards equivocally switches back and forth between calls to preserve the 'world-class standard of Soviet education' and invocations of raising a 'new person' to meet the 'new standard' of knowledge and innovation economy.

Extensive policy reviews by international stakeholders were consistent in criticising the early notion of educational standard for its emphasis on educational inputs rather than outcomes. Immediately following the introduction of standards, a 1999 World Bank report states,

> 'Since 1992 work has been undertaken to develop minimum standards and assessment and testing systems, as well as to reform accreditation and quality evaluation to meet the needs of the market and modern life, but standards are still defined as inputs to the learning process rather than as student outcomes.' (World Bank 1999: 3)

Half a decade later, another World Bank review advocated for a re-conceptualisation of the concept, calling the Russian Ministry of Education's effort 'disappointing':

> 'Over the past ten years, the Ministry of Education has expended significant resources to update school curricula and develop new standards. The results of these efforts are disappointing in terms of moving to outcome-based standards and quality evaluation. Even the structure of the most recently approved (March 2004) standards reflects outdated approaches: they are still based on a list of content elements (units of information) by subject, rather than on the expected achievements of students. (…) 'In contrast [with other countries], the authors of the recently adopted Russian standards put the content description first, and do not define expected learning outcomes in sufficient detail. Such an approach orients the pedagogy toward the delivery of information. It also shapes Russian textbooks, which still pretend to be the only source of knowledge.'' (World Bank 2004: 6)

OECD experts also expressed dissatisfaction with standardisation reform, emphasising cultural differences between the interpretation of standards in Russia and in the Western world:

> 'The term 'standard' in the United States refers to something quite specific: official, written guidelines that define what a state expects its state school students to know and be able to do as a result of their schooling. Most countries in central

> and Eastern Europe [including Russia] are likewise engaged in formulating educational standards, but in their case standards tend to be expressed only in terms of content covered (input) and hours on the timetable process for each subject, rarely in terms of student outcomes. Occasionally, student outcomes are mentioned, but often in vague, unmeasurable terms: '[Candidates] must be familiar with… the essence, purpose and meaning of human life…[and] the correlation between truth and error.' (OECD 1999: 65-66)

In addition to international criticism, the concept of educational standards was seriously challenged by Russian educationalists as lacking a clear ideological base and pedagogical justification (Smolin 2005, Dneprov 1998). Education analyst Elena Lenskaya, for example, argued,

> 'School standards were perhaps the only failure [of the modernisation reform]. Those were developed by academics who lacked school experience and were only too happy to embrace all new ideas without attempting to understand them (…) Also, the standards remained input-based, specifying the content to be taught rather than the expected outcomes. The latter were defined in a very vague way, and the majority of them were impossible to measure.' (Interview with *The Teachers' Gazette*, 2006)

A 2005 self-assessment by the Ministry of Education acknowledged,

> 'The development of the first generation standards for general education, which has been taking place in the past twelve years, has not resulted in a policy document that would satisfy all users [of educational services] – the society, parents, teachers and learners. The analysis of multiple complaints about all versions of educational standards with no exception shows that the construct of a standard needs adjustments, which would include specification of contemporary understanding of the standard (…) as well as the development of its structure.' (Concept for National Standards 2005: 11)

Under heavy public criticism of the perceived 'one size fits all' approach to educational standardisation, the Ministry of Education made an attempt to re-frame the concept of the second and third generation standards (2005 until present) within a framework of indigenous pedagogy. In 2005, the Russian Academy for Education embarked on developing a 'second generation' concept of educational standards. The new standard was proclaimed a 'principally new and

unprecedented education endeavor' in that it was 'scientifically based' (Concept for National Standards 2005). Strongly echoing the rhetoric of the international policy recommendations, the second generation of educational standards was proclaimed to be principally novel in that, for the first time, it was results-oriented and competency-based:

> 'Educational standards have now been formulated in the language of outcomes (*na iazike rezul'tatov*). Various aspects related to methods of pedagogical realisation [of the said outcomes] should most certainly be excluded from the content of standards' (Concept for National Standards 2005: 15).

The Concept for National Standards (2005: 16) stated that, having fulfilled their mission of 'preserving an invariable core of the general secondary education,' the 'old' standards needed to be re-conceptualised in a 'contemporary' paradigm. Second generation standards were positioned within a larger humanistic paradigm, in which 'standard' was regarded as a 'social contract' between an individual, the society and the state, while the learner's developmental needs were proclaimed of supreme value. The new, 'learner-centred' and 'competency-based' paradigm of educational standard was explicitly construed in opposition to the old 'transmission of knowledge' paradigm:

> 'In lieu of the existing standards that comes down to the minimum of information (knowledge) we are offering a standard based on different principles - principles of variability and redundancy of knowledge. (…) For the first time does the state standard mention the school of critical thinking.' (Concept for National Standards 2005: 20)

In keeping with a push to ground the idea of educational standards within indigenous pedagogical tradition, the 2005 Concept claimed to draw on a creative and activity-based approach (*tvorchesko-dejatelnostnii podhod*) as represented by the works of Vygotsky and Leontyev:

> 'Today, if we don't want to be, in Vygotsky's words, slaves of the mind and of reproductive thinking, a school of indeterminacy must come into education. This means that the child will have to solve non-standard and non-typical tasks, tasks

> with redundant or insufficient information, and tasks based on the logic of probability.' (Concept for National Standards 2005: 20)

Whilst legislatively the idea of standard continued to be defined as a set of accountability requirements, the official rhetoric shifted away from an explicit emphasis on state control towards the realm of pedagogy. Presented as being newly discovered, the school of 'creative pedagogy,' associated with the names of Lev Vygotsky, Daniil Elkonin, Alexei Leontyev, and Vasilii Davydov, was declared a 'scientific base' for the new conception of standards. The new rhetoric did not situate the reform initiative within Russian reformist tradition but continued to draw on the discourse of revolutionary novelty. Framed in terms of 'never before' and 'for the first time in history,' the deictic point of departure remained in the present. Although framed as a revolutionary leap towards progressive educational policies, the notion of standard continued to be permeated with paradigmatic inconsistencies and contradictions, wavering between the new 'competency-based' and the old 'transmission of knowledge' paradigms. The introduction of the term '*kurrikulum,*' in addition to the existing 'educational standard,' '*uchebnii plan,*' and '*programma,*' reinforced conceptual ambiguity.

In 2010 a draft of the third generation 'standards for general education' was published on the *standard.edu.ru* federal web portal, inviting an open nation-wide public discussion. Despite continued rhetoric of 'principal novelty,' the document defined educational standard in the same way as in the 1992 Law, namely as a 'set of state requirements.' The draft law distinguished between 'Standard' (singular and capitalised) and 'standards' (plural), where the singular use signified 'a normative judicial act,' which establishes 'compulsory requirements' for each educational level, while the plural referred to curriculum specifications for various academic levels (standard.edu.ru). The 2010 draft law divided the requirements into three

groups: 1) requirements for learning outcomes, 2) requirements for the structure of basic educational programmes and 3) requirements for the conditions for implementation of those programmes. A systemic activity approach (*sistemno-dejatenostnij podhod*) was named as the new pedagogical foundation for the educational standard. In addition to specific curriculum content, 'personal parameters' of student development were introduced for the first time. For instance, under the third generation standards, learners were expected to acquire over four hundred identified 'key skills' (*kluchevie navyki*), including 'love of their region (*krai*) and love of their Motherland,' 'respect to people, its culture and spiritual traditions,' 'acceptance of traditional family values,' 'advocacy for a healthy life style,' 'creativity and ability to think critically,' 'social engagement and observance of the law' as well as 'ability to make conscious professional choices.' In addition, the new standards divided the formerly 'compulsory minimal curriculum' for general secondary school education into 'core' and 'elective' components, thus *de facto* introducing into the Russian high school the principle of subject choice.

Thus, as far as official definitions are concerned, from the 1992 Law to the draft 2010 Law on Education, the notion of educational standard has remained essentially the same. It continued to be defined in terms of unspecified 'requirements,' either requirements 'for the implementation' (*trebovania k realizatsii*) or 'for the condition of the implementation' (*trebovania k usloviam realizatsii*) of educational programmes. The hegemonic role of the state in determining the form and the content of educational provision has remained implicit in these definitions. Amidst self-referential and circular definitions the principle questions of what comprises the 'requirements' and what mechanisms will ensure the fulfillment of those requirements have remained

unanswered. Standardisation-related policies continued to be underlined by linguistic ambiguity surrounding the term ‘standard’ and a persistent confusion of lexical and legislative meanings of the terms employed. Alexander Adamsky, Rector of the influential Institute for Issues in Educational Policy ‘Eureka’ and a vocal proponent of the standardisation reform has called the saga of educational standards ‘a peculiar Russian language reading comprehension test’ (Interview to eurekanet.ru, February, 2011).

Unified National Test

In parallel with the elaboration of academic standards, since 1992 the Ministry of Education has been developing the second component of the standardisation reform, the Unified National Test (UNT). While curricular standardisation dealt with the process of learning, the introduction of UNT was meant to improve the transition between secondary and higher education by increasing transparency, fairness and efficiency. Specifically, as an external tool for assessing school leavers’ performance, its purpose was to eliminate institutional barriers between secondary and higher education, introduce an independent quality control mechanism into the Russian education, enhance school-leaver’s mobility, equalise territorial, social and economic differences between students from urban and rural areas, and eliminate corruption (Shishkin 2003, Smolin 2005, Osipyan 2007). By adopting a single state examination, designed and produced by the central Ministry of Education, the Russian Government authorised a major shift from the Soviet-era system of separate final school examinations and university entrance examinations. The test was introduced on an experimental basis in 2001 and launched nation-wide in 2009As stated by then Prime Minister Putin, ‘the essence of the UNT examination is to provide an opportunity for a young person living in the most remote village to apply to any prestigious higher education

institution without leaving their home' (mon.gov.ru). The new testing system was meant to objectify the process of academic assessment by obtaining more reliable data that will be comparable across schools and universities. It was also aimed at reducing opportunities for corruption through the use of more secure testing grounds, including computer software and specially trained independent experts.

The development and implementation of the exam was almost entirely sponsored by a multi-million World Bank loan (Gounko & Smale 2007). Amidst media controversies surrounding the financing of the exam, Russian educational officials have repeatedly emphasised domestic forces behind the standardisation reform and refuted allegations of copying Western-style standardised tests. However, the format of the exam is remarkably similar to other popular high-stakes standardised tests, in particular, the SATs. 'This exam, - argued Gessen, - is a Russian version of 'America's most-maligned standardised exam - the Scholastic Assessment Test' (Gessen 2003: 13, as cited in Gounko & Smale 2006: 333)[14].

The government adopted a flexible approach to the implementation and popularisation of the UNT. During the 'experimental' stage, each region of the Russian Federation was asked to

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[14] The exam for all subjects consists of three parts: A, B, and C. In part A, test-takers are asked to choose the correct answer out of a number of suggested answers (multiple choice). Part B consists of one-word answers or fill-in-the-blank questions. In part C, the test-takers have to solve different tasks and problems, or give a detailed written answer. The exam is scored on a 100-point scale, and the results are converted into the traditional five-point system, "1" and "2" being unsatisfactory grades, "3" - satisfactory or "pass", "4" - fair or good, and "5" - excellent. Depending on the subject and the department, an excellent score might range from 65 to 100. Students were to take the Unified National Test free of charge at the end of 9th and 11th grades. Students are required to pass five exams: two are mandatory (Russian language and mathematics) and three depend on a school-leaver's choice based on their future area of study or personal preference. An optional Unified National Test was offered in the following subjects: Biology, History, General knowledge, Chemistry, Physics, Literature, Foreign languages (English, French, German) and Informatics.

participate in the experiment on a trial basis and each individual university was allowed to choose in which of the nine subjects the national test would be offered. Ministry of Education allowed universities the freedom to base their admission decisions on centralised testing results, on their own tests, or on a combination of the two - an option the majority of Russian universities opted for. Fearing losing control over the industry of student involvement, powerful lobbies of elite state universities, such as Moscow and St.Petersburg State opposed the introduction of the exam, while regional universities were eager to recognise the UNT results for admission at an early stage.

The experimental stage was marked by a litany of technical insufficiencies that threated its nation-wide introduction. Challenges included such issues as obtaining certified copies of exam results and providing adequate level of technology necessary for the exam implementation and exam processing across the whole country, including computers and secure Internet connection in remote provincial areas. Multiple violations were routinely reported by monitoring bodies (Smolin 2005). In addition, the introduction of the exam was punctuated by a series of widely publicised scandals involving high ranking officials[15]. Despite technical difficulties, allegations of corruption and resistance by university lobbies, the exam was made mandatory nation-wide in 2009.

With the transition from secondary to higher education at the heart of the testing reform, the UNT provided, at least in theory, a valid practical solution to a variety of long-accumulated

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[15] One of the most scandalous incidents involved the Head of the Federal Agency for Education Victor Bolotov, who in 2004 was accused of gross waste and embezzlement of federal funds earmarked for the launch of the UNT.

structural weaknesses of the system. It signified a strong government's commitment to enhance educational equity and introduce a mechanism of quality control into testing procedures. The international expert community saw the UNT as an integral part of a larger systemic reform, which had great potential for creating equal opportunities for access to higher education, preventing corruption, and making higher education a more demand-driven industry. The UNT has allowed school leavers to send in their results to several universities at a time, which effectively increased access to higher education for students from remote areas. Research has shown that with the introduction of a unified national exam, first-year students' social background has significantly diversified (OECD 2007, Bolotov 2005, Reshetnikova 2003). The proportion of students from families of low economic background and from remote rural areas has also increased (Efendiev & Reshetnikova 2003). An OECD survey, conducted in a number of Moscow and regional higher education institutions, revealed that the results of the UNT correlate with student achievement within the first study term, suggesting its strong scientific base and predictive power (OECD 2007). According to the Head of the Federal Monitoring Agency for Education and Science, Viktor Bolotov, the correlation between the UNT scores with first year university examination grades appear to be higher than with the grades of traditional oral examinations (Bolotov 2008). Lenskaya and Bolotov (1997: 5) provide a fair assessment of the role of the UNT in the standardisation reform:

> 'The system of external standardised exams, regardless of all the criticism, has played a very important role: it has dealt with the obsolete, subjective and time-consuming system of dual, mostly oral exams, upon leaving school and entering university. This has brought more equity of opportunities, particularly for students of remote Russian regions who can now enter the best universities without spending a lot of money on travel. External exams have provided excellent feedback into the system, allowing decision makers to compare schools and university entry requirements. These are exams that play the role of outcome-based standards today: in the absence of well-defined and measurable school standards, they offer a set of norms school graduates must comply with and do so

in a transparent, open form. There is room for improvement as regards to quality of individual test items and elements of procedures, but the benefits far exceed the drawbacks.' [English translation by the authors]

'The unprecedented endeavor' (standard.edu.ru) of the standardisation reform has caused unprecedented public outcry, with the word 'standard' becoming the buzzword of the reform debate since the early 2000s. The debate has been dominated by controversy, confusion, and resistance. Despite having been in use for over two decades, the very term 'standard' continues to be highlighted as problematic by proponents and opponents of the standardisation agenda. The idea of educational standardisation is castigated as 'bad,' 'unfortunate,' 'anglo-centred,' 'Anglophone,' 'copied from English,' 'foreign' and 'inorganic.' In the public discourse, the term is commonly referred to as 'an empty box,' 'a fashion whim' and 'just a label' that has been 'artificially implanted' into the system. Curricular standards are criticised for being void of essence ('redundant,' 'empty,' 'just a package,' 'a pretty box that's empty inside') or too abstract and declarative ('resembles an agitprop'), while the standardised test has come to epitomise a 'three letter outrage' (Smolin 2005b: 41). Sergei Lisovsky, an influential public figure and Senator of the Russian Parliament's Federation Council, has called the standardisation reform a 'total destruction of the quality of education in Russia (Interview to *The Teachers' Gazette*, January, 2006). Both reform measures are commonly perceived among the public as a by-product of 'bureaucratic games' played by an incognito pro-Western law-maker, as illustrated by popular quotes below:

> 'Could someone please tell me, what exactly was wrong with the Soviet education and why it was necessary to trade it for the American system?' (kid.ru)
> 'The new standard destroys the best of what was created within Soviet and Russian system of education.' (rol.ru)
> 'Does the educational standard only exist in some bureaucrat's head?' (September the 1st Newspaper headline, August, 2007)

The debate often evokes suspicion of Western conspiracy and is framed in terms of 'brain drain,' 'debility of the nation,' and 'total destruction of education':

> Doesn't the pedagogical elite understand that the so-called 'standardisation' of Russian education to the global requirements only strives to facilitate brain drain to the dying Europe and the USA?' (uchportal.ru)

Conceived of as a product of pernicious western influence, the standardisation reform is seen as a 'hindrance' to the educational process ('burden for the teacher,' 'makes it impossible to teach'). Sarcastic statements such as 'What are these labored standards?' and 'The tale of woeful standards' have routinely made headlines of national newspapers.

Contrary to the official rhetoric of standards as being conceptually richer than the familiar 'curriculum' (*programma*), the interpretation of education standard as merely a 'fashionable,' 'Anglophone' synonym for 'curriculum' is pervasive in the public discourse. Anti-reform Duma deputies have called educational standard 'just an official letterhead' for the existing requirements to educational content (Parliamentary hearings transcript, 2009). Russian pedagogic community has castigated the standardisation reform as 'nothing but good old school curriculum formulated in exceptionally dry, inconcrete and generic terms' (Review of Educational standards by the Council of Classical Gymnasium No. 610, St. Petersburg, reprinted by pedsovet.org, 2010).

Along with overwhelmingly negative perception, the interpretation of the term 'standard' is surrounded by widespread confusion. The term is commonly preceded by the modifier 'so-called,' and its precise lexical meaning is explicitly problematised in all domains of the reform debate, from lay public discussions to op-eds and policy-making debates in the Duma. The

confusion revolves around two points commonly raised in the reform debate: ‘what does the word ‘standard’ mean’ and ‘what comprises an educational standard’? In regard to the first point of controversy a question posed by a regional school teacher on one of the popular pedagogical forums sums up the main point of confusion: ‘Does “standard” mean minimum, maximum [of educational content] or something in between?’ (pedsovet.org). The second predicament is poignantly expressed by a prominent Russian politician and an opposition leader Oleg Smolin. In assessing the progress of the standardisation reform over the period of fifteen years, Smolin (2005: 61) writes,

> ‘Instead of a standard for the conditions of educational process guaranteed by the state (that is, a set of requirements that the school, parents, higher education institutions, or students can put forward *to* the state) we are presented with something different: ‘requirements for the conditions for the implementation of basic educational programmes.’ Whose requirements? For whom? It is clear from the context of the law that these are state requirements *for* the school, which is exactly the opposite of what the community expects.’

In summary, the overwhelming public attitude to educational standards has to date remained that of perplexity and skepticism. Representative of the public sentiment is a metaphorical statement by Anatolii Gasparzhak, Rector of Moscow Higher School for Social and Economic Sciences, that hit newspaper headlines in 2010: the new educational standard resembles ‘a marble telephone from the Soviet-era fairytale “Old Khottabych”: it looks like a telephone but it doesn’t ring.’ The analysis that follows probes into cultural reasons behind the controversies outlined in this section. I begin by probing into the public confusion over the interpretation of the term and exploring the meaning of the word ‘standard’ through the analysis of the lexical dimension of the debate

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5.2. ‘Minimum, maximum or something in between?’: lexical dynamics of the term ‘standard’

In order to trace the source of lexical confusion in the public debate, I conducted an NVivo-aided lexico-semantic analysis of the word ‘standard’/‘standards’ (*standart/standarti*). The findings presented here merit a brief methodological commentary. Lexical tokens have a wide range of fixed and flexible contextual meanings. Similar to its use in English, the term ‘standard’ is densely layered with linguistic and cultural nuances. Dictionary definitions include a range of lexemes as varied as ‘general principle,’ ‘state of things,’ ‘cliché,’ ‘pattern,’ ‘desired level,’ and ‘desired quality.’ These definitions carry many further judgment-laid overtones. Positive connotations include those of ‘ideal,’ ‘model,’ and ‘of highest quality.’ Neutral definitions cluster around the semantic field of ‘master copy,’ ‘norm’ and ‘gauge.’ Negative connotations are those of ‘cliché,’ ‘low,’ and ‘of lowest acceptable quality.’ Similarly, the adjectival meaning of ‘standard’ (*standartnii*) ranges in meaning from ‘meeting the highest standard’ to ‘meeting a certain standard,’ and further to ‘meeting the lowest standard.’

In addition to dictionary definitions, the word ‘standard’ carries a number of culture-specific connotations. Deeply associated with Soviet-time strict quality control of goods and services, it has long-standing positive connotations of exceptional quality. Such collocations as ‘national standard’ (*gosudarstvennii standart*) and ‘quality standard’ (*standart kachestva*) continue to be used as product labels and exploited in marketing campaigns in contemporary Russia. Examples are the ongoing TV talent show ‘Quality Standard’ (*Standart Kachestva*) and the internationally renowned vodka ‘Russian Standard’ (*Russkii Standart*). At the same time, similar to its use in the

English language (Alexander 2008), ‘standardisation’ (*standartizatsiia*) and ‘standardised’ (*standartizovannii*) carry predominantly negative connotations of de-personalisation and averaging-out.

Keeping these specificities in mind, I focused on the contextual ‘use-meanings’ and discourse-specific semantic valences (Lemke 1995) of the word ‘standard’ in a particular discourse formation – public reform debate. Using the search function within the data corpus, I identified instances of terminological use of the term in the context of the standardisation debate[16]. I then used the broader context of the debate, ranging from a sentence to a few paragraphs, to reconstruct the denotative meaning of the term. I marked up and coded the lexical value of the word and the domain of use (public, policy-making or official) in each individual instance. Finally, I sorted the results by lexical meaning and by domain of use. The lexico-semantic analysis revealed three fixed interpretations of the term ‘standard’ in the context of the standardisation debate:

1) Standard as a *principle of educational provision* aimed at ensuring fair distribution and a unified educational content. This usage is exemplified by the following statements made by the Minister of Education, Andrei Fursenko, at 2006 Parliamentary hearings:

   ‘The New Generation Standard will provide a balance of academic fundamentality and effective use of [educational] results for innovation development.’ (Transcript of Parliamentary hearings, 2006)

   ‘As a principle of education provision, educational standard will ensure a more efficient learning and testing schemes.’ (Ibid.)

[16] I excluded from the analysis fixed value-neutral dictionary usages, such as ‘general principle,’ ‘pattern,’ ‘master copy,’ ‘cliché,’ and ‘lowest/highest quality.’ I also left out individual interpretations as well as variations of the meaning in the professional jargon of law-makers in parliamentary discussions: for example, the use of ‘standard’ (singular) as a specific *normative act* legitimising government-set educational standards.

The interpretation of standard as a principle of educational provision is broadly in-line with the concept of standardisation established in official education policy documents, including the 2005 Concept for National Standards of General Education. Thus, the Concept defines educational standards as a principle of educational governance or a 'social contract' that involves a mutual responsibility between the state, society and individual:

> 'The new type of [social] relationship relies on the principle of mutual agreement between the individual, society and state in the elaboration and implementation of educational policies. This necessarily purports the assumption of liabilities (agreements) by the parties, a condition under which educational progress is made feasible. Thus, educational standard is a social contract that involves a balance of mutual liabilities as well as a balance of requirements.' (Concept for National Standards 2005: 10)

As a general principle of educational management, this usage encompasses all levels of education, from school to higher and professional education without distinguishing between them. As stated by an educational official,

> 'It is natural for a civilised and organised society to have some agreed-upon requirements in regard to educational standards: [for example] WHAT should and should not be considered part of [the system of] education, at least at those levels [of educational system], where systemic education has become a socially significant factor. The specific content of the educational standard is a separate issue.' (pedsovet.org)

As illustrated by the quotes above, the semantics of the word 'standard' in the official discourse is linked to the ideas of a 'social contract,' 'balance between the society and the state,' 'public consensus' and 'agreed upon requirements,' all of which suggest a broader, abstract meaning of a 'principle' or 'an element of the system.' This usage is almost exclusively limited to the genre of written and oral official discourse.

2) *Standard as minimal mandatory educational content*, including subject knowledge, practical skills, periods of study and learning outcomes to be set by the state and

complied with by educational institutions. This usage is best illustrated by the following newspaper headlines:

> ‘The state will only finance the standard of education’ [denoting minimal educational content]
> ‘Current educational standards are overloaded with scientific facts’ [denoting specific content of school curriculum]
> ‘The standard is being cut by 25%’ [denoting new regulations for periods of study, classroom hours and teacher salary rates]
> ‘Will our high school students receive the minimal standard’? [denoting minimal expected learning outcomes]

Illustrative of this usage in the policy-making domain is the title of the 2008 Parliamentary session on educational standardization, which laid grounds for new educational content, periods of study and learning outcomes: ‘Content of the standard for general education’ (*Soderzhanie standarta obshego obrazovaniia*). Another example is a quote by Dmitry Medvedev at the 2006 talk on ‘Priority National Project “Education”’:

> ‘Now on to educational standards. I started my talk today by stating that we should keep working on it. As the standards are being developed, I hope that, on the one hand, the content would be very specific. On the other hand, we should not try to cram all the multiplicity of life into them.’ (Transcript of the talk, April 2006, as cited by rost.ru)

As illustrated above, such usage is narrower in its lexical meaning than that of a ‘principle.’ Thematically, this usage is limited to the discussion of general secondary education reform. It may include the notion of standardised testing, insofar as testing is seen as an integral part of curriculum-setting. This usage is common in the mass media, as well as in oral political and public discourses.

3) Standard *as a set of compulsory and free-of-charge school subjects within the revised educational content.* Appearing in collocations such as ‘minimal standard’ and

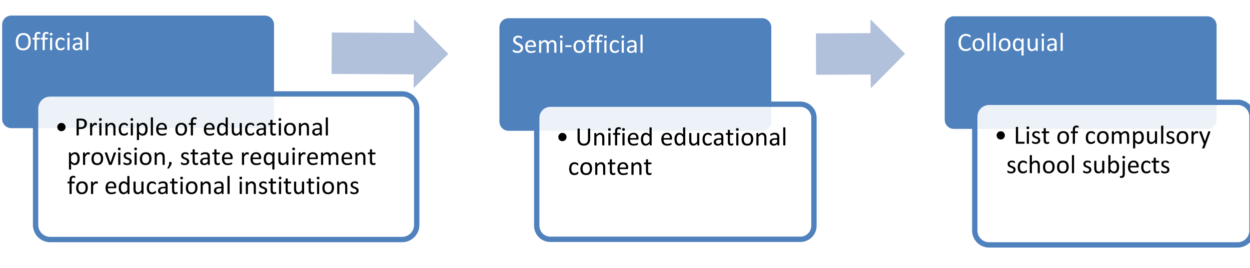
'mandatory standard,' this usage is exclusive to the context of redesigning secondary school curriculum[17]. Illustrations from the public discourse are provided below:

> 'If the standard is allegedly oriented to the future why is computer science (*informatika*) left out from the list of compulsory subjects?'
> 'I am also pro-minimisation of the standard. Too much is currently cramped into school disciplines, a critical revision is needed. Take, for example, one useless and worthless 'Phonetic analysis' in the Russian class.'

Widespread in the public discourse, this usage is not semantically connected to the broader meaning of 'standard' as a principle of educational provision and management.

Thus, the analysis of lexical dimension of the debate indicates a clear semantic specification that occurs as the term 'standard' migrates from higher (official) to lower (spoken) registers. Specifically, its meaning narrows down from a more abstract, formal 'principle' to a semi-formal 'educational content' and further to the colloquial 'list of subjects.' A summary of lexical analysis presented here is presented in Table V.

Table V: Lexical meanings of 'standard.'



[17] In the Russian language, in addition to 'substance,' 'essence,' and 'matter,' the word 'content' (*soderzhanie*) means 'a table of contents,' thus paradigmatically connecting the idea of educational standards to the idea of a *list* of themes or knowledge areas.

These lexical nuances provide a useful insight into the widespread public confusion over the meaning of the term: 'Does the standard suggest minimum, maximum, or something in between?' Indeed, in the official discourse, educational standard refers to the 'maximum' in the sense of a fundamental principle of educational provision, while in the colloquial use it may be defined as a 'minimum' in the sense of a 'minimal list of compulsory school subjects.' In the semi-official discourse it is, in fact, 'something in between' in the sense of 'unified educational content.' Thus, while sharing the terminology, the participants of the standardisation debate appear to draw on distinctly different interpretations of the word 'standard.'

It is important to note that lexical meanings are not isolated from each other but fluid and mutually-penetrating. The official usage trickles down into the colloquial domain, and the colloquial usage, in turn, finds its way into official statements. Thus, colloquial use is widely present in oral statements by high-ranking officials, as exemplified by the following quote by Minister of Education Vladimir Filippov:

> 'If the state provides the school with sufficient funding we will figure out ourselves what to teach in a physics, chemistry or a biology class without any nationwide standard.' (Transcript of Parliamentary hearings, 2002)

Otherwise rather isolated, the official written discourse has recently undergone certain rhetorical adjustments vis-à-vis colloquial interpretations of educational standard. While in earlier official statements educational standard was positioned as a 'principally new' educational phenomenon, the framing of the third generation standards (2005 - present) has incorporated colloquial usage:

> *'From standards containing a detailed list of topics within each subject that is compulsory for each student, there will be a transition to a new standard [comprising] requirements as to what educational programmes should be like, what results children should demonstrate, and what conditions should be created in schools for achieving these results.'* (Managing Quality in Education 2005: 49)

The conceptualisation of standard as a principle of governance, however, has been limited to the genre of education laws and written policy statements. Having clarified basic definitions, in the next section I continue to explore the sources of public confusion over the concept of educational standard. Specifically, I probe into two other questions raised in the public discussion in regard to official definition of standards as 'requirements': 'Whose requirements? For whom?'

5.3. 'Whose requirements? For whom?': an analysis of policy texts

5.3.1. The 'standard-requirement' hybrid

Since the introduction of the concept in the early 1900s, the notion of educational standards in the official policy framework has been invariably accompanied by that of 'requirements.' 'Standards' and 'requirements' have been contextually cross-referenced and inter-defined across policy statements. Thus, standards either '*consist of*' requirements *(v standarti vklucheni trebovaniia)* or *'include'* requirements (*standarti vkluchaiut v sebia trevbovania*). The tendency to define standards in terms of requirements and vice versa is clearly reflected in the most recent (2010) Law on Education, which defined 'standards and requirements' (*standarti i trebovania*), unifying them as a single term. While standards is a relatively novel idea in Russian educational discourse, requirements (*trebovaniia*) is a familiar concept that draws on the notion of rigid institutional accountability within a Soviet party-state. Such contextual amalgamation of two disparate concepts has legitimately triggered public concerns over the nature of proposed educational requirements.

In order to answer these questions, I have carried out a grammatico-semantic analysis of official standard-setting documents within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). SFL interprets meaningful grammatical features, including passive/active modes, present/absent agentalisation, omissions, synonymy and others, in relation to their social meanings. Drawing on SFL, I used patterns of grammatical association between the two terms to reconstruct the social relations and identities underlying the notion of 'standard-requirement.' To this end, I have performed an NVivo-aided search of data corpus for the word 'standards' ('standard') and marked up instances of its use vis-à-vis 'requirements.' I then scrutinised each token for meaningful linguistic features within a broader context of a sentence or a paragraph.

The analysis has revealed the following significant patterns of use. The default lexical template used is a fixed collocation 'federal state educational standards and requirements' (*federalnie gosudarstvennyie standarti i trebovania*)[18]. Grammatico-semantic analysis of the collocation suggests that standards and requirements are employed by the official discourse as *contextual synonyms,* i.e., words that are not synonymous with each other in semantics, but act effectively as synonyms in a certain institutionalised context. Linguistic evidence supporting this observation includes two main sets of argument: semantic and syntactic. From the perspective of semantics, I have identified a number of variants of the template collocation, within which a re-positioning of the main and the subordinate members does not affect the meaning of the phrase. Thus, throughout written policy discourse, the default template 'federal state educational standards and requirements' spins off into a number of lexical combinations, including:

[18] 'Federal state' (*federalnii gosudarstvennii*) here is a literal translation of the phrase. While in other contexts 'federal' and 'state' act as synonyms in the sense of 'national,' in the context of educational standards a distinction is made between 'federal' referring to 'Russian Federation' and 'state' referring to 'national.'

- ‘educational standards and federal requirements’ (*obrazovatelnie standarti i federalnie trebovania*),
- ‘requirements of federal standards’ (*trebovania federalnih standartov*),
- ‘federal state educational standards based on federal state requirements’ (*federalnie gosudarstvennie obrazovatelnie standarti na osnove federalnih gosudarstvennih trebovanii*).

Used as synonyms across policy texts, semantically, all of these pairings refer to the notion of ‘educational standards.’ Contextual coupling of the two terms is so strong that the template collocation, as well as its variations, is used throughout policy discourse as a *set phrase* in the context of international standards, as in ‘international standards and requirements.’

A similar phenomenon is manifested at the syntactic level. Within the said pattern, ‘standards’ and ‘requirements’ appear connected with either a comma or a conjunction, including ‘or,’ ‘and,’ and ‘as well as,’ as in the following examples from the 2010 Law:

> ‘State control over educational quality in organisations engaged in educational activities located on the territory of the Russian Federation [is put in force] in accordance with *federal state educational standards, federal state requirements* (...)’
>
> ‘In case an educational organisation is found to have violated the requirements *of the federal state educational standard **or** federal state requirements* (...)’
>
> ‘in accordance with *the federal state educational standard **and** federal state requirement*’
>
> ‘The new scheme provides continuity between supplementary professional programmes and *federal state educational standards for professional education **as well as** the requirements of professional standards*.’

Additionally, the term ‘requirements’ is consistently positioned in brackets in the function of *clarification or definition*:

> ‘(...) identical or thematically similar educational programmes within the same *federal State educational standard (federal state requirements).’*

While requirement is presented as a contextual synonym of standard, the lexico-grammatical distribution of the two terms suggests a dominant role of the former. Normally, in terms of

linguistic government, i.e., grammatical relationship between the word and its dependent, the words 'standard' and 'requirement' have different distribution patterns in the Russian language. For example, although both standards and requirements can be *met* (*sobliudat'*) or *violated* (*narushat'*), these particular verbs are used predominantly in collocation with 'requirements' and not with 'standards' (Lebedeva 2003, Denisov 1983, Krasnykh 2001). Throughout the official policy discourse, however, linguistic governance is consistently determined by the 'requirement' component of the pair, suggesting its stronger semantic position within the collocation. In summary, lexically, grammatically, syntactically and idiomatically 'standards' and 'requirements' appear to be semantically merged in the official discourse, with the 'requirement' component lying at the core of official definitions.

5.3.2. Agents of the standardisation paradigm

The above speculations lead to the second aspect of confusion within the public debate: 'Whose requirements are they and for whom?' To rephrase within the parameters of this study, 'which agencies are seen as accountable for implementing state-set requirements within the official standard-assurance paradigm'? This sub-section investigates the discursive texture of laws and official policy statements in terms of the allocation of agents in the proposed standard assurance paradigm. I argue that although the official discourse sidesteps clear definitions, the underlying representation sustained by discursive and linguistics means is that of educational standards as government-set requirements to educational institutions.

The official standard assurance paradigm features three agencies: the state, the educational institution and the learner. Their precise roles and responsibilities are not legislatively defined and are only loosely described in various official statements. The relationship between the agencies is typically framed as follows:

> 'The educational standard (...) set by the *state* serves as a guarantor, or an indicator, of the [desired] level of national [educational] development, as well as of the degree of responsibility placed on the *learner*. Goals [of education], standardised requirements, landmarks, systems of assessment and control are set at the state level. Norms and conditions guaranteeing the fulfillment of educational needs [of learners] are established [at the level of the state]. *Educational institutions and teachers* are given an opportunity to participate in designing educational programmes and curricula (*uchebnie plani i programmi*) as well as in defining educational content, the sequence of courses and [teaching] methodologies. Thus, standards become the basis for a free organisation of education. A national system of education with a predominantly regional (local) level of management is thus potentially established.' (2010 Draft Law)

Despite the explicit emphasis on its guaranteeing and regulating role, the state is virtually removed from the paradigm as an active agent. This is achieved through a number of de-agentalisation techniques. As illustrated above, as the *logical* subject of a sentence, the state appears in the grammatical position of an *object* in passive constructions ('educational standards are set in accordance with state requirements,' as opposed to 'the state sets educational standards in accordance with state requirements'). Instead, 'standards' consistently appear as the *subject* in place of a human or institutional agency: 'standards set quality criteria' and 'standards ensure educational quality.'

Further de-personalisation of the standard-assurance process is achieved by replacing 'standards' with 'standard-setting procedures,' as in the following quote from the 2010 Law:

> 'The *procedure* for designing and setting federal state educational standards is defined by the Government of the Russian Federation' [in lieu of 'federal state standards are defined']

As a result, although, thematically, the government continues to be positioned as a regulating agent, syntactically it is hidden behind the 'standard-requirement' hybrid.

Through the techniques of de-agentalisation educational standards are objectified and viewed as mechanisms for both guaranteeing and evaluating educational quality. Consequently, the constitutive role of the government (setting the standards and ensuring their nationwide implementation) is downplayed and its inspecting role (setting requirements and controlling the degree of compliance by educational institutions) is highlighted, with the official rhetoric shifting between quality assurance and quality control paradigms depending on the pragmatics of the immediate context. Thus, on the one hand, standards are positioned as quality *assurance* mechanisms:

> 'Quality of education in organisations involved in educational activities is ensured through the implementation of federal state educational standards and federal state requirements (...)' (Concept for National Standards 2005)

On the other hand, educational quality is also evaluated against the set standards:

> 'Federal state educational standards and federal state requirements (...) are the basis for the objective assessment of the educational quality (...)' (Concept for National Standards 2005)

By virtue of controlling educational quality at the input and at the output, standards are effectively positioned at the centre of the quality assurance paradigm, while educational institutions are assigned the executive role in the implementation of standards.

Educational institutions, in turn, are also hidden behind a non-agency of 'educational programmes.' Instead of educational institutions, 'educational programmes' consistently appear in the position of the subject/active agent:

> 'Basic educational programmes (...) *are required to ensure* the attainment of learning results by students (...), in accordance with federal state educational standards.' (Concept for National Standards 2005)

The final link in the standard assurance paradigm - the student - is also effectively de-agentalised. In lieu of a human agency, 'student preparedness,' 'the attainments of learning results,' and 'educational results' are found in active constructions:

> 'State (final) attestation is a form of assessing the relevance of the level and quality of *student preparedness* against the requirements of the federal state educational standard for learning results (...)' (Concept for National Standards 2005)

In allocating active positions to *processes* and *results*, the official standard assurance paradigm consistently masks institutional and human agents behind passive syntactical constructions. The emerging standard assurance paradigm appears to be completely de-agentalised:

A common feature of a technocratic discourse, de-agentalisation serves to obfuscate social actors and their responsibilities (Lemke 1995: 63).

In summary to the section, educational standards, as it emerges from the official paradigm, are effectively presented *government-set requirements for educational institutions*. The public confusion appears to mirror the lack of conceptual clarity in the official narrative about the distinction between educational standards and state-set requirements as well as about precise roles and responsibility of various educational stakeholders in the standard assuring process. As a 'measure of all things,' educational standards are positioned at the hub of the standard assurance paradigm, with the government and the state virtually removed from the paradigm as a quality assuring agency. At the same time, ambiguous policy language, marked by emissions, lexical

inconsistencies and concept substitutions between ‘educational standards’ and ‘government-set requirements’ serves to implicitly reinstate the controlling role of the government in educational matters.

Thus far in this chapter I have explored the notion of educational standards from a lexico-semantic perspective. In tracing sources of public confusion over the definition of ‘standard,’ I have established that the dialogue between the top and the bottom is hampered by differences in the basic interpretation of the term, as well as by the conceptual opacity of the official narrative. As I argue in the rest of this chapter, underlying mixed government rhetoric and widespread public resistance is a struggle of larger ideological frames of reference. Specifically, I probe deeper into the conceptual dimension of the debate and demonstrate that various interpretations of the term ‘standard,’ coupled with differing value judgments, stem from larger culture-specific interpretative frames. For the purpose of presentation, I will discuss these frames under two overarching themes: state control and pedagogy.

5.4. The ‘double standard’ of state control

In the public discourse, the general notion of standards receives two distinct ideological interpretations. The first interpretation sees educational standard as *obligation* of the state to provide quality and free-of-charge education to all citizens. This frame draws on that of a welfare state, where the state serves as the principal agent of the quality assurance paradigm. Education here is viewed as a public good and its fair, uniform and free-of-charge distribution is considered solely a responsibility of the state. Within this interpretative frame, the familiar Soviet-era

educational model serves as a conceptual point of reference for the novel term. This frame is activated with a reference to state's 'duty' (*dolg*), 'obligation' (*obiazannost'*), and moral responsibility (*moralnaia otvetstvennost'*), as shown in the example below:

> 'I consider educational standard a *duty* (*objazannost'*) of the government to provide quality education nationwide. This is the only function the standard should have. That said, our government, that is, the high ranking bureaucrats in power, will try to cheat their way out, as they always do. We need to keep a vigilant eye on the government so that it doesn't wriggle its way out of its *responsibilities (otvetstvennost')* and we need to cut short its attempts to free itself of the responsibility it is absolutely obliged to fulfill.' (A teacher, *The Teacher's Gazette,* May, 2007)

'Standardisation,' in turn, is interpreted as nationwide delivery of an educational provision of the *highest* quality, with 'standard' (adjective, *standartnii*) signifying both 'unified' and 'of utmost quality':

> 'Russia needs a unified educational standard compatible with the requirements of higher educational institutions, unified textbooks and unified programmes. In the Soviet days people educated on this basis were considered the most educated people in the world.' (A parent, *The Teacher's Gazette,* May, 2007)

The 'state obligation' frame of reference is marked by the idealisation of the Soviet past and the sentiment of nostalgia for 'the best education in the world.' While the overall interpretative frame is largely positive, it is often overshadowed by an appeal for vigilance over the actions of the government.

By far predominant, however, is the negative interpretative frame of the standard as a mechanism of exercising state control over education. Here, educational standard is interpreted as an *accountability requirement* lodged by the state to educational institutions. Within the negative frame, the new academic standards and the Unified National Test are interpreted in terms of 'corrals,' 'bounding boxes,' 'muzzles on academic freedom,' and 'merely bureaucratic games.'

Both are seen as an unnecessary burden on the pedagogue and a hindrance to the development of an educational institution:

> 'Generally speaking, there is no need for an 'educational standard.' It is only needed for the bureaucrat. The job of the bureaucrat is to determine whether I am 'standard' or not. To be included into the list of the 'standard' you would be expected to bribe up the law-maker. Whilst in real life the standard is absolutely useless. Rural schools don't meet a lot of standards but they are still doing fine. Standard, in the end, is just a box into which the bureaucrat wants to squeeze the whole shebang.' (A teacher, *The Teacher's Gazette*, August, 2006)
> 'It looks as if the Unified National Test has been designed with the sole purpose of hampering the process of assessment, in order to satisfy a whim of an incognito law-maker.' (A parent, ege.ru)
> 'And who is going to live and work according to these standards - some incognito 'professionals'? Aren't they no more than usurpers who have appropriated a right to dictate [the rules] in the areas where they are not more competent than others?' (A commentator, *The Teachers' Gazette,* October, 2007)

As illustrated in the examples above, the standardisation reform is perceived as an invention of an anonymous bureaucrat. It is said to have been legitimised by the state as a means of monopolising educational sector and exerting centralised control. Standardisation reform is interpreted within this frame as equalising educational opportunities and unifying educational content on the basis of *lowest* acceptable quality. Such interpretation is underlined by a persistent metaphor of a prison or a livestock corral where the masterminds of the reform are portrayed as 'prison guides,' 'usurpers,' or 'herdsmen':

> 'Our efforts to oppose the standardisation reform are as ridiculous as asking a prison guard for a relaxation of a confinement regime. The objective of the government is to dictate how to live our lives, what to teach our children and so on. By merely protesting against this particular document [the 2010 law on education] we, in principle, admit the right of the government to order us around. Therefore, if we are to protest, we should be protesting not so much against this particular law on educational standard but against the right of the state to standardise our lives.'

In opposing the reform, the public narrative commonly evokes negative connotations of mass production:

> ‘Standardisation allows for cheap mass production and the standard makes it possible to stick a Taiwanese-made notebook into a home-made electric socket.’
> (An observer, ege.ru)

Conceptualised in terms of ‘a manufacturing standard,’ standardisation reform is seen as incompatible with the domain of Russian education. It is appraised in extremely negative and judgment-loaded Russian terms: ‘*uravnilovka*’ (averaging out, depersonalisation), ‘*vseh pod odnu grebenku*’ (one size fits all, literally: to groom everyone with the same comb), ‘*shtampovka*’ (assembly line production), ‘*protsentomaniia*’ (manic race for percentage rates). ‘Standard’ (adjective) is referred to as ‘routine,’ ‘stereotypical,’ ‘mass-produced,’ ‘impersonalised’ and ‘mediocre.’ Standardised curriculum and testing are said to lead to ‘mass production,’ ‘robotisation of the student,’ and ‘debility of the nation,’ turning Russia into ‘the West’s appendage for sourcing raw materials.’ This frame of reference often evokes public suspicions of government conspiracy. It is feared that the hidden agenda of the standardisation reform is to bring up a ‘brainless robot’: a uniform product of an ‘educational McDonalds’ programmed to perform a limited set of industry-driven tasks.

As follows, the interpretative frame described above broadly corresponds to the idea of ‘standard as requirement’ advanced by the official discourse. However, public perception is dramatically different from the official one in terms of their value proposition. While the official discourse promotes the newly introduced educational standard as a panacea to the systemic issues of quality and equity, the public discourse portrays it as the *cause* of inequality and the quality crisis. In popular public perception, the new educational standard has caused systemic setbacks detrimental to both educational institutions and individuals. By ‘obeying’ and ‘succumbing to’ the new standards, schools have ‘lagged behind’ or ‘have fallen behind the global progress’:

> 'In Europe and the US, educational institutions are in a healthy competition with each other, while in Russia schools and universities, both private and state, are forced to obey standards sanctioned by the bureaucrats. I believe this is what's behind recent setbacks in terms of quality, equity and technology.' (A teacher, pedsovet.org)

Thus, one could argue that, in terms of evaluative framing, standard in the meaning of '*state duty towards*' becomes an antonym for the standard in the meaning of '*state requirement for*.' Along the same lines of reasoning, standardisation reform is believed to have hampered personal and professional development of individual students by imposing the 'one size fits all' approach on the learning process:

> 'Having passed the UNT and fit into a certain 'standard,' the student is left with a limited scope of educational opportunities.' (ege.ru)

This interpretation of educational standard as a straightjacket for academic and civic freedoms has served as a backbone for the discourse of resistance to the standardisation reform. The two interpretative frames discussed in this section are summarised in the table below.

Table VI: Public perception of educational standard: state obligation versus state requirement

state obligation	state requirement
Standard is a model of excellence, the **highest** quality	**Standard** is the **lowest** acceptable quality
Educational standard is a public good and its assurance is an **obligation** of the state	**Eductional standard** is minimal unified centrally controlled educational curriculum
Standardisation is free of charge nation-wide provision of education of highest quality	**Standardisation** is a control device, state requirement designed to hinder free educational development

In the public domain the conflict between these two frames is commonly actualised through the lexical clash of the borrowed *standart* and domestic *programma*, the latter meaning 'comprehensive curriculum.' Contrary to the official framing, the idea of standard in the public

mind does not complement but principally opposes the concept of '*programma.*' A typical argument by the opponents of the standardisation reform is construed as follows:

> 'We never had [the idea of] 'standards,' we've had 'curriculum' since the dawn of time. Now they've come up with all these bureaucratic games: the Anglophonic 'standard' is now pronounced as that of a higher rank than the Greek 'programme.' But the new term does NOT carry the meaning that was imbedded in the programme. It makes it impossible for the teacher to work.' (A teacher, *The Teachers' Gazette,* April, 2007)

As follows from the quote, the 'anglophonic'[19] *standart* is perceived as new and foreign, while the old, domestic ('from the dawn of time') *programma* is seen as organic and authentic. The lexical clash in this example reveals an underlying conceptual clash. The indigenous '*programma*' is moored within the positive 'state obligation' frame, where it is associated with comprehensiveness, fundamentality and high quality of educational provision. The 'anglophile' standard,' however, evokes the 'state control' frame, where the term is associated with low quality, superficiality ('does not carry the [same] meaning') and excessive bureaucracy ('merely a bureaucratic game,' 'makes it impossible for the teacher to work').

This conceptual opposition is not limited to public discourse but is sustained in the official discourse as well. Consider, for example, a statement by a Ministry of Education official at a parliamentary session:

> 'We insist that the standard does not serve as a 'muzzle' on academic freedoms. On the contrary, it should provide opportunities for the realisation of these freedoms.' (Transcript of Parliamentary hearings, 2007)

In both public and official discourses, the 'new' standard is construed vis-à-vis the progressive Western educational model and in opposition with the 'old' one. However, the value orientations are reversed. The official narrative construes the 'new' standard as a guarantor of high quality

[19] '*Angloiazichnaia'*: literally, originating in the English language.

and academic freedoms and the ‘old and outdated’ *programma* - as a bureaucratic hindrance to educational development:

> ‘Not everyone understands that the state educational standard is not the same as school curriculum [*programma*] the home system is accustomed to. Curriculum covers everything that can possibly be taught; standards, however, cover the minimum that must be taught and that the school graduate is required to master. The idea of state educational standards was borrowed by the designers of the first ‘Law on Education’ (1992) from the experience of industrially developed countries with de-centralised systems of education, and [does] not [originate] from Russian history. Consequently, transitioning from unified curricula to standards does not mean limiting [as held by popular opinion] but expanding academic freedoms.’ (Deputy Alexndr Shadrikov, Transcript of Parliamentary hearings, 2002)

As illustrated above, a common rhetorical strategy of the official discourse is establishing a desired frame of reference by negating the undesirable one. Consider the following example from a state-issued monograph ‘Managing Quality in Education’ (2004: 123):

> ‘Popular opinion holds that ‘standard’ means ‘grey,’ ‘stereotypical,’ ‘undistinguished.’ Some people think that educational standards are only needed for bureaucratic managers to facilitate control [over education], while for teachers standards are no more than an obstacle to creative work. That is, of course, not true.’

However, by appealing to popular sentiment in an attempt to neutralise resistance, the official narrative simultaneously reinforces popular interpretative frames.

This sub-section highlighted a conceptual clash between two frames of reference pertaining to perceived liberating or limiting roles of educational standard. In addition to the ‘state obligation’ versus ‘state requirement’ dichotomy, the concept of standardisation has a pronounced pedagogical dimension. The idea of educational standard is interpreted in the public discourse as adverse to the essence of domestic pedagogy seen as profoundly ‘non-standard.’ The following

section sketches out the conceptual conflict by comparing the official and public framings of domestic pedagogy vis-à-vis educational standard.

5.5. Pedagogical standard: standard or non-standard?

As I have outlined in the background section of this chapter, pedagogical foundation of the standardisation reform has been defined by the government in terms of a revolutionary breakthrough on the basis of indigenous tradition of developmental psychology. The thrust of the rhetoric is accurately illustrated with a quote by one of the developers of the third generation standards, Director of Psychological Institute of Russian Academy of Sciences, Vitalii Rubtsov:

> 'The new standard is an [educational] training scheme within the framework of education for people capable, in various degrees, of independent creative work and creative activity. This principle was the point of departure for the designers [of the new educational standards]. Innovative society requires an innovative person. Unfortunately, the previous system of education did not have this particular objective. Instead, it had the objective of mastering knowledge, skills and competencies. Is this a good thing? It might be indeed. But the innovation society needs a different kind of person. The new educational standard for general education is a scientifically-based call for the formation of competencies that are, to a greater or lesser degree, characteristic of a creative personality. The scientific school that lies at the basis of this standard is the school of Vygotsky, Leontyev and their followers Elkonin and Davydov. This is the school of thought that treats the idea of personal development as the cornerstone [of education]. Perhaps for the first time the educational standard is based on fundamental sciences (…).' (standart.edu.ru)

Although references are made to renowned Russian developmental pedagogues, here and throughout the official discourse the relationship between the idea of educational standards and the indigenous notions of *vospitanie* remains undefined. Instead, the official discourse builds its rhetorical force on the divide between the progressive new and the old Soviet. In the quote above this is achieved through the invocation of the 'knowledge-skills-competencies' triad (*znaniia-*

umeniia-navyki), an emblematic marker of Soviet pedagogy. The triad serves to evoke the 'state machinery' frame within which the uniformity of educational instruction is seen as a depersonalised mechanism for mass-producing 'cogs' in a planned economy. The Soviet model is contrasted with the Vygotskian approach, which is presented as newly re-discovered and organically harmonious with the idea of educational standard. The reference to the prominent Russian education theorist is employed to signal the rootedness of the reform in domestic pedagogy, with its emphasis on *vospitanie* and development of the learner's creative potentials. Overall, however, beneath claims of novelty and originality, the official narrative operates in a pedagogical vacuum.

Outside of the official discourse the value poles are completely reversed. In pedagogical terms, the adjectival use of 'standard' (*standartnii*) is associated with the cliché, the impersonalised and the mass-produced, while 'non-standard' (*nestandartnii*) stands for the original, the unique and the creative. In a featured article of the Teachers Gazette, a renowned Moscow intellectual Ludmila Malenkova discusses,

> 'I have been dealing with moral education [*vospitanije*] all my life and I can not remain unemotional about the idea of *vospitanije* expressed in terms of 'educational standards.' A lot of new words are coming into use these days: 'technology,' 'monitoring,' 'service,' and 'standard.' It's impossible to remain unemotional about all these changes. Vladimir Levi[20] once wrote that there are no standard (*standartnii*) children. Vladimir Monomach was fascinated by the great variety of people's faces, and especially by the fact that each face is unique. In one of his letters to me, Dmitry Likhachev[21] wrote: 'Paradoxically, dissimilarity draws together, whilst similarity, sameness and standard-ness leave us indifferent. It's possible to fall in love with an unpretty face but it's impossible to fall in love with a standard, mass-produced face.' What we are doing here [by introducing standards into the system of education] is trying to come up with a method of die-casting or stamping (*shtampovka*). How pedagogical is that?' (*The Teacher's Gazette*, September, 2010)

[20] A renowned Russian writer and psychologist.
[21] A distinguished Soviet scholar, known as the 'guardian of national culture.'

In discussing the idea of educational standard, the passage invokes the notions of 'technology,' '*monitoring*'[22], and 'service' as an associative line that links *standart* to market economy production. These notions are dismissed by the author as inorganic to the humanistic pedagogical paradigm. The latter is evoked with a reference to influential Russian thinkers Vladimir Levi and Dmitrii Likhachev, whose views on education were rooted in the ideas of personal development through the learner's natural curiosity and creative potential. The backbones of those ideas is the notion of 'non-standard-ness' (*nestandartnost'*) and 'one-ness' in the sense of individual uniqueness of a human being. The 'non-standard' (adj.) in this paradigm is interpreted as 'one' or 'one of a kind,' while 'non-standard-ness' - as 'one-ness,' or 'equality within individuality.' These are opposed to the ideas of 'same-ness,' 'same as everyone' and 'equally depersonalised' – all epitomised in the notion of 'standard.' The 'same-ness' versus 'one-ness' distinction has a long-standing philosophical underbelly that has been described by the social philosopher Erich Fromm (Fromm 2000: 20-21):

> 'In contemporary capitalistic society the meaning of equality has been transferred. By equality one refers to the equality of automatons; of men who have lost their individuality. Equality today means 'sameness' rather that 'oneness.' It is the sameness of abstractions, of the men who work in the same jobs, who have the same amusements, who read the same newspapers, who have the same feelings and the same ideas. Contemporary society preaches this idea of individualised equality, because it needs human atoms, each one the same, to make them function in a mass aggregation, smoothly, without friction: all obeying the same commands, yet everybody being convinced that he is following his own desires. (...) Just as modern mass production requires the standardisation of commodities, so the social process requires the standardisation of man, and this standardisation is called 'equality.'

Along similar philosophical lines of reasoning, the statement by Ludmila Malenkova contrasts the ideas of 'non-standard-ness'/'one-ness' with those of 'standard-ness'/'same-ness.' 'Standard-ness' is interpreted within a knowledge-centred, rationality-oriented and outcome-based

[22] '*Monitoring*' here is a term transliterated from English, a synonym for the Russian *nabliudenie*.

pedagogical paradigm, where the sole purpose of education is to transmit to the younger generation the ready-made socio-cultural heritage of the adults. The metaphors of 'die-casting' and 'stamping' generates an image of the child as a *tabula rasa*, into which readily available set of beliefs and morals are imprinted by the educator. These metaphors are strongly reminiscent of long-standing domestic concerns over pedagogical violence most vocally expressed by Leo Tolstoy (Tolstoy 1989). Tolstoy called the knowledge-centred paradigm a form of 'moral despotism,' arguing that no learning can be achieved through putting the educator in a superior position and imposing a 'standard' procedure on the process of education. When teaching is merely knowledge transmission and the educator is merely a manager, claimed Tolstoy, the outcome of the educational process is akin to die-casting *(shtampovka)* or 'a tendency of one man to make another just like himself' (1989). Instead, Tolstoy promulgated and popularised humanistic education based on the cultivation of a creative and artistic personality through active, conscious and guided exposure to domestic culture by a pedagogue-humanist.

Although with a lesser degree of conceptual intricacy, the overarching philosophical contestation between standard and non-standard is reflected at the level of lay public discourse. Consider the following discussion of standardised testing by a parent of an undergraduate student:

> 'Personally, I think we put too much emphasis on standards. Our higher education produces graduates with *standard* thinking who are only able to repeat what they've learned by *rote learning*. In that case, why would we want to have imperfect *'standard'* humans, wouldn't it be better to simply *replace them with robots with artificial intelligence*? You would think robots will be more efficient. What we really need to think about is not how to test children but how to *develop the gift of creativity in them*. This will allow them to become professionals with new, *non-standard thinking.'* (ege.ru)

The interpretation of the 'non-standard' here is based on the idea of cooperative problem-solving through creative (non-standard) tasks (*nestandartnie zadachi*), resulting in independent (non-standard) thinking (*nestandartnoie myshlenie*). The standard, in turn, is unequivocally associated

with rote learning, 'robotisation,' and mechanic application of rules. Table VII below summarises conceptual tensions I have uncovered in this section.

Table VII: Non-standard versus standard

non - standard	standard
Non-standard (adj.) means creative, original, personalised, innovative, and capable of free thinking	**Standard (adj.)** means unoriginal, average, mass-produced and depersonalised
Teaching is creative work (*tvorchestvo)* **The teacher** is a pedagogue-humanist	**Teaching** is knowledge transmission **The teacher** is a manager
Curriculum (*programma***) is** based on active and independent acquisition of knowledge through creative development	**Educational standard is** based on mechanicism, excessive formalism, rote learning and depersonalised instruction

Notably, the clash of these opposing pedagogical frames is widespread within the oral official discourse, creating a polarising effect among the proponents of the standardisation reform. I will illustrate the workings of the opposition with an exchange during a plenary discussion at the State Duma involving two pro-reform policy-makers:

> 'Vladimir Shadrikov, one of the masterminds of the third generation educational standards:
> "As we know, 'standard' is translated from English as 'model,' 'etalon,' or 'master copy' that serves as an initial model for comparing similar objects. This is extremely important to remember. Some people tend to interpret 'standard' as a pattern (*shablon*) or, a certain - so to speak - dogma. We based the idea of [educational] standard on a model to be used to compare programmes, textbooks and other study materials. Therefore, standards are meant to provide unity of educational space through a comparison with suggested programmes and textbooks, as well as other study materials."
>
> Gennadii Yagodin, Duma Deputy:
> "Standard' is a bad word. Vladimir Dmitrievich here has tried to convince us that in English this word means something other than what it means in Russian. But the thing is, it's in Russia that we live in. We do NOT [emphasis in the transcript] want a standard student, or a standard pupil, or a standard teacher, or a standard engineer. The very word 'standard' is very off-putting."'

In interpreting the concept of educational standard, Deputy Shadrikov draws on the interpretative schema presented in the official discourse of the reform, where standard is positively framed as a useful tool of educational management. In his emotional response Deputy Yagodin draws on the popular interpretation of the same term, where standard is perceived as incommensurate with the local pedagogy. In discourse analytic terms, the two discourse formations are sharing the language, yet are not 'talking about the same thing' (Lemke 1995: 38). As a result, the policy-making debate often finds itself deadlocked over wordings and basic definitions. While the public discourse is relatively homogenous in its oppositional orientation as well as in its argumentative structure, the policy-making discourse simultaneously carries both official and

popular frames. Straddling the boundaries between the opposing frames, it is highly self-contradictory. Consider, for example, the following government statement:

> 'Do we need educational standards? Undoubtedly, we do. And not just in the system of higher education but in schools as well. Generally speaking, *standards force educational institutions to work in strict regimes* [**state requirement frame**]. Which *contradicts the very spirit of a university*, as universities have always been known for their *free thinking:* top-notch sciences have been taught there, *non-standard approaches and opinions have always been welcome* [**creative pedagogy frame**]. *Restricting educational process by rigid regulations won't allow for proper, quality, teaching of the subjects* (...) [**State requirement and state obligation frames**]. This will *work to the detriment of high educational quality* [**state obligation frame**]. Standards are needed, first of all, *for the purpose of accreditation and carrying out checks on the functioning of educational institutions* [**state requirement frame**]. The standard sets the *minimum* that educational institutions *are required* to provide [**state requirement frame].** (council.gov.ru)

This narrative represents the whole range of interpretative frames embedded into the texture of the official narrative. The 'state obligation' frame here clashes with the 'state requirement' frame; with both coming into conflict with the 'creative pedagogy' frame. This is reflective of the inconsistencies in the overall policy framework of the reform discussed in detail in the previous chapter. While nominally proclaiming humanistic values, the official discourse legislatively reinforces the paradigm of authoritarian state control. The domestic pedagogical tradition, based on the idea of 'non-standard-ness,' undermines the rhetoric of both. Figuratively speaking, while attempting to 'square the circle' the official rhetoric is 'bursting at the seams.'

5.6.Wholeness and fragmentation

The notions of educational standardisation, standardised assessment and quality assurance appear

to be reciprocally linked to the concepts of pedagogy and culture[23], with the humanistic pedagogical model of education seen as the *foundation of culture*. In discussing the cultural suitability of the standardisation reform, one Duma Deputy states,

> 'What are we essentially actually talking about here [in the discussion on educational standards]? We must preserve a certain educational core in school, a core of knowledge and skills that allows us to *preserve our culture, develop our culture, think independently, be able to think and to learn, as well as be willing to learn.* That's all it [the educational standard] is.' (Transcript of Parliamentary hearings, 2002)

Along the same line of argument, a school teacher argues,

> 'What exactly do the designers of the standardisation reform expect of Russian system of education? Standards are supposed to correlate with the *value system* which comes down to *one of the two*: nurture (*vospitat'*) a personality *or* breed one for the needs of the innovation economy.' (ege.ru)

Thus, in its appeal to domestic pedagogical and cultural values the public discourse sees the idea of 'standard' *a priori* incommensurate with the local value system in *any* of its various lexico-semantic variants: whether it is a tool for managing educational provision, state requirement for educational institutions or a novel pedagogical approach. In the words of one teacher participant of a pedagogical forum, 'the mistake of the government in regard to the modernisation reform lies in the fact that it is trying to formalise that which is principally non-formalisable in the public mind' (standard.edu.ru).

In drawing together findings presented in this chapter and in chapter IV, I suggest that the popular perception of modernisation reforms has been underlined by a powerful generative metaphor of *wholeness versus fragmentation*. Just as educational quality is perceived as a uni-

[23] The close relationship between education and culture in Russia has a *legislative* foundation: the constitution of the Russian Federation stipulates that as a social welfare state, the state is obliged to provide conditions for the free development of a human being, including such aspects as cultural and spiritual development as well as freedom of self-expression through creative work and participation in cultural life.

dimensional, absolutist and immeasurable quality of educational system, the issues of national curriculum-setting, schooling and testing are also conceptualised in holistic qualitative, rather than quantitative, terms. Thus, popular pedagogical discourse continues to see the process of learning and assessment as intimately subjective and imperceptible to standardised measurement:

> 'No standardised testing can assess the quality of student achievement better than the teacher through the *observation* of their students throughout the year.' (ege.ru)

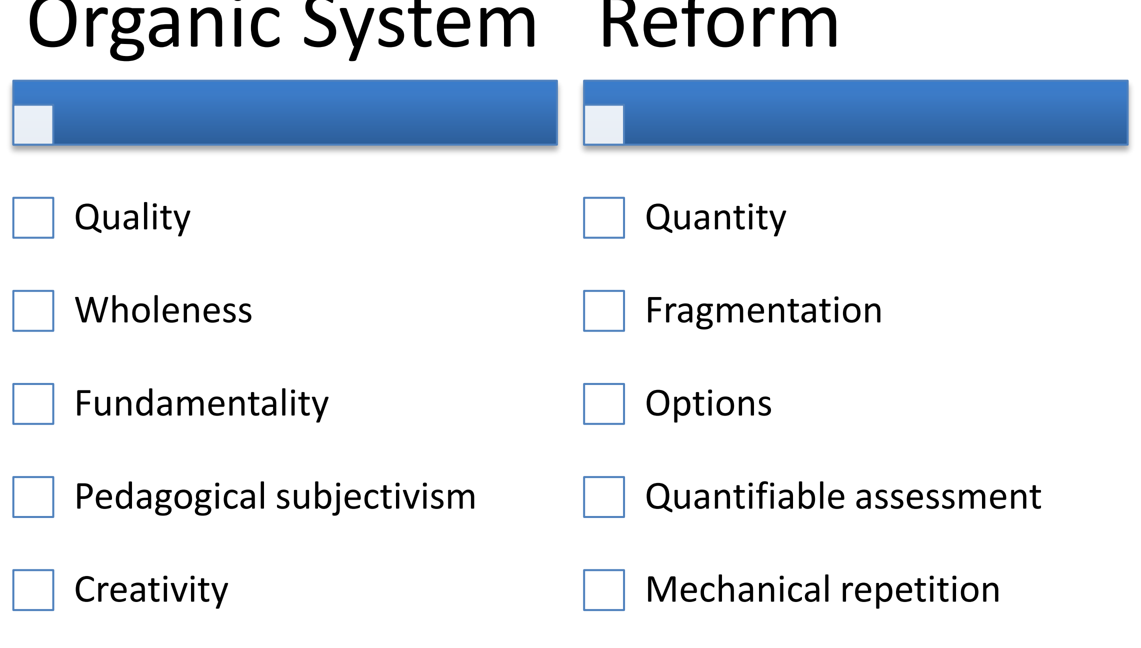
Drawing on the 'non-standard-ness' frame, popular pedagogy vehemently resists the idea of standardised outcome-based testing. Through a comparison with various forms of arts, such as the theatre, the idea of quantifiable outcomes is discarded as contradictory to the essence of educational quality:

> 'The very idea of 'standardised quality control' is absurd. It's as ridiculous as quality control at a Philharmonic Hall or a good restaurant.' (An observer, ege.ru)

The indigenous notion of 'non-standard-ness' reinforces the conceptualisation of educational quality as a holistic characteristic pertaining to the highest standard of educational provision and attainment. As a result, the very idea of objectivising and quantifying educational outcomes through the Unified National Test is conceived of as a disintegration of the learning process and a displacement of student individuality. The public discourse continues to see standardisation and quantification of educational quality as a major contradiction in pedagogical terms. In addition to the undifferentiated ever-creative process of assessment through subjective observation by the teacher, the idea of wholeness encompasses the indigenous idea of 'fundamentality,' embodied in the concept of the Greek *programma*. The perceived dismantling of the comprehensive *programma* through the introduction of curricular options appears to be interpreted in the public mind as fragmentation of the organic system through artificial intervention.

The *wholeness-fragmentation* metaphor appears to frame key reform oppositions I have identified in chapters IV and V: 'quality versus quantity,' 'fundamentality versus choice,' 'creativity versus mechanical repetition,' and 'subjectivity versus objectivity.' Ultimately, the modernisation reform itself appears to be metaphorically conceptualised in terms of breaking an organic system into isolated fragments, as summarised in table VIII:

Table VIII: Organic system versus reform



5.7. Conclusion

The present chapter has outlined various definitions and interpretations of educational standards in the official and public domains of the modernisation reform debate. I have exposed multiple

points of tension surrounding the concept at the linguistic, metaphorical and conceptual levels. I have demonstrated that *s*ynchronous use of the term ‘standard’ is characterised by a vertical diffusion of meaning, whereby while remaining within the semantic field of ‘educational content,’ it undergoes semantic narrowing as it trickles down from the formal into less formal domains of the reform debate. While the official discourse positions educational standard as a principle of educational provision, the public discourse interprets it as merely a reduced school curriculum. I have argued that differing interpretations of the term have impaired the reform debate at both public, policy-making and official levels.

Having explicated lexical ambiguities, I deconstructed conceptual frameworks within which particular meanings of ‘standard’ are instantiated. I have showed how through a de-personalisation of agents within the standard assurance framework the official narrative diffuses the responsibility for the implementation of educational standards and asserts controlling and inspecting roles of the state over educational provision.

I also presented an extensive analysis of the interpretation of educational standard in the public debate vis-à-vis the official framing. I have argued that the term ‘standard’ receives evaluative judgment of either ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ ‘suitable’ or ‘unfortunate,’ etc., depending on a particular conceptual frame evoked. I have identified two conflicting sets of frames within the standardisation debate: state control and pedagogy. One is associated with authoritarian pedagogy and state monopoly over education, while the other is rooted in the local pedagogical tradition of *vospitanie* through creative learning. I have uncovered a number of tensions in the interpretation of the idea of standard, including the oppositions ‘curriculum versus *programma*,’

‘standard versus non-standard,’ and ‘whole versus fragmented.’ Within these oppositions, one member stands for the ‘humane,’ ‘fundamental,’ ‘individually unique,’ ‘creative,’ ‘pertaining to quality,’ and ‘liberating,’ while another represents ‘superficial,’ ‘restricting,’ ‘stereotypical,’ ‘mediocre,’ ‘mechanistic’ and ‘lacking individuality.’ Whilst sharing these initial points of reference, the value points appear reversed in the public and the official discourses. The official discourse construes the progressive idea of educational standard in opposition to the ‘grey uniformity’ of Soviet-era schooling, while the public discourse castigates the standardisation reform as a total displacement of personality. Straddling contradicting frames of reference, the official discourse exhibits a considerable degree of inconsistency in its representation of educational standard. Despite repeated government’s attempts to reconcile the interpretative frames within a single narrative, self-contradictory official rhetoric appears to ‘bounce off’ (Lakoff 2004: 115) indigenous pedagogical frames.

CHAPTER VI

MONEY VERSUS THE SOUL: SCHOOLING AND NEOLIBERAL ECONOMICS

The present chapter examines issues pertaining to the relationship between education and the market economy. It explores the concept of education as a 'commercial service' and the associated concepts of money and economic gain vis-à-vis the spiritual makeup of Russian culture. Through a discursive analysis of public interpretation of economic reforms in education I will expose deep-seated ideological conflicts between the neoliberal and the traditional Russian worldviews as well as probe into obstinate public resistance to the ongoing process of educational commercialisation.

6.1. Background to economic reforms

The economic reform of the post-Soviet Russian education system began with the 1992 Law on Education, which established the legal foundation for institutional freedom in the management of funds and generation of revenues, as well as legalised tuition charges and commercial activities in public institutions. Educational institutions were now allowed to set up joint ventures and invest in securities, use self-generating resources, carry over funds from one fiscal year to another and lease equipment and venue space. Thus, unlike the 'software' aspects of the reform, the neoliberal blueprint for an economic makeover was substantiated by specific reformatory measures and was backed up legislatively.

With monetisation being the primary focus of reform, specific reform measures concerned both

micro-level economics of a given educational institution and large-scale structural adjustments. The micro-level solutions included the introduction of an assortment of costs relating to every-day school and university life. Educational institutions were encouraged to seek income from non-state sources and engage in entrepreneurial activities such as renting out facilities and venues. As a result, basic services, including printing and photocopying of classroom materials, after-school clubs and textbook provision, which had been formerly subsidised by the state, became widely monetised. The macro-level adjustments constituted various self-financing and self-sustainability mechanisms within educational institutions, the creation of private schools and fee-paying programmes, as well as the establishment of market-based teacher salaries and inter-school competition. These developments fuelled a boom in fee-paying education in private schools and higher education institutions. By the late 1990s public universities were receiving up to 20% of their revenues from tuition fees, and 10% to 20% from other educational services (Bain 2003). By the early 2000s undergraduate students enrolled on a fee-paying basis exceeded those financed by the federal budget. By 2004, 53.6% of undergraduate students were enrolled on a fee-paying basis, reaching an unprecedented level of 61.7% in 2007 - 2008 (mon.gov.ru, 'Statistics by Year').

In addition, a new financing scheme for general education was introduced, the so-called '*per capita* financing of educational services,' or 'money follows the student'. Instead of the traditional centralised budget allocation to schools by central government, the new scheme was based on a clearly specified formula with the primary basis being the number of individual students enrolled at an educational institution. The scheme was called for to address the issues of corruption, lack of accountability on part of school administrators, inefficient use of resources, and growing inequalities between different regions of Russia. By making student demand the

determining factor in the allocation of state resources, the government has *de facto* introduced the principles of school choice and inter-school competition into the system of general education.

In analysing these changes, education policy literature has focused attention on examining two aspects: the driving forces behind the reform, and its significance in transforming the local culture of schooling. Two main driving forces were identified as local micro-level adjustments prompted by educational institutions and the global neoliberal imperative adopted by the Russian government (Webber 2000, Bray & Borevskaya 2001, Karpov & Lisovskaya 2001, Smolin 2005, Gounko & Smale 2007, Bain 2010, Silova 2010). Policy analysts have argued that in the early reform period (1991 – late 1990s), much of the micro-level educational reality was shaped by spontaneous institutional adjustments to the 'shock therapy' socio-economic reforms of the early 1990 (Karpov & Lisovskaya 2005, Smolin 2005). The sudden withdrawal of the state from its patronal role in educational financing signified an unprecedented welfare retrenchment. Despite persistent rhetoric of a welfare state, the policies of 'guaranteeing' increasingly shifted towards 'steering at a distance' (Smolin 2005). By the mid-1990s, amidst the decline in resources formerly available through traditional channels of government financing, many educational institutions were operating on the 'leftover principle' of financing (Webber 2000). As a result, many economic developments were initially stimulated in the 'bottom up' manner, as a mechanism of survival in the face of an attempted rapid transition to market economy. Karpov & Lisovskaya (2001: 11) identify these early developments as 'mutations,' or 'spontaneous, adaptive, and historically predetermined reactions of the already existing educational institutions to the new environment.' Similarly, Scott (2002: 146) conceptualises the post-Soviet economic transformation in Russian education as a shift from 'liberal absolutism to emerging pragmatism.' Overall, policy analysts agree that the introduction of market mechanisms into everyday

functioning of educational institutions was somewhat chaotic (Webber 2000, Karpov and Lisovskaya 2001). Some observers (Karpov & Lisovskaya 2001, Smolin 2004; 2005) suggested that Russia's move towards market-based education was to a large extent caused by an economic necessity rather than a broader shift in public mentality towards neoliberal values.

The macro-level economic policies were initiated by multinational organisations and transmitted through the Russian neoliberally-inclined political elite (Bray & Borevskaya 2001, Gounko & Smale 2007, Bain 2010, Silova 2010). Since the early 1990s, the multinationals aggressively advocated the strengthening of the economic function of education and the elimination of transition-specific obstacles to a free educational market, while criticising the residues of a welfare state as having 'major deficiencies in terms of supporting a market system' (World Development Report 1996: 123). Throughout the 1990s, an extensive debate was taking place between Russian policy-makers and representatives of Russian academic community[24] about the influence of these macro-developments on the larger system, as well as the direction of the economic reform in general. The discussion continued into the late 1990s, when, following the 1998 appointment of Vladimir Filippov as the head of the education modernisation programme, the official policies took a sharp neoliberal turn. Similarly to the reforms of educational quality and educational standards, the neoliberal path of educational economics was presented by the Russian reformers as yet another imperative of the time, with market values quickly assuming the character of 'common sense.' Initially popularised by advocates of radical economism, such as Rector of Higher School of Economics Yaroslav Kuz'minov and economist Evgenii Yasin, the new policies were endorsed by the Putin and, later, Medvedev administrations. As part of the

[24] Representative from the academic community involved in educational policy negotiations includesd such renowned Russian educationalists as academicians Mikhail Davydov, Yurii Polyakov,Yurii Gromyko and Viktor Slobodchikov.

‘stabilisation’ reform, 2000 ‘Federal Programme for the Development of Education for 2000-2004,’ 2001 ‘Modernisation of Russian Education for 2010’ and ‘National Doctrine on Education for 2025’ were adopted, formally stipulating the establishment of market principles in education. These documents promoted a market-based approach to education, justified as ‘bringing the system on par with contemporary realities’ (Federal Programme 2000: 10). Such concepts as the educational ‘market,’ ‘commodity,’ ‘competition,’ ‘educational service,’ and ’consumer choice’ became part and parcel of the official discourse on education. One of the central concepts, education as ‘commercial service’ (*obrazovatelnaia usluga*) became to emblematically denote both the process of learning in general and a one-off commercial education-related activity.

In terms of their impact on traditional educational structures, most observers agree that the radical economic changes of the post-Soviet period have significantly and irrevocably reshaped the traditional fabric of education (Bain 2003, Smolin 2005, Gounko & Smale 2007). The new socio-economic realities, such as fee-paying programmes, private tutoring and paid electives, are belived to have effectively rendered intellectual capital a tangible economic service, altering the interrelation of Russia’s economic agents. Some commentators have gone as far as to suggest that late 1990s economic developments have *de facto* turned educational institutions into commercial enterprises (Smolin 2005) and that economic policies of the last decade indicate a clear shift from a supply-driven to a demand-driven model of educational provision (Bain 2003). Gounko & Smale (2007: 61), for example, asserted that a shift ‘decidedly away from the welfare toward the neoliberal state policy perspective’ has taken place in Russian education.

Other analysts, however, expressed serious reservations to pronouncements of market hegemony in Russian education (OECD 1998, Zajda 2003, Smolin 2005, Bibkov 2009). In analysing

neoliberal developments, some highlighted gross disparities between economic rhetoric and reality. Contrary to the market-based rhetoric of increased educational equality through greater choice, educational policies of the late 1990s - early 2000s are said to have resulted in increased socio-economic inequality and social exclusion (OECD 1998, Zajda 2003, Smolin 2005, Bibkov 2009). Policy analysts have argued that neoliberal economic policies prompted the development of an educational 'quasi-market,' chaotic growth of tuition fees, unprecedented closure of rural schools and severe social segregation of students based on parents' income (Smolin 2005, Bibkov 2009). With no proper educational infrastructure in place, such as school buses in rural areas, hundreds of 'failing' rural schools were cut off federal funding and forced to shut down (Dneprov 1998, Smolin 2005). Instead of providing the rural population with more choice and ensuring fair re-distribution of state funding across the nation, the *per capita* funding model is believed to have created a whole 'underclass' of young rural people with little educational aspirations or skills to contribute to their communities (Zajda 2003). 'As Russian society becomes increasingly stratified in terms of wealth, - argued OECD policy experts - Russian education is increasingly stratified in terms of opportunity. Educational choice remains limited for most children. Indeed, for many, real educational access and opportunity have diminished' (OECD 1998: 81).

While socio-economic impact of modernisation reform is an important policy issue, the discussion of economic reform in education appears to have sidestepped the equally important aspect of cultural ideology in the process of reform. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, in addition to socio-economic turbulence, a number of powerful ideological tensions have developed between new economic realities and traditional values have during the course of the reform, shaping and altering the global neoliberal scripts. I depart from the well-acknowledged

assumption of a conflict between the tenets underlying the traditional welfare and the new neoliberal models of educational provision (Gounko & Smale 2007, Khrushcheva 2000, Olssen et al. 2004, Harvey 2005, Chubb & Moe 1990). In socio-cultural terms, the 'cradle-to-grave' socialist socio-economic model treats education as a public good and presupposes free-of-charge, state-guaranteed egalitarian distribution of education. In contrast, the new neoliberal educational philosophy views education as a private good, puts faith in the individual and prioritises the economy over the state. It emphasises individual ability to maximise resourcefulness under competition and fosters the entrepreneurial spirit. In economic terms, the welfare model translates into heavy dependence on government funding with the state serving as a major resource provider. The neoliberal model, on the other hand, invariably implies institutional competition and user fees with minimal involvement of the state. From this perspective, the neoliberal view of educational market is antithetical to state guaranteed rights in education (Chubb & Moe 1990, Tooley 2000). How does a country travel a vast ideological distance from a social welfare state to a neoliberal one within the space of two decades? Or in Bertelsen's (1998: 131) words,

> 'In the embarrassed silence following the dissolution of socialist societies, is the hegemony of the market complete? Is there any space left for cultural struggle?'

Despite the obvious ideological schism the non-economic aspects of neoliberal modernisation reform in Russia are surprisingly understudied.

In light of the above considerations, this chapter aims to explore the ideological underpinnings and cultural embeddings of post-Soviet educational economics. More specifically, I will consider the following questions:

• To what extent has the neoliberal economic discourse been embraced by Russian educational stakeholders?

• Has education been 'commodified' in the neoliberal sense and how justified are the claims of 'neoliberal revolution' in Russian education?

• How are the pathways of culture and ideology interconnected and negotiated in the case of post-Soviet Russia?

In conceptualising economic aspects of the education reform in terms of culture and ideology I engaged with the 'cultural turn' in postmodern educational research (Ray & Seyer 1999, Green 1994, Bertlesen 1998). This approach embraces the idea of economic reality being made up of ostensibly non-economic cultural practices and treats the inter-relation of the two as 'a continuous reciprocal interaction and feedback loop' (Jameson 1991: 15). On the one hand, education is an instrument in the 'formation of ideologies and collective beliefs which legitimate state power and underpin concepts of nationhood and national "character"' (Green 1990: 77). On the other hand, educational systems are constantly re-modelled on the basis of new political and economic realities, serving to legitimate and reproduce its terms. In order to demonstrate how market-based educational economics played out in Russian culture I explore ideas and notions around the conceptual field of 'service,' 'consumer choice' and 'competition' in relation to educational provision. I probe into these concepts as sites of ideological contestation for securing cultural meanings in the process of discursive change, as well as trace ideological underpinnings in the interpretation of the terms in official and public domains. I conclude with a socio-cultural commentary on the culture-specific differences highlighted in the analysis. The following section

provides an account of the new educational order as it emerged from the official rhetoric of the economic reform.

6.2. The new educational order: education as a commercial service

In previous chapters I have shown how the official rhetoric of the past two decades has been increasingly shifting from 'provision' and 'guaranteeing' to 'control' and 'steering at a distance.' In arguing for neoliberal economics, the official discourse has further distanced itself from the welfare state model. It has maintained that the welfare state had been historically exhausted and that a new 'market of educational services' (*rynok obrazovatelnih uslug*) had emerged. The aim of the modernisation reform, therefore, has been positioned as 'catching up' with the economic *status quo*.

The new *status quo* appears to rest upon the relatively new principles of competition and choice. These two principles have been consistently employed as common rationales for the economic policies since the late 1900s, including such controversial measures as the abolition of state guarantees for government subsidies, the removal of federal quota of educational expenditures and tax relief, as well as the introduction of competitive secondary school salaries and *per capita* financing of schools. According to government officials, these principles have re-shaped the relationship between educational stakeholders, such as parents, students, educational institution, and the government. Parents and students were redefined as 'consumers' who are entitled to benefit from the new quality of education enhanced by market forces. The official discourse maintained that at the national level, the market enabled educational institutions to provide a range of choices that catered to students' individual aspirations:

> ‘The students are provided with more opportunities to choose individual learning trajectories as well as flexibly navigate competitive labour markets.’ (Minister Fursenko, 2000, mon.gov.ru)

> ‘Criteria for quality assessment should be made transparent so that the people can freely choose which educational institution they want to place their bets on.’ (Minister Fursenko, 2000, mon.gov.ru)

At the level of educational institutions, the forces of competition and choice were said to drive professional development of the teaching community, while competitive salaries incentivised teachers financially:

> ‘A teacher, whose students achieve good results, must receive significant stimulating financial rewards.’ (Our New School 2010)

The *per capita* method of state financing further stimulated intra-institutional competition:

> ‘The *per capita* model of financing will facilitate the implementation of the 'money follows the student principle,' which will stimulate competition on the educational market.’ (Minister Fursenko’s public statements over 2000- 2005, mon.gov.ru)

The competition between educational institutions were said to foster efficiency and excellence:

> ‘The most competitive institutions will be in greater demand and thus more economically successful.’ (Minister Fursenko’s public statements over 2000-2005, mon.gov.ru)

In the long run, educational institutions were designed to provide customer satisfaction through quality services, while concurrently maximising economic returns. Competition between individuals in the labour market incentivised students to succeed, as it induced creativity, self-reliance, initiative and individualism. Thus, competitive pressures were said to equally motivate schools, individual teachers and students to improve.

The representation of the state in the official reform narrative is consistent with the ‘state control’ paradigm discussed in chapter IV. The close involvement of the state in educational

affairs was justified through an appeal to protect and ensure quality and equality, until 'the market regulated itself.' The role of the state was portrayed as facilitating the completion of the commercialisation process that was already taking place, as well as empowering consumers to make informed, market-led choices. Similar to the rhetoric of the state as a guarantor against the 'non-quality,' the economic discourse framed existing inequalities as a result of individual, managerial or institutional inadequacy. It was suggested that those should be remedied through creating an even more competitive environment. Choice and competition were presented as forces that help identify 'quality' students worthy of further investment. For example, in his annual assessment of the impact of the state involvement in the educational market in 2009, Minister Fursenko declared,

> 'The developments of the past few years have proven that the state's strategy of putting stakes [betting on] on the strongest has paid back a hundred percent.' (mon.gov.ru)

The representation of the student in the context of economic reform has been notably different from that of a passive knowledge-receiver I described in chapter IV. Students were portrayed as rational and self-actualising agents able to 'identify their professional aspiration and design their educational trajectories accordingly in order to achieve personal and economic fulfillment' (mon.gov.ru). The student were reconceptualised as self-reliant and economically savvy agents governed by professional ambition. As consumers, they were said to be responsible for the market-led choices they make. Such representation of the student was marked by the use of 'fashionable' words, mostly borrowed from English language: 'entrepreneural' (*predpriimchivii*), 'socially mobile' (*mobilnii*), dynamic (*dinamichnii*), 'cooperative' (*sposobnii k sotrudnichestvu*), and 'enterprising' (*initsiativnii*). The Modernisation Concept for 2010 (15), for example, describes a customer of educational service in the following way:

> 'The changing society needs contemporary, educated, ethical (*nravstvennie*), enterpreneural people who are able to make independent decisions when faced with a variety of choices and to foresee potential consequences, who are able to cooperate, who are mobile, dynamic, constructive and who have a developed sense of responsibility for the well-being of their country.'

The official discourse navigated through various educational issues by switching back and forth between the representations of the student as a sovereign customer or a passive receiver of knowledge, focusing on one or the other depending on the immediate context. Personal qualities associated with traditional social welfare values, such as civic consciousness, spirituality, personal responsibility for others and love of the motherland, are interfused with those associated with neoliberal ones, including enterprise, self-reliance, self-interest and employability. The two blocks of qualities often appear in two distinct clusters separated by 'as well as,' as in the example from the Concept 2010 below:

> 'As our educational priority, moral upbringing [*vospitanie*] must become an organic part of the learning process integrated into the general course of education. The principal objective of moral upbringing [*vospitanie*] is the formation of civic consciousness, judicial awareness, spirituality and culturedness; as well as enterprise (*initsiativnost'*), self-reliance, tolerance, socialisation skills and adaptability in the labour market.'

As in the example above, claims of superiority of moral norms of *vospitanie* with its emphasis on non-material values go hand in hand with calls to create instrumentally rational, economically productive and competitive members of society. The neoliberal ideal of a harmonious, self-regulating educational market is not concerned with either potential ideological tensions or the gap between textbook neoliberalism and dismal educational realities. Instead, competition and choice are presented as organic solutions for a demand-driven, high quality 'educational service.'

Furthermore, contrary to government's continued declarations of commitment to free education, the official discourse of the reform appears to be 'colonised' (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999) by the concept of commercial educational service. Instead of demarking the 'free' and the 'paid-for,' the official discourse perceives of free-of-charge educational provision and the commercialised nature of the learning process as two self-evident goals of the modernisation reform. In his 2007 annual address to the State Duma, Minister of Education Fursenko stated,

> 'First off, I will outline the key points of the modernisation programme that I will be discussing in my presentation. These are the state provision of free-of-charge secondary education, improving the quality of professional education and increasing the marketability educational services.' (mon.gov.ru)

At the same time, despite the aggressive promotion of education as a commercial service, the official discourse has been exceptionally reticent about its constitutional status. The official narrative has consistently maintained ambiguity as to how the new educational market relates to the constitutional commitment to free education, as well as whether any kind of educational service, even fully subsidised by the state, fits the commercial paradigm. I illustrate this argument with the analysis of educational legislation between 1992 and 2011. Educational laws during this period display an increasing strengthening of contextual-synonymic relationship between the concepts of 'education' and 'educational service.' Thus, the 1992 Law on Education unambiguously employs the term 'educational service' in the context of legalising extra-curricular, paid-for educational activities (as stipulated in articles 13, 14 and 26 and 27). Legal documents of the mid-2000s use the two terms interchangeably and as contextual synonyms. 'Educational service' is employed in the sense of both a one-off commercial transaction and daily routine of teaching/learning or process of education in general. Consider, for example, the following statements from 2002 Concept for Modernisation:

- ‘The government is returning to education as a quality guarantor of educational services.’
- 'Educational institutions are liable to provide extra educational services.’

In the first statement, ‘educational service’ denotes ‘education’ in general, while in the second statement ‘educational service’ means specificially a paid-for tutoring session. 2010 Draft Law on Education also employs the terms interchangeably, displaying a clear preference for ‘educational service’ in the general meaning of ‘education,’ the former being used 30% more frequently than the latter. Such usage obfuscates the boundaries between free and paid-for sectors of education in economic, legal and ideological terms.

Further ambiguating the distinction, the 2010 Draft Law provided a formal definition of ‘educational service. It was defined as

> ‘a service [transaction] provided by an educational institution or an individual entrepreneur in designing and implementing educational activities as a result of which the learner completes an educational programme or an individual modules, which *does not incur conferral of a document allowing to continue education at the next level or start a professional career*.’

The final specification in this definition effectively excludes all formal degrees, state or privately issued, by secondary schools or universities, limiting the application of the term to ‘additional,’ i.e. extra-curricular, private and paid-for services, as initially specified in the 1992 Law. A separate definition was provided in the 2010 Draft Law for ‘*paid* educational services’ (*platnie obrazovatelnie uslugi*) defined as ‘educational services that are subject to a fee (*vozmezdnii*) and paid for by individuals or judicial entities.’ Thus, according to the 2010 Draft Law, ‘educational service’ is neither a privately offered paid-for activity nor any of the degree programmes offered within the framework of Russian system of education as defined by the Constitution.

The rhetoric of subsequent legislation further obscures the meaning of the term by positioning 'state educational services' in close relation to 'state duties in the sphere of education' (see, for example, article 12 of 2010 Draft Law, 'The Mandate of the Constituents of Russian Federation in the sphere of education positions'). A collocational analysis of post-2010 legal statements yields the following *synonymous* patterns of use:

Educational provision	=	Provision of educational services
Implementation of educational programmes	=	Provision of educational services [in the sense of 'the provision of state educational services,' accompanied by parenthesis in the function of clarification for the 'implementation of educational programmes']
Educational programme	=	Educational service
To receive education	=	To receive educational services
Financing of education [by the state]	=	Financing of educational services

Thus, textual analysis indicates a strong tendency for the substitution of the general meaning of education with a commercial education-related activity. The same tendency is manifest in public statements by top government officials, where the two concepts are interchangeable, with

'educational service' serving as a 'contemporary' or 'modernised' term for education. Consider, for example, an exchange between Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev and a member of the public at a 2007 press conference on education reform:

> 'Question: Dear Dmitry Anatolievich, I would like to know your opinion on the quality of education in higher education institutions offering distance education programmes.
>
> Answer: You must be talking about the quality of education, or, *in contemporary terms, about the quality of educational services* provided by higher education institutions.' (Transcript of Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's Press Conference, 2007, mon.gov.ru)

Thus, the concepts of 'educational service,' 'choice,' and 'competition' have been tenaciously inculcated as newspeak that better reflects new educational realities in both written and oral official discourses of the past decade. The new educational rhetoric suggests a conceptual equivalence between the concepts of 'service,' 'paid-for service,' and 'state-guaranteed educational provision.' Neither educational laws nor official policy statements have provided a clear distinction between free education, education as commercial service and education as a commercial service fully or partially subsidised by the state. The commercial foundation of new relationships between educational stakeholders is consistently implied, but not directly stated. The policy implications of such rhetoric are highly controversial. On the one hand, the conceptual convergence of 'education' and 'educational service' is consistent with the openly declared agenda for commercialising the bulk of educational provision. On the other hand, such blatant conceptual substitution in pivotal educational policy documents presents a slippery slope in legal terms as being essentially antithetical to the constitutional right to free education. The following chapter explores the public perception of the controversy.

6.3. Public perception of neoliberal economics: the moral maze?

The public attitides toward the new educational economics suggest emphatic rejection. In the eyes of a provincial teacher, State Duma deputy or middle-class parent, education is uncompromisingly neither a market service, nor a commercial activity or a commodity. The economic reform in education is commonly castigated by various segments of the public as morally wrong and culturally unacceptable. I will illustrate the public stance through the analysis of extensive societal debate following the institutionalisation of the concept 'educational service' in the 2010 draft law 'On Education.' This analysis draws on data from various social domains, including parliamentary hearings, online discussions of the 2010 draft law, public statements from the pedagogical community and educational radio call-in programmes. In bringing together different perspectives, I aim to expose the common cultural logic behind the public resistance.

In the realm of federal policy-making, opinions appear heavily polarised. Routine plenary discussions in the Duma represent a battleground for two clashing points of view: an espousal of the concept and a categorical denial. In arguing the case against the introduction of 'educational service' into legislation, opponents describe this concept as foreign and incommensurable with the ethos of Russian education. One Duma deputy, for example, argues:

> 'I am convinced that in assessing the new law [on education] we need to remember that education is not a service (*usluga*). As soon as this paradigm, this ideologeme, is forced upon us, education is bound to become a commercial service. That, in its turn, would immediately entail financial and other [inaproppriate] components. Education - and I can not stress this strongly enough - is not just about the transmission of knowledge but is about *vospitanie* and the cultural upbringing that is crucial for the succession of generations.' (Transcript of Parliamentary hearings, 2010)

Another deputy agrees,

> ‘As soon as education is conceptualised as a commercial service, the fare meter turns on. We need to understand that national education is by no means a market service. It is the hearth of culture. Although the concept of 'service' is being pushed through the legislation, I fully support Sergey Mikhailovich in that we need to separate the concepts [of education and market]. Education cannot be the same as dental services, like pulling out a tooth.’ (Transcript of Parliamentrary hearings, 2010)

The structure of the argument offered by the reform opponents here and elsewhere is notably similar: it negates the proposed concept on the grounds of its *commercial* character (‘entails financial components,’ ‘the fare meter turns on’).

A similar resistance logic is found in public discussions. The vast majority of public commentary to the 2010 draft law interpretes the concept ‘educational service’ as ‘reductionistic,’ ‘illegitimate,’ and ‘culturally incommensurate’ (zakonoproekt2012.ru). One commentator condends,

> ‘To reduce the function of a state educational institution to provide an educational 'service' is just plain wrong. Are our cultural institutions about 'providing a service'? Is it not about preserving and producing cultural values? Is a school now all about providing educational services rather than bringing up (*vospityvat'*) citzens and human beings?’ (zakonoproekt2012.ru)

Another commentator states,

> ‘The term 'provision of state services' should be changed to 'fulfillment of duties by the state.’ The state is not a commercial firm and the talk of 'services' has no legitimate place in this discussion. The Constitution clearly states that the individual, their rights and freedoms are of paramount value. Any talk of 'state services' (*gosusluga*) is absolutely illegitimate.’ (zakonoproekt2012.ru)

Another one writes,

> ‘The term 'educational service' in the text of the federal law 'On Education' and the absence of the concept of *vospitanie* is extremely disconcerting. I suggest that the terms 'educational service' and 'market of educational services' be completely abandoned. All 'market' terminology in the text of the law 'On Education' would mean a gross error of reductionism.’ (zakonoproekt2012.ru)

As illustrated in these quotes, public commentary is almost unanimous in denying the new concept cultural legitimacy, as well as insisting that the term be removed from the text of the law altogether.

Even stronger antagonism is found among the pedagogical community. In protesting against the concept, pedagogues criticise the forceful imposition of the market paradigm on the education system and the government's hidden agenda to dismantle free-of-charge education. Concerns are expressed over the legitimacy of the government rhetorical strategies for introducing commercial elements into the system. Educators worry about the apparent 'crude' and 'mechanistic' substitution of 'education' with 'educational service.' In regard to higher education, for example, one instructor of Herzen State University states,

> 'The market economy model is being actively inculcated into our higher education from above, at the government level. The notion of 'educational service' is being presented as one that is 'able to meet the challenges of our time.' Yet the true logic behind the concept is obvious: education is to become a tool in the provision of purely economic development. As a result, there is no place left for the individual, with their spiritual needs, worldviews and value beliefs. Neither is there a place for the Teacher who has always been there to meet these needs of students.' (Herald of Herzen State University, 2009)

The attitude of the pedagogical community is epitomised in the 2010 open letter from an all-Russia teachers' community to the President of the Russian Federation. Endorsed by leading Russian pedagogues, the letter alternates between bitter acknowledgements of the inevitability of the commercialisation reform and a defiant apologia for what teachers believe to be bygone fundamentals of national education. The market economy terminology is marked throughout the text by inverted commas signifying the irony the authors see in its pertinence to the educational discourse:

> ‘According to the changes introduced to the State Fiscal Code, the school, as a budgetary institution, will now be financed according to the state order. The school has effectively become a commercial organisation that provides 'services' to the population. The concept of 'learning' has thus been replaced with the concept of 'educational service.’ Parents have been turned into clients of this 'service' and school directors have become 'effective managers.' Pedagogical objectives have receded to the background and economic utility has become the cornerstone of education. National education, as we see it, is the nations' activity aimed at exploring and multiplying the riches of knowledge and experience of the past generations. This activity is independent of the economic sphere. By no means can education be regarded as a 'commodity' or a 'service' put out for sale in the market.’

Another widely circulated public statement - the resolution of the 2011 All Russia’s Teachers’ Forum perceives of the new relationship between education and the market as a dehumanised ‘give-take’ transaction:

> ‘The participants of the forum propose that the pedagogically pernicious ideology of ‘educational service’ be renounced. In the course of their duty teachers do not provide any services to the population. The educational process is a complex partnership that requires mutual cooperation and responsibility from all participants. There can be no market ‘give-take’ principle applied to our children. The reference point for contemporary Russian education, as laid down in our national traditions, should be a familial, and not a market, model. Education is a non-market social good to which all citizens of our country are equally entitled to.’

Echoing the public protest, Russian pedagogical community has consistently called for the abandonment of the ‘pernicious’ concept. As evident in the public statements above, a powerful layer of cultural resistance stems from public concerns regarding the notion of *vospitanie*. The common cultural logic behind this resistance is the counterposition between *vospitanie* and *commerce*. The section provides an overview of the concept of *vospitanie* and probes into the nature of the perceived conflict.

6.4. *Vospitanie:* selfless servicing or paid-for service?

Vospitanie is a uniquely Russian concept (Halstead 2006, Muckle 2003). Variously translated as 'moral upbringing,' 'personality development' or 'character education,' it deals with the development of Russian values and attitudes in the process of academic learning. Halstead (2006: 424), for example, defines it as 'a systematic attempt to mould the attitudes and comprehensive world view of children and to inculcate in them certain predetermined values and behaviour patterns (...).' Long (1984: 470) defines the goals of *vospitanie* as raising 'honest, truthful human beings who are helpful to others and who must work hard in school to develop intellectual, aesthetic, and physical abilities – that is, to develop a comprehensive, harmonious personality.' What makes *vospitanie* a distinctly Russian concept is the organic fusion of elements that in other cultures are considered independent or even conflicting: factual knowledge, skill formation, personal morality, patriotism and civic ethics (Alexander 2000).

Contemporary educational discourse, both public and official, has retained its commitment to *vospitanie* as a principal component of schooling. A round-table on 'Education reform: the public view,' (February 15, 2011) chaired by the former President of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev, defines *vospitanie* in the following way:

> 'What is quality education? A cultured free-thinking individual is an 'educated' person by definition. *The best vospitanie is quality education and the quality education is vospitanie - the two are inseparable. Vospitanie*-oriented education is a humanistic kind of education that ensures the development of an individual's personality, fosters its individuality and ensures the fulfillment of all its educational, spiritual, cultural and other everyday needs, as well as provides freedom of choice for the content and delivery of schooling and for the ways of self-fulfillment of the personality in cultural and educational space. *The ultimate goal of vospitanie is to breed a person of culture, or in other words, a personality whose core traits are freedom, humanism, spirituality and procreation (zhiznetvorchestvo). (...) It is the ability to discern between good and evil.'* (pedsovet.org)

The functions of cultivation, acculturation, or the inculcation of ethics and morals that are Russian are equally articulated in the official spoken and written discourse. Minister of Education Fursenko, for example, argues,

> ‘When we talk about *vospitanie* (…) we need to get across one single most important message. An individual cannot be successful if his or her country, citizens and friends are unsuccessful. Every child must understand that these things are deeply interdependent. In other words, one cannot be happy when there are unhappy people around. This is what we need to teach our children in school (…) If a child absorbs this message, he or she will easily pass any test.’ (Interview to www. zavuch.info)

In discussing *vospitanie*, educational officials emphasise core traits of a ‘cultured person,’ such as freedom of the spirit, civility and self-fulfillment within the larger society. Russian Academy of Science member and Advisor to the Ministry of Education Sergey Lebedev, for example, states,

> ‘Thousands of school lessons do not come down to problem-solving in maths, physics or literature and other subjects. These are lessons of life, teaching attitudes to nature, cultural values and people. A new generation of education standards are currently being developed for secondary schools. This has renewed public debates about the ultimate goals of education. In the course of one of those discussions a crucial idea was articulated: *the ultimate goal of education is to teach graduates to distinguish between good and evil.’* (Interview to www.portalus.ru)

Similar to the views prevalent among the public, the official rhetoric attaches special significance to morals, i.e. the ability to make culturally sensitive moral judgments and to behave accordingly. It is, however, precisely this aspect of morality, the ability to ‘distinguish between good and evil’ that iscontrasted with the idea of ‘educational service’ in the public discourse. In antithesising *vospitanie* and commerce, a typical line of reasoning begins with an evocation of cultural morals and value orientations, before setting them into a sharp contrast to a commodified

package of impersonal rationalistic skills. Consider, for example, a statement by the President of The Russian Academy of Education Nikolai Nikandrov:

> ‘When education is governed by the market, the ‘provision of educational services’ comes to the forefront. Centuries ago, Dmitry Ivanovich Mendeleev wrote that knowledge without *vospitanie* is a sword in the hands of a madman. Paradoxically, the contemporary school is paying exceptionally little attention to *vospitanie*. In the meantime, we’re living under the 1996 Law on Education which defines education as ‘*vospitanie* as well as schooling conducted in the interest of an individual, society and the state.’ Mind you, *vospitanie* comes first!’ (Interview to Education and Work for Those who Want to Learn, 2010, pedsovet.org)

A statement by Yurii Solonin, the Head of the Council of the Russian Federation on Education and Science, draws on similar rationale:

> ‘I have always upheld and will until the end of my life continue to uphold the view of education as a special sphere of human activity that is defined by value orientations. Without cultural values education becomes a useless activity and begins to fall apart. (...) Unfortunately today education is increasingly being treated as a service. The problem is that there is indeed a tendency in contemporary education that can be called ‘provision of services’: the child needs to learn to write and count, acquire a certain package of skills. But Russian education is not just 10-16 stages of formal schooling but a system of *vospitanie*. We live in the world of the market, so hideous that everything becomes a commodity, whether it’s the love of woman, education or art. All of these things have now allegedly become a commercial service. I, however, will never be able to accept this. As a professional, I believe the concept is out of sync with the system of education.’ (Interview to *The Teachers’ Gazette*, March 2011)

Devoid of any formerly attached communist bias, *vospitanie* is conceptualised in the public discourse in spiritual, rather than ideological terms: ‘the eternal,’ ‘the good,’ ‘the formative,’ ‘the creative,’ ‘the spiritual,’ with the core component being ‘pertaining to the human soul.’

Thus, the backbone of the conceptual opposition, as it emerges from the public debate on *vospitanie*, juxtaposes the spiritual (the soul) against the material (money). In maintaining this

opposition, the public discourse is categorical in uncoupling the alliance of traditional and neoliberal sets of personal values attempted in the official discourse. The following statement by the President of the Russian Academy of Sciences Nikolai Nikandrov exemplifies the 'take-it-or-leave-it' public stance:

> 'The educational system can bring up two different types of person. The first is the adoptive type, one that does not possess any kind of an established set of moral and ethical values, one that exists inclusively in the paradigm of personal success and well-being and one that does not associate their deeds with the interests of the society and those around them. He or she is successful in the contemporary, genealogically Western consumer society. In Russia, however, the system of education is purposefully values-oriented (...). It is not aimed at forming such 'random' person (...). Rather, it is aimed at creating [the second type of] a person with a certain set of personal qualities brought up within the humanistic tradition. An inherent characteristic of such a person is the desire to be a 'good person,' possess high moral and ethical standards, be ready for self-sacrifice in the interest of others and for self-restraint when it comes to their personal interests. In other words, we want to bring up a person who leans toward the pole of the good rather than the pole of the evil.' (Interview to Agency for the Implementation of Socio-political Initiatives, arspi.ru)

Note how the traditional and the neoliberal values are counterposed throughout the statement. One is 'good,' value-oriented and representing positive national values, spiritual and orderly, while another is value-neutral, representing moral *laissez-faire*, materialism-oriented, ego-centric and disorderly. Teachers and parents also tend to frame the debate in 'either/or terms. One parent, for example, dicusses,

> 'Today, a certain contradiction has emerged [between the market and pedagogy]. I would like to hear the opinion of the Ministry [of Education] on the following issue. What kind of an end product do we want? Should it be a graduate with a high market value and high applicability, a person who is able to sell themselves in the market? Or should it be a person who appreciates the value of education as such?' (Q&A with Minister Fursenko, mon.gov.ru)

Similarly, the Russian teachers' Open Letter to the President quoted earlier in this chapter maintains that the two are completely 'independent' of each other. The 'either/or' nature of the

relationship between the two is evident in recurring titles of journal articles and TV/radio talk shows, such as 'Education: service market or value system?' ('Parents' Assembly' radio show, The Moscow EchoMarch, 2011), 'Are we providing services or planting the seeds of the eternal?' (The Teachers' Gazette, 2011).

As evident from the quotes above, the spiritual/material dichotomy strongly manifests itself in the language of the debate, particularly through a continued lexico-thematical opposition of two derivatives of a common root *sluzhit* ('to serve'): *usluga* in the sense of 'paid-for service' or 'petty favour' and *sluzhenie* in the sense of 'philanthropical, selfless serving.' In the context of educational debate *usluga*, with its strongly pejorative or judgmental undertone, has come to epitomise the materialistic, petty, practical, rationalistic and mundane. In contrast, *sluzhenie* is associated with the virtuous, the moral and the imperishable. I will illustrate this perceived dichotomy with two examples from the public discourse. The first one is a widely circulated statement by a school teacher publishes in the Teachers' Gazette entitled 'I don't want to be a tutor!' (*Ne hochu byt' tiutorom*!):

> 'The tragedy of educational innovations is the destruction of the image of the teacher. The Contemporary pedagogue, morally exhausted and strangled by petty bureaucracy, will never again inspire such lines as "Teacher, let us humbly kneel before your name." New educational policies have renamed us from enlighteners (*prosvetiteli*) to degree-holders (*obrazovantsy*), public sector employees (*biudzhetniki*) and scroungers (*nakhlebniki*). We are not longer planting the seeds of "the wise, the kind and the eternal." We are now providing educational services (...) We are now service-able (*usluzhlivii*) people. Deliver and get paid. If the consumer is satisfied - get paid more. The formal bureaucratic logic might look spotless but teachers are no longer figures of authority and respect. Their role as 'educators' (*vospitateli*) has been destroyed.' (The Teachers' Gazette, 2011)

Another example is the polemic exchange from the October 2012 issue of the popular Big City magazine (*Bolshoi Gorod)*, which ran a column entitled 'Two-headed education monster: *usluga*

or *sluzhenie*?' In counterposing the two terms, the paper distinguished between the 'official' and 'alternative' interpretations of education. The former was defined as a 'commercial service' (*usluga*) and the latter as a 'selfless service' (*sluzhenie*) and a 'long-term investment of the state into human capital.' To illustrate the opposing views, the editors interviewed two well-known educational specialists - Efim Rachevsky, representing the Ministry of Education, and Oleg Smolin, an opposition Duma deputy:

> Efim Rachevsky (proponent of the reform): 'Popular etymology no longer discerns the cognate origin of the two words [*usluga* and *sluzhenie*]. Indeed, there is not much semantic difference except for the fact that *sluzhenie* carries an unnecessary pompous connotation. However, a lot of people still see *usluga* as something ignoble. While *usluga* is precisely what education is about – a service that is financed by the state. This is the state's way to serve its people.'
>
> Oleg Smolin (opponent of the reform): 'A lot of my Duma colleagues are trying to wash their hands clean of the ideology of educational service. The [euphemistic] use of the term in the official policy is perfectly justified – one could never call education a 'commodity' or a 'job to be done.' Unlike customer service, education is a two-way process. In the Russian language the word *usluga* carries deeply negative connotations. Just think of Chatsky's 'I'd love to serve. Servility is what I hate' [*Sluzhit' by rad – prisluzhivatsia toshno*]. Russian teachers are no fans of this language; it is associated with dehumanisation and moral decay. We want the educational process to be alive, not dead.'

Here, the opponent evokes public etymology by quoting a popular phrase from Aleksander Griboedov's play 'Woe from Wit.' Central to the dramatic conflict of the play, the *usluga* - *sluzhenie* opposition represents the main character's noble struggle for the national idea (*sluzhenie*) against petty servility (*usluga*), the latter being associated with hypocrisy, moral decay and slavish worship of materialistic pursuits. Note that the rhetoric of the proponent is based on evoking, albeit through negation, the popular frame ('*usluga* is not necessarily ignoble'). This rhetorical move - argumentation *ex contrario*, through negation of common frames of reference - is commonly employed by the government in an attempt to re-frame the

overwhelmingly negative public narrative. Proponents of reform often argue that ‘education service’ is a ‘normal,’ rather than ‘bad’ term and that the concept behind the term is ‘neutral,’ rather than ‘degrading.’ Consider a statement by Anatolii Gasparzhak, Rector of Moscow Higher School of Social and Economic Science and one of the masterminds of the neoliberal reform:

> ‘If we are selling our work, the knowledge of the subject, the skill to teach the subject, then we are vendors of knowledge and *there is nothing degrading about it*. In fact, free education does not exist anywhere in the world. We are paying taxes and, thus, are also paying for education. *Since the Soviet times we have been ashamed of such words as ‘bureaucrat,’ ‘officiary,’ ‘service.’ Meanwhile, these are absolutely normal words.* I don’t want teachers to love their pupils, I want them to teach them professionally. I want them to work as professionals who love their job and not the pupil. (...) Having committed to implement educational standards, teachers agree to receive a certain payment for the work they do. *I insist that the word ‘service’ is not a bad word, it’s a good word.* (*The Teachers’ Gazette,* 2011)

Whilst the proponents’ rhetoric struggles to portray *usluga* as a positive cultural value, the public discourse indulges in witticisms and wordplays based on the common lexical root of *usluga* and *sluzhenie*. One of the most popular jokes, for example, defines educational service as *medvezhia usluga* (literally ‘a bear’s service,’ from Jean De La Fontaine’s ‘The Bear and the Gardener’), a set expression that denotes an ill-considered act with unfortunate results carried out of best intentions.

Thus, in discrediting the concept of ‘educational service,’ the public debate appears to be remarkably homogenous. Within the common structure of the argument, the concept *vospitanie* is brought up as a primary function of education and subsequently contrasted with the idea of money and fiscal relations. The notion of education as a commercial service subsidised by the

state is trivialised and ridiculed through comparison to making a purchase at a grocery store, having a tooth pulled out at the dentist's or getting a haircut at the barber's. The actual financial burden associated with the commercialisation of education appears at the far periphery of the debate. While complaints about the rising cost of education are vocal in other strands of the reform debate, the discussion on 'educational service' focuses on ideational aspects, overlooking or sidestepping the practicalities. Within the ideational realm, the common denominator of opinions spread across a number of genres of public discourse is the *opposition of the spiritual and the material.* The idea of no common ground between the material and the spiritual is not articulated, but implied as self-evident. Further discussion is strikingly absent from the debate. With the market seen as having no spiritual value, public discourse leaves no room for compromise.

Before I turn to the cultural commentary of these findings, I provide a final illustration of how the tensions bewteen the spiritual and the material manifest themselves throughout the public domain. The example provided below is an extended quote from a 2005 radio call-in show *Roditel'skoie Sobranie* (Parents' Assembly). The popular broadcast programme brought together representatives of distinctly different social domains. Among them Evgenii Bunimovich, a poet and a well-known pedagogue; Alexei Chernyshev, Deputy Head of the State Duma Committee for Education and Science; Ksenia Larina, former actress and well-known journalist covering educational issues and a number of call-in members of the public:

> 'Larina: Before proceeding to the discussion, let us first clarify the terminology. *Is education a service market or a national asset?* Evgenii Abramovich, I would like to ask you first: *is this a contradiction?*
>
> Bunimovich: *In fact, it is a contradiction.* And I think it's good that we've finally formulated the question in this way (...). We've been discussing educational standards, the unified state examination and what-have-you, while this whole time

the critical question is that of a particular model [of educational provision]. And if education is to be a service market, as has been imposed on us recently, then [the model] is that of a grocery store.

Larina: *Cash for product.*

Bunimovich: *Cash for product.* Pay the bill and check the quality of the product. And this model is possible elsewhere, but it *is absolutely unfit for our realities and our traditions.*

(...)

Chernyshev: A service market or a national project... We've been looking for a national idea and turned it into a national project, education being one of them. But one word doesn't change the essence. Take [the concept of] educational service. I come to the barber and receive a service – a haircut. Is this really the same as educational service, a concept that's being imposed on the system? *There is a huge difference between the two concepts, it's not the same at all. Because education is an internal need of a human being to receive knowledge and apply it creatively.*

(...)

Bunimovich: For me, the key word of this polemic discussion is 'educational service.' Although this ideology is being promoted at the government level I am no supporter of the concept. *I am no supporter of the concept of school being a shop where one pays a certain amount to get a certain amount of sausage of a certain quality. It doesn't matter who pays – you, the municipality or someone else. Education just doesn't work this way. And not just in Russia but elsewhere. The quality of education does not improve with the introduction of the crude model of educational service.*

(...)

Call-in parent: I would like to agree – one cannot compare education with an assortment of sausage of different quality. How can one can advocate for [a market model] where one chooses between Zhiguli and Mercedes or a particular type of sausage or cheese? *We are talking about the human soul here, how can one not understand this?*

Larina: *Yes, the human soul*.'

In declaring that culture and the market of customer services are mutually contradictory, all speakers agree that the proposed market model ('cash for product') is culturally unsuitable. All discussants employ the notion of the 'soul,' which evokes resistance to materialism and

modernity. Throughout the discussion, all express their depreciative attitude to the economic reform by making an analogy with 'primitive' or 'crude' transactions, such as getting a haircut. All discussants see money as a non-value and contrast it with *vospitanie,* which is seen as the spiritual basis of indigenous pedagogy ('internal need of an individual to receive knowledge and apply creatively'). With the cultural meanings tightly condensed in the language, the idea that there is no common ground between the material and the spiritual is unarticulated, but implied as self-evident.

6.5. Money versus the Soul: a cultural insight

The public outrage is unsurprising when the neoliberal agenda is interpreted against the continuity of cultural patterns. As I have shown in the previous section, public resentment is primarily aimed at the commercial and materialistic nature of education, as embodied in the concept of *usluga*. Pivotal to such sentiment are broader popular attitudes towards material wealth. Historically, Russian people view money with suspicion and contempt (Lotman & Uspensky 1985, Kon 1995, Nikandrov 1997, Khrushcheva 2000, Smolin 2005, Lotman 2009). Popular sayings refer to money as an 'unavoidable evil' (*neizbezhnoie zlo*) and 'contemptible metal' (*prezrennii metal*). The Russians antithesise money and the idea of the 'human soul,' where the 'soul' represents the inner world, life force and the essence of things. Money is traditionally perceived as a danger to the spiritual well-being: the richer the wealth, the smaller the soul (Khrushcheva 2000, Lotman 2009). One should, therefore, always be on guard against the dangers wealth poses for the soul. Richness in Russian historical culture is by no means a virtue or a mark of uniqueness and 'chosen-ness' but a sign of spiritual shallowness and superficiality contempt (Lotman & Uspensky 1985, Nikandrov 1997, Khrushcheva 2000).

Poverty, in turn, is associated with holiness and a life of depth and compassion (Lotman 2009). An acclaimed Russian modernist poet Marina Tsvetayeva contends, 'the notion of the basic falsehood of money is ineradicable from the Russian soul (Tsvetayeva as cited in Khrushheva 2000: 9).

Amongst this broader traditional antagonism towards money, a particularly negative value is assigned to the concept of entrepreneurship contempt (Lotman & Uspensky 1985, Khrushcheva 2000, Lotman 2009). Possessing material goods is not a sin in itself, however wishing or striving for it is (Khrushcheva 2000). Paradoxically, gaining money through unexpected inheritance, a stroke of luck or by divine disposal is within culturally acceptable bounds (Lotman 2009). In fact, the very word for 'wealth' (*bogatstvo*) derives from 'endowed by God,' while 'well-being' (*blagopoluchie*) means 'receiving the good from above,' implying no active involvement of the receiver (Ozhegov 1986). Meticulously focusing on increasing one's wealth, however, is ignoble and harmful to the soul.

Commerce is considered a dishonorable enterprise (Lotman & Uspensky 1985, Nikandrov 1997, Khrushcheva 2000, Lotman 2009). Russians traditionally have more respect for a lucky gambler than for an honest tradesman (Khrushcheva 2000, Lotman 2009). A commercial transaction is interpreted depending on the point of reference: to be on the purchasing end is culturally justifiable while to be on the selling end is frowned upon (Lotman 2009). This attitude is deeply ingrained in language, whereby linguistically synonymous words have a more positive connotation if the internal form of the word emphasises the process of buying rather than selling. For example, while the meaning of *kupets* (merchant) is the same as *torgovets* (trader), the former, a derivative of 'to buy,' has more positive connotations than the latter, a derivative of 'to trade' (Ozhegov 1986). The idea of moderation, or having 'just enough' is deep-seated in the

Russian concept of financial well-being (Ozhegov 1987, Khrushcheva 2000). The etymology of a whole lexical field associated with wealth (*bogatstvo*) is underlined by the idea of self-restraint and moderation. For example, the word for 'fiscal prosperity' (*dostatok*) shares the same root as 'enough,' 'just enough,' and 'not too much.' 'Financial prosperity' or 'the state of being financially well-off' (*obespechennost'*) is merely a 'lack of need' or 'absence of destitution' (Ozhegov 1986). These archaic attitudes continue well into modern history. A historical dislike of entrepreneurial ability and commercial acumen was strongly reinforced by the communist civil religion of the early 20th century, which propagated salvation from the 'idiocy of lust for profits' (Gorky as quoted in Dinello 1998: 47) through de-monetisation of the society. The attitude was subsequently solidified by decades of communist rule that was adamant in denouncing the 'bourgeois mentality.' Until the early 1990s, Russian thesauruses defined 'enterpreneur' as 'capitaist, someone predisposed to fraud, trickster' (The Great Soviet Encyclopedia, 1978). Indeed, 'Russians, the ordinary Russians who did not get their philosophical education from Milton Friedman's books, insist that there is an almost unbridgeable gap between the entrepreneurial spirit and the Russian soul' (Khrushcheva 2000: 8).

Contemporary Russian attitudes toward accumulation of wealth are deeply rooted in traditional culture, dating back to the collectivist culture of the 18th and 19th centuries (Khrushcheva 2000, Lotman 2009). Cultural resistance to the accumulation of wealth and material possessions is tied into the Russian view of society, including equal and fair distribution of societal goods. The concept of fairness and egalitarianism in Russia is premised on the principles of communalism, compassion, moderation and self-restraint, where the good of the society invariably comes before

self-interest (Khrushcheva 2000, Lotman 2009). As a result, the pursuit of personal economic gain is seen as detrimental to the community. In putting interests of the group over interest of an individual, the Russian culture concerns itself with the equality of outcomes, rather than equality of opportunity, input or condition. Equality, in social terms, is seen mainly as ensuring that a neighbour does not get ahead of you rather than raise above the average yourself. A popular Russian joke illustrates the workings of this cultural logic: a fairy godmother approaches a poor Russian peasant and promises him anything his heart desires on the condition that his neighbour would get twice as much of it. 'All right, - said the peasant after some thinking, - Blind me in one eye' (Khrushcheva 2000).

Traditional Russian culture is known as an example of what cultural historicans have labelled as 'envy' culture, as opposed to 'greed' cultures (Coser 1974, Nikandrov 1997, Khrushcheva 2000, Kon 1995). 'Greed' cultures value material possession and the accumulation of wealth through concerted effort, competition and entrepreneurship (Coser 1974, Khrushcheva 2000). The cultural logic of the 'greed' culture is 'I'm better than my neighbor, and I will prove it by working harder and having more than he has!' (Kon 1995: 2). Consequently, 'greed' cultures tend to foster what Novak (1982) calls 'virtuous self-interest,' i.e. such personal traits as thrift, self-reliance, individualism, efficiency, calculability, independence and risk-taking. Economic inequality is seen within the 'greed culture' as a natural effect arising from fair competition between individuals. Thus, the image of a 'good' citizen within the 'greed' culture is that of a 'constantly reinventing entrepreneur' (Lynch 2006: 5). The 'greed' cultures can be found in the US, Anglo-Saxon and most of European countries where the middle class, Western-style bourgeoisie, constitutes a core layer of society.

In contrast, 'envy' cultures are predicated on the principle 'I'm better than my neighbor, and I will not permit him to have more than I have!' (Kon 1995: 2). 'Envy' cultures see social stratification as taken for granted and immutable. The "envy' mentality focuses on 'leveling' and rejects egoistic utilitarianism as an external force that undermines communal well-being. Khrushcheva (2000: 7) elaborates,

> 'Envy cultures' aim to guarantee the survival of the group at a subsistence level, but ruin the ambitious. The very idea of profit, of tangible reward for taking an economic risk is associated with the inequality imposed by men. Meanwhile, justice is identified with protecting the integrity of the helpless, disadvantaged and weak in a given collective against the indifference and self-promotion of the stronger.'

In economic terms, preserving the social status quo means making the wealthy poorer, rather than making yourself wealthier. Thus, the American motto of 'keeping up with the Joneses' becomes 'keeping the Ivanovs down' in the Russian version (Khrushcheva 2000; 10-11). Personal ambition and competitiveness are concepts foreign to the traditional Russian culture (Lotman 2009). In contemporary Russian the words 'initiative' and 'ambitious' continue to bear pejorative connotations. 'Initiative is punishable' (*initsiativa nakazuiema'*), warns a popular saying. 'Ambition' is not a 'noble aspiration' but a 'vain pursuit,[25]' while 'self-interest' is egocentricity and greed. 'Self-interest has no warranty in morality,' - writes a 19th century philospher Alexey Khomiakov, - 'material gain, a purely quantitative individual good, excludes the qualitative dimensions of life centered around service to the community' (Khomiakov, as quoted in Khrushcheva 2000: 7). Another Russian thinker Konstantin Aksakov, states,

[25] 'Ambition' is one of the most notorious linguistic 'false friends' in the field of Russian-English translation. Overlapping in pronunciation, the English 'ambition' and the Russian *ambitsia* have opposite positive and negative value orientations. When Western-style language textbooks were first introduced in schools and universities in the mid-1990s Russian students, including myself, were commonly confused by the discussion of 'professional ambition' in a positive light.

> 'A commune is a union of people which have shed their egotism and renounced their personalities; it is an expression of a collective consensus, a high Christian act of love. Thus, the commune is a moral chorus… a chorus celebrating the soil, while the individual is like a false note in a choir.' (Aksakov, as cited in Paramonov 1996)

As an extreme representation of the 'envy' culture, the Russian culture encompasses such values as compassion, communalism, collectivism, solidarity, inefficiency and spontaneity. In respect to contemporary Russian culture, Levada Centre, Russia's leading non-governmental polling and sociological research organisation, identifies the following national traits: mandatory self-isolation, low significance of material well-being, orientation to the future, dominancy of societal orientations over individual interests and an undifferentiated holistic spiritual attitude to life (Levada 2008). These characteristics are reproduced and sustained by other realms of cultural production, such as political structures and religious thought. Thus, in embracing self-interest and material gain, 'greed' cultures are prone to liberalism and democracy, while 'envy' cultures are subject to authoritarianism and socialism (Kon 1996, Mainamis at al. 1996, Khrushcheva 2000, Khrushcheva 2007). With the exaggerated state paternalism underlying the political system, Russia's 'socio-economic genotype' has been defined as a mixture of great power statehood (*derzhavnost'*), collectivism (*sobornost'*), etatism, egalitarianism and an 'imperial syndrome' (Iliin at al. 1996). The political system under socialism strengthened these features by consistently supressing individual initiative and promoting the fear of competition. Kon (1995: 1) discusses,

> 'Individuality was supressed as a sign of bourgeois individualism incompatible with the virtues of the New Soviet Man. The primitive egalitarianism in wages, the fear of competition and espesically the bureaucratic mentality that equated individual with a 'cog' in an impersonal clocklike social mechanism conspired to stifle personal initiative.'

Similarly, Russian religious thought reflected these beliefs through the prism of Orthodox values. Russian Orthodoxy holds individual profiteering in deep contempt, denouncing materialistic pursuit and emphasising asceticism and selflessness. Two of the principal Russian orthodox values are *beskorystie* and *nestjazhatel'stvo*. *Beskorystie*, literally 'absence of self-interestedness,' or 'self-neglect,' and *nestyazhatelstvo*, literally 'non-acquisitiveness' are two essential characteristics of orthodox *righteousness*. Permeated by the orthodox spirit, Russian literature and philosophy have been unanimous in portraying entrepreneurs and petit bourgeois as anti-heros and 'greedy profiteers.' Codified by Russian writers, most notably, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, the prevalent collectivist mindset and the portrayal of the pursuit of money as a moral *laisse-faire* and are endemic to Great Russian literature (Lotman 2009). Russian writers saw the materialistic egotism of the West as a perpetrator into the Russian healthy social organism and a threat to its moral stability. *Kulak* – an independent farmer – is the most popular anti-hero of the early twentieth century classical literature. Literary protagonists, in turn, are often passive, indecisive, incapable of action daydreamers, irresponsible gamblers or light-hearted swindlers[26].

In addition to elucidating public antagonisms toward commercialisation of education, the cultural traits discussed above help explain the re-actualisation of the indigenous concept of *vospitanie* in the public discourse. Traditionally, *vospitanie*, especially in Western scholarship, tends to be discussed in the context of Soviet political ideology. Fused with political education under Communist rule, it is believed to have collapsed with the fall of communism. It is often seen as either a 'dead metaphor referring to raising children' (Anderson 2001: 317) or a notion

[26] These cultural patterns appear to have been strongly reinforced in the post-Soviet history by the resurgency of the Russian orthodoxy, the rise of ultra nationalism and, most recently, the return of political authoritarianism under Putin.

‘irrevocably tarred with the Communist brush’ (Dunstan 1992: 96). However, as I have shown in the previous section, the idea of *vospitanie* in contemporary public discussion is largely stripped of political ideology. In fact, words from the semantic field of ‘ideology,’ including ‘inoculate,’ ‘inculcate,’ ‘indoctrinate,’ are used in association with neoliberal reforms and in contraposition to indigenous pedagogy. Instead, *vospitanie* is interpreted as an integral element of *culture*. In defining *vospitanie*, the discussants draw on spiritual and moral, rather than ideological, categories. The common ground for the public interpretation is the idea of harmony between the social and the individual, where the collective and the personal are dialectical in nature and the collective is a focal point for nurturing a creative personality. In the realm of *vospitanie*, a single man’s personal fulfillment and happiness is dependent on the happiness and fulfillment of those around. The collective and the creative go hand in hand: moral foundations are collective but internalising them brings the child individual gratification and personal happiness. Rooted in the cultural worldview, these pedagogical beliefs go beyond the communist ideology. In fact, it was suggested that to a large extent they have developed in opposition to the communist principles of a centralised polity, including rigid state-controlled, highly ideologised curriculum and uniformity of hierarchical organisation (Alexander 2001, Archer 1979, Smolin 2005).

Vospitanie-based pedagogical ideas were prevalent among the reformers at the initial stage of the education modernisation reform. The intellectual glue uniting a variety of pedagogical schools that boomed in the late 1980s-early 1990s was the centrality of social interaction and individual creativity to human development. While individualism and behaviorism were catching up in the West, the Russian pedagogy continued to explore the embeddings of human history and culture into social interactions and to endorse a collectivist vision of the human psychology. Although post-1990s educational policies took a shift away from either traditional or communist

worldviews, the indigenous notion of *vospitanie* has remained a powerful interpretative frame. While the official discourse attempts to present *vospitanie* as compatible with the commercial nature of education, the public discourse frames the two as mutually exclusive.

6.6. Conclusion

This chapter explored socio-cultural interpretations of economic reform in education. The neoliberal economic reform agenda for Russian education was designed in accordance with the Washington consensus globally, and driven by economic necessity locally. Throughout the 2000s, it made a rapid ascent into the socio-political space through the government elite, in particularly through neoliberally oriented educational policy-makers of the late 1990s. The analysis of the official policies has unveiled a narrowly defined textbook version of neoliberal economic modernisation at the heart of the reforms. The neoliberal script was adopted by the Russian government with little room for local socio-cultural adjustments. Market-based ideas of 'provision of service,' 'competition' and 'choice' were employed as conceptual rationalisations for reform, and positioned as universal and value-neutral.

By means of rhetorical substitution, the official discourse established an implicit equivalence between private profit and public good, and blurred the boundaries of *vospitanie* and commercial profit, suggesting the two coexist organically in the new socio-economic order. By focusing on a culturally decontextualised market paradigm, the official discourse circumvented broader socio-economic factors, including pedagogy, history, and social embeddedness of educational structures. Outside of the written corpus of laws and policy statements the policy-making discourse is characterised by a contradictory structure of ideas. Struggling to achieve ideological unity by combining the two contrasting worldviews, it switches back and forth between different

frames of reference depending on the immediate context of the utterance.

The application of market ideology to the sphere of education triggered strong resistance by the intended consumers of educational services. In both high and popular discursive forms, the common public sentiment towards the idea of education as a *commodity* has been that of implacable antagonism and moral condemnation. Fine-grained cultural analysis revealed significant axiological differences in fundamental ethical and philosophical assumptions behind the interpretation of market principles in the official and public discourses.

By bringing together the economic and the ideological angles, I have argued that the new values formally introduced into the Russian education system in the course of the economic reforms are deeply contradictory to the informal socio-cultural practices. I have contextualised these findings within the stream of research that traces Russian pedagogy beyond the communist rule into the indigenous v*ospitanie*-based Russian tradition with its prior claim of the spiritual over the material. In particular, I have shown how the Russian ethos of egalitarianism, collegiality, and community spirit, coupled with an orientation to post-materialist values, has resisted the market values of competitive individualism, material profit and entrepreneurship, the latter seen through the Russian eyes as ethically deficient and morally deprived. I have concluded that the poles of opposition identified index a broader discursive contest between a traditional, collegial, state-paternalistic, heavily etatist worldview and the market-driven, individualistic, and materialistic one.

CHAPTER VII

NEOLIBERAL WORLD VIEW AND RUSSIAN NATIONAL CHARACTER: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter discusses the empirical findings and contextualises them within broader literature on Russian education and historical culture. The discussion below is organised in the following way. Firstly, it highlights the overarching contestations between neoliberal and traditional worldviews as well as cultural origins of the bottom-up resistance to neoliberal reform. Secondly, in narrowing the focus on contemporary Russian culture, this chapter delineates a number of specific patterns of thought that have shaped the direction of the ongoing modernisation reform. I have identified these patterns as follows: Russia's ambiguous attitude to the West, tensions between statehood and pedagogy, an opposition between revolution and reform, and a binary pattern of cultural reasoning. Finally, this chapter contextualises the discussion in contemporary scholarship on social change and provides a brief prognosis for the sustainability of the neoliberal reform in Russian education.

7.1. Neoliberal social order through the lens of traditional culture

The findings presented in the empirical chapters of this thesis have revealed a number of ontological and axiological conflicts between neoliberalism and traditional Russian (and broader Slavic) culture. I have argued that at a fundamental level, the neoliberal and the traditional Russian represent two sharply contrasting worldviews. Underlying the neoliberal vision of fair society lies a constitutive principle that by maximising self-interest one maximises social welfare (Beckert 2009). What one wins, another can win too; therefore, the more winners there are on the educational market, the better-off the society is as a whole. Within this neoliberal 'regime of truth' (Foucault 1980) self-interest, self-responsibility and competitiveness are neither positive nor negative values, but taken-for-granted traits of human nature:

> 'Neoliberalism is a philosophy in which the existence and operation of a market are valued in themselves, separately from any previous relationship with the production of goods and services, and without any attempt to justify them in terms of their effect on the production of goods and services; and where the operation of a market or market-like structure is seen as an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide for all human action, and substituting for all previously existing ethical beliefs.' (Treanor 2005: 9)

In the Russian worldview, however, the 'ethic in itself' is reversed: personal ambition is a zero-sum game: one person's gain is someone else's loss. Material and symbolic goods are seen as limited and can only be obtained through a re-distribution of existing ones at someone else's expense. With social relationships generally undifferentiated, a change in a neighbour's social status or wealth undermines the entire structure of social network. The only culturally acceptable way to preserve social balance is, therefore, through a collective decision about 'what is best' for the group. As a result, personal ambition is discouraged and change is unwanted. Table IX summarises contrasting value positions of the neoliberal and traditional worldviews as reflectedin the Russian education reform debate:

Table IX: Neoliberal versus traditional Russian worldviews

Neoliberal	Traditional
Competition (Greed) - Egalitarianism (Envy)	
Competition is a healthy mechanism for the distribution of societal goods. It ensures efficiency and quality.	Competition promotes egoistic utilitarianism and creates inequality. Equality of outcome comes before equality of opportunity or condition.
Money (Material) - Soul (Spiritual)	
Acquisitiveness and material possessions are positive values. Money is an end in itself.	Accumulation of wealth is morally corrupt. Vulgar materialistic pursuit harms the soul.
Self-interest - Altruism	
Self-interest is a prime human drive and personal virtue.	Self-interest is subordinate to the interest of the group. Personal ambition undermines the well-being of the community.

While detecting certain ideological tensions, mainstream post-Soviet literature tends to conceptualise them in purely ideological terms, i.e. in terms of socialism versus neoliberalism:

> 'The concepts of economic growth, competition, human capital, a democratic society, a market economy, effectiveness, efficiency, labor markets, and a knowledge-based economy, usually found in the World Bank's and the OECD's publications, are used throughout these [Russian government] documents. The choice of such vocabulary is deliberate. Market and neoliberal discourse has found its way into government documents and is being further spread by the mass media, changing linguistic exchanges in society. Just as the term 'perestroika' signified radical political and economic transformation in the 1980s, this new language may define the shift from a socialist to a more neoliberal mentality.' (Gounko & Smale 2006: 333)

One of the central findings of this research is a deeper ideological conflict underlying competing visions of reform in contemporary Russian education discourse. While ideological differences are certainly vocal in the reform discourse, the conflict extends beyond ideological boundaries into the realm of traditional cultures, where post-Soviet national education policies signify a radical detachment from traditional cultural configurations. How have these cultural specificities translated into the reform process?

I believe that through vulgar popularisation of the neoliberal worldview Russian reformists have paradoxically re-activated and reinforced the traditional views. Thus, the concept of learning in the official discourse has been premised on the idea of self-interest in a freely competitive market, while the traditional forms of social engagement have been ignored or discarded as deviations. The substitution of 'education' with 'educational service' has driven the otherwise viable idea of partial educational commercialisaiton to its extreme: not only there is market out there but there is nothing but market. The official policy mantra of *stavka na sil'neishego* ('betting' or 'putting the stakes' on the strongest), coupled with a hypertrophied distinction between the 'good'/the 'quality' and the 'bad'/the 'non-quality,' have implicitly yet consistently

established a hierarchy of superior winners and deficient losers. Policy interpretations of choice and competition have been premised on the moral supremacy of the market that celebrates elitism, selfishness and the triumph of the strong over the weak. As such, the official rhetoric effectively refutes the values of social solidarity and fosters indifference to the weak and the vulnerable.

> 'An 'elitist' ethic has gained legitimacy in educational circles, - notes an OECD commentator, - partially in reaction to what was perceived as too much egalitarianism in the Soviet system, which in practice translated into rigid uniformity.'(OECD 1998:81)

To borrow Reddaway & Glinski's (2001) metaphor, dogmatic application of market ideology to social institutions by Russian political elites is similar to the 'market bolshevism' aimed at the annihilation of the tsarist past at the beginning of the 20th century. The ethics of 'natural selection' adopted in the government policies have pushed the educational system, at least rhetorically, to operate within the 'survival of the fittest' mode.

The newly proposed educational ethic has continued up to date to fuel public resistance at a fundamental level. As I have demonstrated in this thesis, official and public conceptualisations of key reform ideas have been dramatically opposed to each other. Thus, the idea of maximising human personality through competition, curricular choice, and standardised assessment has been interpreted in the public as a complete displacement of a personality. The notions of diversity and uniqueness through quality standards have been perceived in terms of sameness and averageness. The concept of quality assurance through nationwide educational standards has been conceived of as a quintessence of authoritarian state control.

Popular mentalities have played an equivocal role in the reform process. On the one hand, dramatic re-interpretation of neoliberal ideas is a legitimate protest against the radical reversal of

traditional values in particular, and the excesses of modernity in general. From this perspective, I will engage with Smolin's argument that public conservatism coupled with a high degree of institutional inertia has played a vital stabilising role amidst the shock therapy-style modernisation reforms:

> 'In addition to the initial high level [of educational standards] in the Soviet period, in addition to specific motivation and exceptional sense of responsibility on the part of academics and pedagogists (...) it was the inertia and conservatism of the social institutions that, while preserving the spiritual potential of the nation, leave Russia a chance for modernisation in the future. In contrast, a radical revolutionary makeover of educational and scientific institutions would have led to an irreversible lagging behind from the more advanced countries.' (Smolin 2005:41)

On the other hand, public conservatism is also an expression of extreme social inertia, fear of ambition and innovation, as well as a general orientation of culture towards social envy, inefficiency, and stagnation. In this sense, I will also take onboard Kon's argument that 'envy, disguised as social justice, is the most powerful enemy of social and economic progress' (Kon 1996: 4). The archaic pre-industrial features of an 'envy' culture discussed in chapter VI have certainly played a crippling role in the reform process. In respect to its backbone principles, the contemporary system of Russian education might well be described with Hans' aphorism coined half a century ago: 'Russian it was and Russian it remains' (Hans 1963: 189).

7.2. Russia's ambiguous attitude to the West

Another source of ideological tension ingrained into the reform debate is Russia's historically ambiguous attitude to the West vis-à-vis Russia's national identity. As I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, the reform discourse has been heavily polarised between two ideological camps: the 'radical reformers' and the 'old guard.' While the official discourse finds itself caught between the globally dictated educational agenda and the imperatives of national identity, the

public discourse is largely construed through the prism of the opposition between the spiritual impoverishment of the West and Russia' unique course of civilisational development. In the public mind, such perceived properties of Russian nationalism as intellectualism, spirituality, and morality have been conflicted with the new, pro-Western, ideologies.

Such pattern of cultural thought has a strong historical precedent. Russian national identity has been long construed vis-à-vis the 'Other' within 'the indigenous versus the borrowed' opposition (Snyder 1990). Originating in the 18th century, the intellectual debate on Russia's position in the world has been marked by a strong ambivalence towards the 'Other,' initially represented by Europe (Snyder 1990) and in late modernity by the US (Elliott & Trudge 2007). This ambivalence has been punctuated by a vacillation between Russia's infatuations with the West and its preoccupation with own unique historical course of development, including a total rejection of the West. The opposition between the indigenous and the borrowed was solidified under Peter the Great's reign, a time when 'Western' ideas were first introduced into Russian realities, culminating in the struggle between two intellectual groups in the middle of the 19th century: the so-called 'Slavophiles' and 'Westernisers.'

Contemporary educational debate appears to heavily hinge on this historical polarisation, drawing arguments from the 'Slavophiles - Westernisers' intellectual stand-off. Both camps show appreciation for Russia's unique cultural and spiritual character, but disagree on Russia's historical progress vis-a-vis the West. The pro-Western reformers have emphasised Russia's historical 'backwardness,' seeing backward-looking nationalism as a regressive force. In search of progressive ideas for Russia's socio-economic advancement the reformers have turned to the 'enlightened' West and adopted a scientific-utilitarian view of reform. While acknowledging

Russia's unique historical development, the reformers have maintained that Russia needs to 'catch up' with Western civilisation by imitating its advanced practices.

The 'old guard' has drawn on Russia's heritage and emphasises such traditional values as spirituality (*dukhovnost'*), Orthodox collegiality (*sobornost'*), moral virtue (*nravstvennost'*) and intellectual profundity (*fundamental'nost'*). Similarly to the 18th century Slavophiles, the 'old guard' ascribes to Russia a special historical role as a bearer of 'true spirituality,' maintaining the myth of Russia's entitlement to a messianic role in the world's future. The sentiment of the Slavophiles' argument is captured in a famous Prince Odoevsky's quote:

> 'We [Russians] have a great mission to fulfill. Our name is already inscribed in on the tablets of victory: the victories of science, art and faith await us on the ruins of tottering Europe.' (as cited in Snyder 1990: 352)

The qualities perceived by the nouveau Slavophiles as uniquely Russian have been contrasted to their counterparts in Western societies: materialism, Protestant individualism, moral *laissez-faire*, and intellectual shallowness. Sharp criticism of the 'declining' Western civilisation has been accompanied in the public discourse by an appeal to preserve and strengthen the indigenous culture.

Russian intellectual thought has seen various blends of the two trends in the 19th and 20th centuries; however, the two basic frames of reference appear to have remained central to the construction of Russian educational identity (Dunlop 1983, Snyder 1990). Cultural anthropologists have argued that the Slavophiles-Westernisers debate reflects the fundamental controversy in the construction of Russian national identity: the extreme solutions offered by the two movements are symptomatic of 'chronic cultural stress' (Stein 1976: 404) Russia has been

suffering from its perceived alienation and self-isolation from the Western civilisation (Stein 1976, Snyder 1990).

As I have shown in this study, post-Soviet education reform debate certainly bears symptoms of an intensified cultural identity crisis. As observed by a number of scholars, the collapse of the Soviet regime had left the country in a state of cultural stress manifest in an axiological vacuum and a search for new humanistic values (Smolin 2001, Webber 2000). It is unsurprising that in this context the social policies of educational 'modernisation' have become to be critically perceived against the backdrop of Russia's civilisational identity. As Alexey Chernyshev, Deputy Director of Duma Committee for Education and Science, observed,

> 'We [Russians] have turned the search for the 'national idea' into the national education modernisation project.' (*Roditelskoie Sobranie*, Radio Moscow Echo, 2005)

The unresolved ambivalence towards the West has remained a controversial leitmotif running through the reform policies and the reform debate.

7.3. State versus Pedagogy

Another source of polarisation in the reform debate lies in a historic interaction of two conflicting reform drives: pedagogy and state control. After Bernstein (1996) I have referred to these frames as 'official' and 'pedagogic,' the former legitimised by the state and the latter sustained by pedagogic community and the public. Domestic pedagogic frame encompasses domestic experimental, learner-centred (so-called 'humanistic'), individually-tailored and *vospitanie*-oriented educational designs. The state control frame is associated with the uniformity of educational inputs, standardised 'assembly line' production, and a tightly regulated state-controlled curriculum. I have demonstrated in this thesis that while both official and public

discourses treat the two frames as antithetical, their reference points appear to be reversed. The official narrative utilises the Soviet model as a symbol of faceless uniformity and the new, 'scientifically based,' pedagogy as the quintessence of educational progressivism. In the public discourse these reference points are flipped over: the Soviet model is seen as the golden standard of educational provision, and the borrowed model represents depersonalised assembly line production.

Similar to the 'Russia vs. the West' opposition, these conflicting frames take roots in pre-Soviet history. Historically, the development of Russian education took place in the context of political hegemony of a succession of dictatorial regimes. Despite radical regime changes from tsarism to socialism, and on to authoritarianism, the state has maintained the same style of centralised educational administration and control. Reflecting on the longevity of the centralised model under conflicting political ideologies, educational historians (Archer 1979, Johnson 1969) have argued that the principles of centralised control of the Tsarist autocracy, the Bolshevik period, and the Soviet era are extreme ends of the same structural continuity, where educational change hinges upon political manipulation:

> 'From the foundations of the Tolstoy system onwards development in Russian education has taken place in the context of an impenetrable polity - a structural continuity which survived major political upheaval.' (Archer 1979: 284)

Other scholars have shown that educational administration of the late Soviet system is in many ways pre-revolutionary in character, with the rigidity and uniformity of the hierarchical organisation under the de-centralised 'ladder' model serving as a prerequisite for the uniformity, stability and egalitarianism of the Soviet education system (Pennar et al. 1971, Archer 1979, Johnson 1969). In the midst of political transformations experienced by the 'impenetrable polity' (Archer 1979) the pattern of rigid governance has served as a stabilising force for social

institutions, ensuring continuity of educational provision, and securing the survival of the educational system at critical times (Alexander 2001, Archer 1979, Smolin 2005).

Parallel to the centralisation grip of the state, runs a powerful tradition of innovative pedagogy and creative development of a child based on the indigenous idea of moral upbringing (*vospitanie*). While the style of educational administration has been administered by the state in a 'top-down' manner, the continuity of pedagogical thought has been sustained from the grassroots in a' bottom-up' fashion. Central to these pedagogical models has been the indigenous idea of *vospitanie*. Rooted in the 17th century orthodox brotherhoods, *vospitanie* is based on principles independent of political doctrines: an emphasis on the child's creative potential and spiritual needs, the role of Educator (*Uchitel'*) as a spiritual and moral model, and a close cooperation between teachers and parents in the moulding of a child's morals and ethics (Archer 1979, Pennar 1971, Eklof 2005). As political regimes espoused various ideologies, independent pedagogical approaches withstood and outlived ideological pressures. Although the unified educational provision under the communist regime is widely known as an icon of uniformity, it is the Soviet period that celebrated world-renowned achievements in innovative pedagogy and experimental child psychology. Examples are Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural approach, Anton Makarenko's self-governing child collectives, Alexander Adamsky's 'lessons of discovery,' and Viktor Shatalov's 'pedagogy of cooperation.' In discussing the relationship between state control and pedagogical innovation, Bereday (1960: 20) observed,

> 'It [Russian education] carries the ballast of rigid traditions and the bonds of axiomatic philosophy, yet it contains some inspiring notions and tries some courageous solutions.'

Within the restricted societal freedoms of the Soviet years, these courageous grassroots pedagogical movements were marginalised by the regime to the periphery. However, following

the opening up of the educational debate, contestations between official ideologies and classroom practices have re-actualised, in particular in the context of the ever-pressing need to unify educational provision across the country. As I discussed in detail in chapters V and VI, in its unyielding opposition to the idea of state policing and control, the public debate on educational standards and on commercialisation of educational services is almost exclusively informed by the overarching idea of *vospitanie*.

7.4. Revolutionary versus reformatory forces

In tracing post-Soviet educational developments, this study has highlighted a complex interrelation between stagnatory, reformist, and revolutionary forces. Marked by intermittences between reformist advancements and counter-reforms, the discursive reform pattern I have traced in the official rhetoric corresponds to what has been described as 'traditional' Russian pattern of social change (Pennar et al. 1971, Archer 1979, Froumin 2005, Sutherland 1999, Smolin 2001). The 'stop-go' (Archer 1979) pattern consists of 'jumping ahead' followed by 'backward' movements (Froumin 2005, Dneprov & Eklof 1993, Smolin 2005). It is characterised by a 'quick fix' approach applied to isolated elements of the educational system at certain points of historical emergencies. The need for stabilisation following an emergency subsequently triggers counter-reform forces that undo the earlier efforts. The reform finds itself caught up in a certain historical paradox: with each reform attempt, the reformers tend to bring to the logical conclusion the very elements of the old system they claim to be aiming to overcome. In regard to post-revolutionary educational reforms, for example, Pennar et al. (1971: 97 - 98), have argued,

> 'The course of action set in 1917 has been pursued without much thought to the changes that might be required of it in the future. When difficulties occur and the system threatens to explode, an emergency occurs, and everyone dashes forward

> with remedies to douse the fire. When this is overcome and when things are all right again, not much thought is given to the new creative revolutionary policies.'

Scholars have traced the roots of such controversial reform politics to Russia's historical culture (Bereday 1960, Lloyd 1998, Dneprov 1998, Alexander 2001). While the balance between continuity and discontinuity in the Russian history is a contested topic, many historians agree that discontinuity is a peculiar Russian 'specialty.' Lloyd (1998: 442), for example, sees Russian history as a succession of 'shocking discontinuities,' with the Soviet period as the most radical departure from the traditional culture. Indeed, Russia's turbulent transition from tsarist autocracy to communist totalitarianism and subsequently to democratic capitalism within the span of a century is full of historical paradoxes. After Yurii Lotman (2009) the Russian culture is often described as a 'culture of explosion,' where gradual historical development is encoded in the terms of 'pushing' or 'accelerating' history at certain bifurcation points:

> 'Change occurs as a radical negation of the preceding state. The new does not arise out of structurally 'unused' reserve, but results from a transformation of the old, a process of turning it inside out. Thus, repeated transformation can in fact lead to the *regeneration* of archaic forms.' (Lotman & Uspensky 1985: 32-33)

In light of these observations, Russian education modernisation reform is undoubtedly a successor of the traditional pattern of social change. Similarly to the revolutionary talk of the early Bolshevik years, social change has been conceptualised in the official discourse as a radical break with the past (in Lotman's terms, an 'explosion') and a rejection of the existing structures in an apocalyptic manner. The overarching reform discourse of the past two decades has been characterised by a heightened sense of urgency, resounding indictment of the mistakes made by the predecessors, and an incessant quest for a one-time revolutionary remedy for the chronic educational ills. Carried out in the 'stop-go' style of educational administration, the reform has fully embodied the logic of self-negation. While disavowing the Soviet legacy, post-Soviet

reformers have exacerbated the most pronounced ills of the old system, such as the 'leftover' principle of educational financing, low social status of pedagogical profession, and disproportionately high rates of higher education graduates (Smolin 2005, Webber 2000).

While in practice multiplying the mistakes of the past, Russian educational reformists have been consistent in espousing the logic of revolutionary denial of the preceding educational order. Its rhetorical sentiment may well be expressed by the infamous slogan of the Bolshevik version of the *Internationale*:

> 'We will destroy this world of violence
>
> Down to the foundations,
>
> And then we will build our new world.'

Dneprov (1998: 13) has accurately described the effect of historical perturbations on the educational system:

> 'Revolutionary development of domestic [Russian] education in the 19th - beginning of the 20th centuries, marked by a constant confrontation between reform and counter-reform, reflected the contradictory nature of the modernisation process, of Russia's [pattern of] 'accelerated development' – a severe conflict between two principal tendencies inbuilt into it [educational development]: progress and stagnation.'

The outcome has been similar to that described by Archer decades ago (1979: 260-261):

> 'The revolutionary talk about 'smashing of the old order of things' may have been good internal propaganda for a nation in flux, but behind the scenes the structure of the new state was rapidly being built upon the remnants of the old.'

The absolutist regimes of the 20th century, coupled with weak institutional capacities and rigidity of the imperial model of society, have proven unable to maintain any consistent reform initiatives in Russia's modern history. From the perspective of the public, the capricious discursive dynamics between continuity and change has certainly contributed to the blurring of

historical boundaries between 'revolution' and 'reform' in their conventional meanings of a violent makeover versus a planned incremental change. It is, therefore, unsurprising that by the end of the 20th century, the very term 'reform' became just as disgraced as the long-discredited 'revolution' (Smolin 2005, Sutherland 1999, Dneprov 1993). For both the public and the policy-makers, the idea of 'reform' began to be perceived in terms of a drastic makeover rather than a smooth transition, with 'how to do less harm' as a guiding principle of policy-making. Even in the best of its implementation, 'reform,' in the public mind, has been perceived as a temporary change likely to be followed by a 'reform of the Reform' (Sutherland 1999: 36). While the need for 'moderate' market reforms in education was universally recognised in Russian society shortly before and after 1991 (Smolin 2005, Webber 2000), from the mid-2000s onwards a revolutionary burnout has become increasingly widespread. A byword by Russia's ex-Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin aptly captures the paradoxical nature of social reform in Russia: 'We meant to do better, but it came out as always.'

7.5. Binary logic of opposition

The clash of the three value positions highlighted above has been strongly underlined by another signature characteristic of Russian thought: an overriding 'binary logic of opposition' (Lotman 2009), whereby social phenomena tend to be conceptualised as absolute and uncompromising alternatives. Lotman has identified several sets of modern-time oppositions whose historical roots stretch back to medievalism: holiness versus politics, wisdom versus foolishness, love versus the law, charity versus justice, and money versus the soul. Such binary vision of the world dictates that only one alternative can be chosen at any historical point, rendering the culture incapable of evolutionary thinking, renewal, and organic growth. Lotman (2009: 174) has deemed this as a result, or rather 'a severe dictate,' of a binary historical culture:

> 'The idea of independent economic development in Western Europe was organically connected to gradual development over time and the rejection of the idea of the acceleration of history.' In our situation, the same slogan presupposes the notion of government intervention and the instantaneous conquest of historical space into the most compressed periods – whether it be 500 days or any other period – previously dictated by history. Psychologically, here we see the same ideas proposed by Peter the Great 'to overtake and surpass Europe' (...) or the even more memorable 'five year plan in four years.' Even when we are talking of gradual development, we want to accomplish this using explosive techniques. This, however, is not the result of some lack of thought, but rather the severe dictate of a binary historical structure.'

Unlike Anglo-America cultures, the Russian cultural evolution lacks a tradition of resolving opposition through compromise; in fact, it fosters a tradition of *intolerance* for any kind of compromise. I have argued that it is precisely a lack of compromising ability on the part of reform proponents and opponents that has had a debilitating effect on a potentially fruitful reform debate. The all-or-nothing nature of change is strongly present in the discursive makeup of education reform with binary logic serving to polarise differing yet potentially congruent moral and ethical values. Thus, instead of embracing its rich educational heritage the official rhetoric of a 'breakthrough' (*proriv*), 'jumping ahead' and 'accelerating history' has focused its discursive energy on annihilating recent history and creating a new educational order from scratch. In doing so, the reformist narrative has denied the preceding educational order any cultural legitimacy, maintaining a sense of historical inevitability for only one possible version of the reform. Struggling to establish the boundaries of the new status quo, the official discourse has tapped into different discursive formations (traditional, welfare state, and neoliberal), radically swapping negative and positive values depending on its immediate strategic objectives. Unable to maintain discursive unity in negotiating the tensions between conflicting ideologies, the reformers have resorted to the tactics of elision and substitution of traditional educational values for radical neoliberal ones: collective excellence for individual ambition, altruism for self-interest, selfless service for detached professional expertise. Similarly, in navigating the

boundaries between the new economic realities, the receding welfare state ideology and home pedagogical tradition, the public discourse has also conceptualised the tacit ideological conflict in absolute all-or-nothing terms.

7.6. Final remarks and prognoses

With education being the primary realm of socio-cultural production, the patterns of historical thinking have played a critical role in facilitating or hampering educational change.

> ‘Such cultural patterns as binary consciousness or the Russian idea may well shape social and political transitions as decisively as macroeconomic policies or international relation strategies (...).’ (McDaniel 1996: 18)

From the sociological point of view, a moral cognitive restructuring within the society is an extremely complex and slow-moving process largely independent of official policy intervention by either local or foreign agents who prescribe them. As a *politically imposed* discourse, neoliberalism in Russia would therefore require a substantial degree of alignment vis-à-vis cultural norms and patterns of thought. Some scholars have argued (Kliucharev & Muckle 2005, Shalin 2012) that the current status quo is that of social anomie, or normlessness, whereby traditional meanings are deranged, and new ones are either not developed or not sufficiently internalised by the civil society. Shalin (2012: 8), for example, maintains,

> ‘(...) the cataclysmic break with the past we have witnessed in the Russia in the last decade cannot be directed and controlled from above. This break produces anticipated consequences, stirs conflicts, and breeds deviant conduct – a pattern well known to students of social change. Underlying this pattern is what Emile Durkheim called anomie, when old norms no longer apply but new ones are too vague and problematic to command universal assent. As numerous accounts attest, behavioral changes in revolutionary times are accompanied by a cognitive restructuring that sets new standards of valuation and breeds a sense of moral malaise. What people in Russia are discovering is that the system is encrypted in their selves, that it cannot be turned on and off at will.’

Educational values, however, are notoriously robust. While the official reform narrative has straddled conflicting value paradigms, popular public educational values, as I have demonstrated in this thesis, have remained overwhelmingly conservative. Such conclusion is supported by evidence from broader culturally-sensitive research on neoliberal reforms in Russia (Iliin et al. 1996, Dinello 1998, Wyman 1997, Kitaev 1994, Wyman 2007, McDaniel 1996). Sociological research shows that while some attitudes are changing (Kitaev 1994), post-Soviet generations of Russian people continue to espouse egalitarian and non-economic values (Dobrynina et al. 2000).

In this context, cultural analysts have expressed concerns over a potential reform backlash in the form of antidemocratic consequences of neoliberalism. In examining cycles of modernisation in the Russian history, a group of Russian sociologists, for example, prognosticated a decisive sociocultural failure. 'The reformers, - they have argued, - are standing *against* the [cultural] reality rather than building on it' (Iliin et al. 1996: 319). McDaniel and Wyman have reached similar conclusions, cautioning against detrimental political consequences of an ill-informed neoliberal policy expansion:

> 'If Russians and their foreign mentors do not confront these cultural and moral questions but continue to insist that the reform of Russia is primarily a technical and economic question, it is all the more likely that capitalism will continue to be wild and immoral, and that formal democracy will have a profound antidemocratic content.' (McDaniel 1996: 18)

> 'In a wider political context the sense that Government policy is out of line with social preferences undermines the legitimacy of the government itself, making tough policies still more difficult to adhere to. The political conclusion must be that a much more convincing effort is necessary to persuade the Russian public of the virtues of change if there is not to be a still more significant backlash against reform.' (Wyman 1997: 212)

In light of the evidence presented throughout this thesis as well as in broader social science literature I will join the ranks of skeptics regarding immediate prospects for neoliberal educational reform in Russia. The findings of this study have indicated that the mentalities of pre-industrial and early industrial society do not bode well with contentious neoliberal education reforms. While the coercive structures supporting a welfare model of educational provision have undoubtedly crumbled under market pressures, the externally imposed neoliberal educational policies have up to date never seriously challenged the foundations of the anti-individualist and anti-monetary ideals in Russian education. As a result, instead of a much desired 'climate of acceptance' (World Bank 2001: 15), two decades into the reform process, neoliberal education agenda continues to face staunch public resistance.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has analysed local interpretations of neoliberal reform policies in Russia in the course of post-Soviet education reform. I have established that Russian education modernisation reform agenda was shaped in close compliance with policy advice by a narrow circle of experts associated with funding organisations, bypassing consultation with other relevant local educational constituencies. Transmitted to Russian society by the educational elite, the modernisation agenda has limited the range of possibilities for political action to neoliberal prescriptions.

The neoliberal voice has been institutionalised under the banner of public-driven demand 'renewal' and posited as fully aligned with nationally-grounded pedagogical preferences. The global neoliberal orthodoxy of free educational market, excellence, standardisation and quality control has informed Russian educational policies of the past two decades, providing the backbone for the new educational ideology. This thesis presented a discourse analytic inquiry into the three pillars of the new educational orthodoxy: educational quality, educational standardisation and commercial educational service. The analysis focused on how local educational architecture has absorbed, adopted, re-interpreted, and resisted these global neoliberal ideas.

The analysis of official government rhetoric has revealed a controversial idiosyncratic version of reform. The trajectory of post-1991 educational change in Russia showed an initial radical liberalisation followed by a neo-conservative phase. During the radical phase, the official language of the reform fully appropriated and ventriloquated the neoliberal doctrine. Presented as unarguable truth, the exogenous economic imperative was employed to commodify the process of learning and to consumerise social actors. The conservative phase included tightening of state control over educational institutions and re-establishment of centrally-controlled curriculum through the introduction of national standards for education. Having overtly endorsed values of democracy and the market economy, the Russian government managed to preserve a state monopoly over the educational policy-making process, creating a gap between educational rhetoric and practice. In advocating individual freedom from state controls, official policies have increasingly withdrawn from their former responsibilities for guaranteeing educational quality, delegating them to individuals and educational institutions. In stark contrast to an increasingly commercialised educational environment, a legal guise of a welfare state with free general and higher education has been rhetorically maintained.

While some contemporary scholarship tends to theorise the espousal of neoliberal rhetoric as an indicator of an ideological shift towards a neoliberal worldview, this study has argued that beyond the rhetorical convergence the discursive architecture of educational governance has remained unchanged from the preceding discourse. Thus, educational quality continues to be conceptualised as a unitary all-or-nothing characteristic, authoritative role of the state is discursively sustained, and academic learning is conceived of within the ‘knowledge paradigm’ with its focus on rote learning and fundamentality. In addition, the official discourse has

maintained the Soviet-style monopolisation and centralisation of control over educational governance and policy-making. From the late 1990s onwards, the state has increasingly reaffirmed its standing as the most influential agent in education.

Instead of negotiating apparent ideological tensions between neoliberal and welfare state models, the highly technocratic official discourse has retained a semblance of ideological unity through mechanical juxtaposition of conflicting value positions. Glossing over perspectives and carrying multiple interpretative frames, the policy language exhibits a great degree of ambiguity. Meanings of reform concepts are refracted and flipped over depending on the pragmatics of the policy context. Competing discourses are 'stitched together' (Taylor 1995: 9) in a 'manipulated consensus' (Silova 2002: 1), allowing for multiple simultaneous interpretations of neoliberal ideas. Reflecting broader issues of institutional anomie and crisis of national identity, official reform policies have lacked clear vision and focus.

The neoliberal master narrative has served mainly symbolic purposes, in order to secure legitimacy for a particular reform agenda and signal allegiance to the neoliberal course internationally. Such notions as 'innovation,' 'choice,' and 'quality' have been employed as powerful myths for projecting idealistic future-oriented visions of reform, obscuring the mismatch between rhetoric and the reality. Throughout this thesis I have uncovered a variety of rhetorical technologies of imitation, including concept substitution and concept merging, through which the official discourse has simulated neoliberal change. Together with a number of other researchers of social reform in post-Soviet Russia (Wilson 2005, Silova 2010), I have suggested that a neo-conservative approach coated in neoliberal rhetoric has produced an effect of 'reform

simulation' rather than paradigmatic transformation. Keeping in mind the centrality of the governmental agency in interpreting and modifying the 'borrowed' discursive meanings, I have argued that the effect of 'neoliberal stagnation' (Magun 2010: 16) in education originates at the level of reform conception prior to implementation.

The ideological tensions between 'the local' and 'the borrowed' are crystallised in the highly charged societal debate filled with public discontent and disenchantment. I have demonstrated how seemingly shared language of the reform conceals significantly different interpretative schemes underlying the official and the public visions of the reform. Through expanding the policy concepts of 'quality', 'standardisation,' and 'service' I have demonstrated how the neoliberal doctrine receives radically different interpretations as it trickles down into the public discourse. Thus, the neoliberal notion of standardisation as a set of educational principles ensuring fair educational opportunities has been re-conceptualised in the Russian culture code as a reductionist one-size-fits-all prescription that straightjackets the local pedagogical tradition. As pointed out in the theoretical premises of this research, vernacular interpretations travel back into the official, creating conceptual ambiguity and causing confusion in the policy-making debate. Besides hindering productive societal debate about the national aims for education, the ambiguity brought on by vernacular interpretations of reform ideas appears to have created a 'false consensus,' leading to the adaptation of a 'diluted' (Webber 2000: 171) version of the neoliberal reform agenda.

The perceived profane nature of original reform ideas has mobilised and sustained public opposition to reform. In unpacking the nature of popular resistance, the analysis presented here

has revealed significant unresolved conflicts between culture-specific worldviews at the heart of the reform debate. I have argued that the popular logic behind opposition to reform is rooted outside of pedagogy in broader cultural values. Specifically, the pillars of neoliberal orthodoxy - the notions of instrumental rationality, personal ambition, choice, competitive individualism and entrepreneurship - have little positive moorings in the Russian cultural canon. Perceived as ostentatiously alien, these notions have been perceived as antithetical to traditional values of communalism, egalitarianism, philanthropy and state paternalism. At the same time, popular perceptions are selective and self-contradictory. Thus, honest educational entrepreneurship continues to be held in contempt, yet pervasive corruption within the system is tolerated. I have further argued that as a cultural artefact, domestic pedagogical values have played a crucial role in sedimenting and conserving outdated educational practices.

Finally, in discussing the cultural pattern of reform I have highlighted the revolutionary nature of social change in Russian historical culture. I have argued that in annihilating the past, the official policy discourse has driven the neoliberal ideas to their opposing extremes, from the perspective of both pedagogy and economy. In terms of pedagogy, by building its rhetoric on the opposition between 'pedagogics of command' versus 'pedagogics of cooperation' it has antithesised Soviet and post-Soviet educational settings. By pronouncing the familiar domestic concepts of humanistic pedagogy a touchstone of the new pedagogical progressivism, the official discourse flipped the axiological paradigms upside down. Similarly, the concepts of standards and quality have been presented as brand new and in opposition to their indigenous counterparts. In terms of educational economics, the official discourse has asserted the hegemony of a market *laissez-faire* and posited the primacy of economy over culture. In translating the idea of competitive

educational market to the public, the official rhetoric has covertly established the ‘survival-of-the-fittest’ mentality over the new educational order.

While discussing historically determined patterns of thought I have further highlighted a cultural tendency to view social change in terms of absolute extremes, such as revolution versus reform, money versus the soul and Russia versus the West. I have shown how, as a result of the binary thought, modernisation reform has been crippled by the polarisation between the ‘modernisers’ and the ‘old guard,’ with two distinct camps encompassing significant ideological differences. In pursuit of a revolutionary change, the modernisers have conceptualised reform in terms of ‘catching up’ with the progressive West and educational modernisation in terms of ‘pushing’ and ‘accelerating’ history. The ‘old guard’ has conceptualised the idea of a radical Western-modelled change in terms of decay and destruction. Its narrative is marked by the idealisation of the Soviet-era past and a pronounced push for the restoration of Soviet educational settings, where ‘the Soviet’ loses its historical specificity and is perceived as part of a commonly shared cultural heritage.

I have suggested that mainstream scholarship on post-Soviet education reform is yet to capture the essential ambiguity of post-Soviet change. I have shown that the challenge of marrying neoliberal modernisation with the ‘Russian idea’ has proven insurmountable in the two decades of the reform process. In terms of the linkage between education and national identity I have found little evidence of public endorsement of neoliberal principles. I have offered a pessimistic prognosis as to the cultural suitability of a standard neoliberal vision for education modernisation. I have concluded that before it can win popular assent in Russia, the neoliberal

discourse is yet to challenge widespread egalitarian and collectivist mentalities, the profound opposition to individualist and mercenary spirit and the enduring anti-monetarist ethos.

APPENDIX I

MAIN DATA SOURCES

State laws and official government statements	
President of the Russian Federation official website	kremlin.ru http://archive.kremlin.ru
Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation official website	mon.gov.ru
Federal Educational Standards official website	http://standart.edu.ru
Unified National Test official website	ege.ru
Draft state laws official website	zakonoproekt2011.ru
Council of Federation official website	council.gov.ru
Civic Council of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation official website	http://sovet-edu.ru
From Russia’s President to Russia’s Young Scholars and Professionals official website	http://www.youngscience.ru
Dmitry Medvedev Video Blog	http://blog.da-medvedev.ru

Sociological, research, and polling agencies	
Levada-Centre, Russia’s Independent Polling and Sociological Research Agency	levada.ru
Public Opinion Foundation	fom.ru
Electronic Monitor for the Development of Education	http://www.kpmo.ru
Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology	http://www.jourssa.ru
Mikhail Gorbachev’s International Foundation for	http://www.gorby.ru

Professional teacher associations and publications	
Russian Education and Society Journal	www.mesharpe.com
Uchitel'skaya Gazeta (The Teachers' Gazette)	www.ug.ru
Pedsovet (Pedagogical Council)	http://pedsovet.org
Online Public Consultations on the Law on Education	http://edu.crowdexpert.ru/node/64
Pervoie Sentiabria (September the First) Newspaper	http://ps.1september.ru
Zavuch Info (Head Master's Information Bulletin)	http://www.zavuch.info
Innovatsionnaia Obrazovatelnaia Set' (Innovation Education Network)	http://www.eurekanet.ru
Agenstvo Sotsial'no-politicheskih Initsiativ *(*Russia's Agency for Socio-Political Initiatives	http://arspi.ru
Assotsiatsia Distantsionnogo Obrazovania Eidos (Eidos, Association for Distance Education)	www.eidos.ru
Pedagogicheskii Zhurnal (Pedagogical Journal)	http://www.delpress.ru
Literaturnaia Gazeta (Literature Gazette)	http://lgz.ru
Federalnii Obrazovatelnii Portal (Federal Educational Portal)	http://ecsocman.hse.ru
Virtualnoe Gosudarstvo Uchitelei (Virtual Teachers' State)	http://www.intergu.ru
Uchitelskii Portal (Teachers' Portal)	uchportal.ru
Sovremennaia Gumanitarnaia Akademia (Modern Humanitarian Academy)	http://www.muh.ru

National media	
Echo Moskvy national radio station	www.echo.msk.ru
Rianovosti media agency	http://ria.ru
Pust' Govoriat! national talk-show	http://pust-govorjat.ru
Argumenti i Fakti newspaper	argumenti.ru
Spetsialnii Korrespondent talk-show	http://russia.tv
Moscow News newspaper	http://mn.ru
Izvestia newspaper	izvestiia.ru
Gazeta newspaper	Gazeta.ru
Nezavisimaia Gazeta newspaper	ng.ru
Vzgliad newspaper	http://www.vz.ru
Rosbalt media agency	http://www.rosbalt.ru

On-line public discussion	
Parents' portals	kid.ru http://www.ya-roditel.ru http://ped-kopilka.ru http://nechtoportal.ru
*Net Reforme Obrazovania! (*National movement No to Education Reform!)	http://netreforme.org
Open public discussion of the 2010 Law on Education	zakonoproekt2011.ru
Discussion on the *Skepsis* Journal website	http://scepsis.net
Public discussions on official government websites	kremlin.ru

	mon.gov.ru http://standart.edu.ru ege.ru council.gov.ru http://blog.da-medvedev.ru

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