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ARTICLE

Transform the world or adapt the student: discursive shifts in the constructions of teachers’ roles and pedagogy in the Russian Federation

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on the analysis of discursive shifts in the constructions of teachers’ roles during the twentieth century in the Russian Federation, this paper argues that pedagogy becomes redefined based on the political elites’ vision for the society’s future. During the Soviet era, teachers were expected to play a key role in social transformation. In order to transform the world, they were expected to deploy humanistic pedagogy to help all students realize their potential. During the post-Soviet era, this vision was abandoned. As teachers were expected to fulfill the function of social control, they were called to adopt technocratic pedagogy that comprised principles of psychologisation, individualisation, pathologisation, and depoliticisation. Psychologisation of teachers’ roles and pathologisation of diversity became deployed to “adapt students to the world” by addressing problems within students rather than in the society. The significance of this paper lies in demonstrating connections between shifting discourses of teachers’ roles, pedagogy, and pursuit of social transformation or conservative social change.

The focus on schools as sites of social reproduction prevalent in the field of social foundations has failed to account for historical events that fostered the emergence of “revolutionary pedagogies”.¹ To address this gap, Ewing and colleagues showed how various national events in countries around the world created ruptures in educational discourses and practices that facilitated the spread of the transformative potential of education.² Building on this work, this article provides an analysis of educational reforms in the Russian Federation in the twentieth century. Unlike many other nation-states in the Global North³ that experienced relative stability in social structures over the span of the last century, the Russian Federation underwent major social ruptures first when the Soviet Union was created in 1922 and second when it collapsed in 1991. With every social

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³The term Global North refers to the well-off industrialised countries, many of which are located in Europe and North America.
upheaval, Russian political elites – individuals and groups in positions of power that were either visible to the public or obscured from the public eye – positioned teachers at the centre of political debates. Thus, discursive shifts in constructions of teachers’ roles and pedagogies that emerged in Russia could provide insights into the repositioning of teachers from agents of social transformation into agents of social control.

At the core of my argument is shifting discourses of what pedagogy entails. Even though the use of the term pedagogy has grown over time in English-language scholarship, the concept remains blurry across different traditions. Shulman, for example, referred to pedagogy as “broad principles and strategies of classroom management and organisation that appear to transcend subject matter”. Arguing against such a limited understanding, Alexander defined pedagogy as “both an act and discourse [that] encompasses the performance of teaching together with the theories, beliefs, policies, and controversies that inform and shape it”. Because “pedagogy connects the apparently self-contained act of teaching with culture, structure, and mechanisms of social control”, pedagogy can be conceptualised as a relational space in which students become oriented in the world, learn about their positions in social structures, and respond to those positions by either accepting or refusing them. At the same time, it is important to recognise that across historical time periods, there is no stable definition of pedagogy. Ewing, for example, demonstrated how notions of pedagogy changed during conservative as well as progressive revolutions in different societies around the world.

Pedagogy plays an important role in normalising inequality or disrupting the status quo of unjust societies. Lingard suggested that “the quality of pedagogies is a social justice issue” because pedagogies that are not intellectually demanding and which make implicit cultural assumptions benefit those with the requisite cultural capital obtained through socialisation within the home and disadvantage the already disadvantaged in terms of such capital and often misrecognise such reproduction in terms of individual ability – a “social gift treated as a natural one”.

Alim and Paris advocated increasing the transformative potential of teachers through the deployment of culturally sustaining pedagogies rooted in the “critique [of] dominant power structures”. What supports teachers’ work towards “positive social transformation” is teachers’ critical consciousness, awareness of sociopolitical

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6Alexander, Culture and Pedagogy, 540.
7Ewing, “Shaking the Foundations of Education”.
contexts of schooling, commitment to equity, and activist dispositions. While this line of scholarship has illuminated what teachers need in order to deploy humanistic pedagogies in pursuit of justice, socio-political factors that enable teachers to enact these principles have received less attention.

Through a comparative analysis of historical and contemporary data from the Russian Federation, this article documents discursive shifts in constructions of teachers’ roles and pedagogy at pivotal historical moments. When those in power see teachers as a transformative force, they support constructions of humanistic pedagogy that position students as actors engaged in transforming the world around them. On the other hand, when teachers are expected to be agents who preserve the status quo, constructions of technocratic pedagogy for social control become dominant. This technocratic pedagogy focuses on solving students’ problems and “adapt[ing] them to the world”, thus producing spectators rather than actors. The significance of this paper lies in demonstrating connections between shifts in discursive constructions of pedagogy and political elites’ vision for social change.

This paper consists of three parts that explore divergent constructions of teachers’ roles that served as the foundation for conceptualising pedagogy before and after the collapse of the USSR in 1991. The first part of the paper presents an analysis of discursive constructions of teachers’ roles in the writings of two most influential theorists of education of the Soviet era (1922–1991). Contrary to the Cold War rhetoric circulated in the Global North, teachers were expected to be a transforming social force and their roles rested on the principles of humanistic pedagogy that prioritised personal relationships, trust, love, and faith in children. The second part of the paper examines a discursive shift in constructions of pedagogy developed in the late Soviet era by the controversial Russian philosopher Georgiy Shchedrovitsky. His work represented departures from the Soviet-era humanistic approaches towards a more technocratic construction of pedagogy as a tool of blueprinting individuals as objects. The third part shows

17This paper is a part of a larger project that examined teacher education reforms in the Russian Federation. The study was conceptualised drawing on the principles of anthropology of policy that approaches policy as an instrument of power and as a struggle over desired futures and contested pasts. The study included a multi-sited ethnography conducted between 2011 and 2015 at a policy-making hub in central Russia and at two teacher education universities in different parts of the country. The data comprised over 80 interviews, 15 focus groups, and more than 50 observations of classroom, university, and public events. Drawing on Nader’s (Laura Nader, ‘Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives Gained from Studying Up’, In Reinventing Anthropology, ed. D. Hymes (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972) 284–311) call to study policymakers’ perceptions and actions as they shape reform directions, the study focused on the reformers actively engaged in discarding constructions inherited from the Soviet past and in reshaping the role of pedagogy in post-socialist Russia in my data collection and analysis. Data sources comprised ethnographic data, policy documents, academic publications, archival materials, and ministerial reports dealing with educational reforms in Russia. Historical data were collected during archival research in the State Archives of the Russian Federation (Rus. GARF), Ushinsky Pedagogical Library, as well as the Slavic library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in order to analyse how discourses of teachers’ roles and pedagogy evolved in Russia in the twentieth century.
how Shchedrovitsky’s design of technocratic pedagogy was heeded by Russian reformers responsible for the introduction of neoliberal reforms in the 2010s. As political elites chose social control as one of the main teachers’ roles, they made teachers responsible for “adapting students to the world”. To accomplish this goal, they introduced technocratic pedagogies based on psychologisation of teachers’ work, individualisation of teaching, pathologisation of diversity, and depoliticisation of education. To explore these transformations in greater depth, the paper draws on the works of Marcuse\(^ {19} \) and Freire,\(^ {20} \) who conceptualised the role of pedagogy in maintaining the status quo of unequal societies and its potentialities for facilitating social transformation rather than social control.

**Theoretical framework**

One of the notable critical theorists who advanced the vision for humanistic pedagogy was Paulo Freire. Freire emphasised that teachers and students undergo open-ended becoming.\(^ {21} \) His pedagogy affirmed students’ full humanity by focusing on hope, joy, and love in the process of learning. He also noted that “the pursuit of full humanity cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship and solidarity”.\(^ {22} \) By posing questions about realities around them and exploring answers to those questions together, teachers and students can name the world in order to transform it. Marcuse complemented this perspective by highlighting the importance of critical theories and deep concepts in students’ ability to engage in critique and action.\(^ {23} \) According to both Freire and Marcuse, critical consciousness plays a crucial role in the dialectical analysis of social inequality. Humanising pedagogy for social transformation, in short, produces actors who challenge the status quo and are equipped to collectively imagine the world otherwise (Figure 1).

In contrast, technocratic pedagogy produces spectators by treating students as mere objects to adapt to the world (Figure 2). Unlike actors who take an agentive stance towards social events, spectators observe from a distance, feeling disconnected both from other social actors\(^ {24} \) and from historical processes as “people without a world”.\(^ {25} \) Freire critiqued educational approaches that focus on the individual as an entity separated from the world as well as depoliticised representations of the world disconnected from human subjects that make it appear immutable and unchanging.\(^ {26} \)

Marcuse treated depoliticisation as an element of the technocratic pedagogy of social control.\(^ {27} \) Instead of engaging in a critique of social systems or oppressive relations, schools teach students to see reality as disconnected depoliticised elements that they

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21Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

22Ibid., 85.

23Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*.


26Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

27Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*. 
cannot change. Such schools produce spectators who focus on “reduced concepts” and “false concreteness”, centring subjects’ personal problems, experiences, or desires at the expense of critical analysis of social structures.

Where these reduced concepts govern the analysis of the human reality, individual or social, mental or material, they arrive at a false concreteness – a concreteness isolated from the conditions which constitute its reality. In this context, the operational treatment of the concept assumes a political function. The individual and his behaviour are analysed in
a therapeutic sense – adjustment to his society. Thought and expression, theory and practice are to be brought in line with the facts of his existence without leaving room for the conceptual critique of these facts.\textsuperscript{28}

This strategy allows political elites to adapt subjects to the existing world rather than prepare them to be initiators of change. As a result, educational institutions operate as sites of social control that maintain existing power structures and preclude a possibility of social transformation.

Building on these observations, Fischer connected the process of depoliticisation with the rise of technocorporate regimes across the world:

Technocorporatism’s attempt to structure decision processes technocratically is a strategy to impede this process of political activation. It is, in short, designed to facilitate the maintenance of a depoliticised mass public.\textsuperscript{29}

Together these processes contribute to the emergence of spectators – people unable to see themselves as actors engaged in the transformation of the world, ready to accept their position in a social hierarchy, and prepared to maintain the status quo of unequal societies.

These theorists demonstrated that the pedagogies teachers deploy are linked to different roles that teachers play in the society. Marcuse pointed out that teachers who have a deep understanding of dialectical forces shaping social realities are more likely to deploy pedagogies for social transformation.\textsuperscript{30} In contrast, if teachers do not engage in social critique and accept the technocratic logic, they perpetuate the status quo and operate as agents of social control.\textsuperscript{31} From the vantage point of these critical theories, discursive shifts in the constructions of teachers’ roles and pedagogy from the Soviet to post-Soviet eras reflect connections between humanistic pedagogies (Figure 1) and political elites’ desire for social transformation as well as technocratic pedagogies (Figure 2) and elites’ desire for social control.

**Early Soviet era: a teacher to transform the world**

Prior to the 1917 revolution, Russian teachers were called to educate their students to become obedient servants of God and the tsar.\textsuperscript{32} With the establishment of the new Soviet state, a search for new forms of education began. As political elites pursued the vision of creating a new society, they turned to teachers. One of the primary architects and early theorists of Soviet education was Nadezhda Krupskaya (1869–1939) – a revolutionary, an important political actor, Lenin’s wife, and a teacher herself. As a member of the People’s Commissariat of Education, Krupskaya made important contributions to the development of the Soviet system of education and was one of the key founders

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[28]Marcuse, \textit{One-Dimensional Man}, 107, emphasis added.
\item[31]Marcuse, \textit{One-Dimensional Man}.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
of Soviet pedagogy.\textsuperscript{33} Krupskaya called for the development of pedagogy that would cultivate freedom and move away from individualist orientations of capitalist education.\textsuperscript{34} In part as a result of her advocacy, new pedagogy developed in the 20s was built on the principles of “humanism, collectivism, internationalism, [and] a new type of relationship between the teachers and the pupils.”\textsuperscript{35}

Drawing on her experiences as an activist prior to the revolution of 1917, Krupskaya argued that teachers had to enlighten the society.\textsuperscript{36} Enlightenment entailed helping students develop the ability to read and write, pursue meaningful lives, lead healthy lifestyles, and work in ways that could bring pleasure and satisfaction. Using school knowledge as “a tool for transforming reality”, teachers were responsible for carrying out the project of social transformation.\textsuperscript{37} To accomplish this role, teachers had to not only know the subject to teach, but also to understand wider sociopolitical and socioeconomic processes.

Apart from understanding social processes, teachers also had to know how to work with children. Krupskaya, along with other Soviet educators after her, conceptualised this work in terms of trusting relationships that become the foundation for developing children’s intellectual abilities, cultivating their curiosity, and expanding their horizons. For example, in describing what kind of person a good teacher should be, Krupskaya wrote:

Someone who knows how to approach children from any background, knows how to win their trust, to help them self-organise, to awaken new interests in them, to broaden their horizons – only such a person can turn out to be a good teacher.\textsuperscript{38}

While these discourses may have had different manifestations in teaching practices, teachers’ roles throughout the twentieth century were constructed around the humanistic values of trust, relationships, and shared interests.

Of note is also Krupskaya’s focus on “children from any background”. Her works highlight not different categories of children, but rather a collective term that encompasses all children. When in the later years of the Soviet rule, categorisations of children appeared in policy texts – children from rural areas, working class families, or orphans – the call was to acknowledge and address the context that put certain groups of children in disadvantaged positions. These categorisations were created in order to ensure that schools offered compensatory services. These services were rooted in the understanding that the challenges students faced were not individual responsibility, but rather an outcome of social and economic inequities that could be addressed by providing extra opportunities or resources.


Sukhomlinsky’s humanistic pedagogy

Krupskaya’s legacy of humanistic pedagogy and teachers’ role in social transformation was further developed by Vasiliy Sukhomlinsky (1918–1970) – a teacher and school principal who was highly influential in the Soviet and Russian educational community during the second half of the twentieth century.39 His renown for educational approaches that transformed lives was so widespread that the school where he was a principal became “an educational mecca visited by thousands of Soviet teachers” and he himself gained the reputation of “the leading exponent of Soviet educational ideals”.40

Sukhomlinsky started teaching at a school in mid-1930s while he was still a student in a teacher preparation programmeme. From his early days as a teacher, he kept a journal and began writing about the foundations of his teaching approaches. According to Sukhomlinsky, a good teacher is someone who loves children, knows and loves the science of the subject he teaches, knows psychology and pedagogy as sciences of upbringing, and is a master of his/her craft. This image of a good teacher shaped his decisions in hiring teachers for his school:

We selected people based on the following principle: first, the moral right to teach and bring up children; second, love for hard work; third, love for children, faith in each child, regardless of the difficulties that his upbringing might entail. If a person has all these qualities, then a lack of experience with [teaching] methods; gaps in his knowledge may not be a problem in the beginning – if a person is hard-working and is thirsty for knowledge, s/he can continue studying while working in school. But if a person does not have faith in a child, if s/he whines, gets disappointed with every tiny misfortune, if s/he is convinced that nothing good will come out of a child – this person has nothing to do in a school: s/he will only hurt children.41

Drawing on his own experience as a principal, Sukhomlinsky described what he saw as a crucial quality in a teacher – faith in children or belief that children can succeed regardless of their backgrounds. A teacher’s role, based on Sukhomlinsky’s writing, was to help children deal with intellectually demanding content by serving as an inspiring example and creating the environment that stimulates cognitive growth. Sukhomlinsky’s arguments closely resembled the premises of sociocultural theorists who emphasised the role of contexts in shaping individuals, arguing that educational institutions had to compensate for what children did not receive from their backgrounds.42 Sukhomlinsky’s constructions of pedagogy, elements of which were espoused by many Soviet educators, approached each student not as an unalterable being, but rather as a being in the process of becoming – the process that can be enhanced and enriched by educational institutions. As Cockerill observed:

Sukhomlinsky projects an ideal of human development which excludes no one, as all have the potential for moral growth, for developing empathy and rendering service to others. All are involved in creating an optimal educational environment ... Sukhomlinsky [...] was moved by a deep concern that there are no casualties in the process of schooling ... 43

40Alan Cockerill, Each One Must Shine: The Educational Legacy of V. A. Sukhomlinsky (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 1.
43Cockerill, Each One Must Shine, 213.
To prevent “casualties in the process of schooling”, Sukhomlinsky developed a humanistic pedagogical approach, which placed the humanity of the teacher and the student at the centre of educational activity. In one of Sukhomlinsky’s most important works, titled To Children I Give My Heart (Rus. Serdte Otdayu Detyam), he emphasised the spiritual dimension of education, exhorting teachers to “rise to the level of students’ spiritual worlds”, to be stirred by the feelings in students’ souls, and to consider how learning can bring their students joy. While Sukhomlinsky argued that teachers should have a strong content knowledge preparation that helped teachers understand “the newest discoveries, studies, and accomplishments”, he also cautioned teachers against “depositing” their knowledge into students. Instead, teachers were responsible for creating lessons that evoked questions in students’ minds, thus igniting students’ curiosity and evoking their sense of wonder. This way teachers could contribute to social transformation by ensuring that all children could realise their full potential.

**Pedagogy, critical theories, and the project of social transformation**

Krupskaya’s and Sukhomlinsky’s vision became encoded teachers’ professional preparation, where humanistic pedagogy played a central role. Pedagogy textbooks and courses often encompassed the historical development of educational thought from antiquity to modern days, explored educational systems in the USSR and abroad, analysed the relationship between schooling and social change, described general methods of teaching and upbringing, and delineated teachers’ professional responsibilities. Critical theories, such as Marxism and Leninism, were taught alongside pedagogy courses. These theories connected teaching approaches with the vision for social transformation and equipped teachers with “advanced concepts” to critically analyse socioeconomic and sociopolitical realities.

Across various texts and contexts, Soviet scholars approached pedagogy as the science of upbringing, akin to the German concept Bildung. Theories of upbringing focused on the moral, aesthetic, physical, work-related, social, and character development of children. Here is how an introductory text in pedagogy explained the role of pedagogy and upbringing in the educational process:

> Upbringing prepares a person for life and labour, passes on to him/her production-labour experience and spiritual riches accumulated in the past, increases a person’s power over nature, gives him/her an opportunity not only to preserve but also to multiply material and spiritual possessions, facilitates his/her multi-dimensional and harmonious development. For anyone who takes on the upbringing role, it is necessary to master the science about human upbringing – pedagogy.

While arguments that Soviet schools produced “loyal, qualified workers for an industrial society” abound, the quote above challenges that position. Indeed, the focus on productive labour dominated Party politics towards the educational system throughout most of the Soviet period, but other dimensions of human activity were promoted and

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44Cockerill, Each One Must Shine.
45Vasilii Sukhomlinsky, Serdte Otdayu Detyam [To Children I Give My Heart] (Moscow: Soviet School, 1973), 59.
46Sukhomlinsky, O Vospitanii, 106.
47Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man.
supported as well. Emphasis on reading, arts, and nature points to a more complex trajectory of pedagogical influences on Soviet citizens: rather than moulding them for a predetermined function, pedagogy facilitated the development of multiple possibilities, leaving the process of human becoming open-ended.\textsuperscript{50} Personal qualities that were believed to be necessary for the society to flourish constituted one exception to this rule: honesty, diligence, and hard work were often emphasised as qualities that all children should develop. Apart from that, pedagogy sought for children to strive towards growth, renewal, and improvement. In Sukhomlinsky’s words,

I believe in the mighty power of communist upbringing . . . I believe that a person can discover happiness and joy through a spiritually full and saturated life, through richness of ideas, thoughts, aspirations, through coming to know the beauty and the greatness of being, through a desire to become better than today, through repeating one’s own beauty in children, through incorruptible and eternal labor for the good of the people and the homeland.\textsuperscript{51}

This statement captures how the ultimate goals of pedagogy that many educators subscribed to was not narrow professional preparation or restrictive notions of success as a process of material gain, but rather happiness and meaningfulness of life – an important element of humanistic pedagogy. Happiness and meaningfulness were also intricately connected with work – for the good of the people and the good of one’s country – without subordinating one to the other. Of course, manifestations of these ideals varied among different contexts, but as Alexander showed in a study of post-socialist Russia there was an overall consensus among teachers and parents about the goals of education and the role of upbringing in the educational process.\textsuperscript{52}

Overall, this examination of pedagogy in the Soviet era reveals several important elements. Similar to Freire’s notion of humanising pedagogy,\textsuperscript{53} Soviet theorists and educational scholars approached students as evolving human beings. Teachers drawing on pedagogical resources available to them had to support their students in the process of open-ended becoming. Informed by critical theory, pedagogy was supposed to create spaces for students to engage in “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it”\textsuperscript{54} (Figure 1). Preparation for being active participants in transforming the world around them positioned students as actors rather than spectators of change.\textsuperscript{55} This framing of teachers’ role and pedagogy stands in stark contrast with the redefinitions of pedagogy that began in the late Soviet period (1960s–1990s) and shaped the most recent wave of educational reforms in Russia.

\textbf{Late Soviet era: a teacher for social control}

\textit{Shchedrovitsky’s technocratic pedagogy}

At the time when Sukhomlinsky ran his school and wrote about the role of pedagogy in transforming individuals and societies, another Soviet thinker worked on redefining pedagogy for the new world. Georgiy Shchedrovitsky (1929–1994) was a controversial

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{50}Zajda, \textit{Education in the USSR}.
\textsuperscript{51}Sukhomlinsky, \textit{O Vospitanii}, 65.
\textsuperscript{52}Alexander, \textit{Culture and Pedagogy}.
\textsuperscript{53}Freire, \textit{Pedagogy of the Oppressed}.
\textsuperscript{54}Ibid., 51.
\textsuperscript{55}Marcuse, \textit{One-Dimensional Man}.
\end{footnotesize}
Soviet philosopher born in 1929 in Moscow. He taught at a school for several years while he was working on his undergraduate degree, first in theoretical physics then in philosophy. Unlike Sukhomlinsky, who dedicated his life to teaching and working with children, Shchedrovitsky pursued an academic career. He defended his dissertation Language-Based Thinking and the Method of its Analysis and earned a candidate of philosophy degree in 1964. Afterwards, he taught in higher-education institutions, worked on the pedagogical dictionary published by the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, and moved between several research institutes. Throughout his career, he published over 150 works dedicated to explorations in psychology, semiotics, logic, cybernetics, management, and pedagogy.\(^{56}\)

In his autobiography, Shchedrovitsky described how he was influenced by Vygotsky’s sociocultural theories that examined the role of language and activity in the development of thinking as well as Soviet psychologists’ writing on activity-based learning, in particular Davydov and Elkonin.\(^{57}\) While pursuing his advanced degrees, he established the Moscow Methodological Circle (MMC), which brought together philosophers and scientists interested in theories of systems, thinking, and activity. The circle worked to develop a theory that would apply principles of logic to the analysis of thinking as activity.\(^{58}\) The group gradually grew into a movement that spread through many parts of Russia and the Soviet Union. Through the Circle’s seminars, meetings, and discussions, Shchedrovitsky developed a “systems-activity” approach – a methodology of analysing and solving problems using models, schemas, and signs.\(^{59}\)

The systems-activity approach served as a foundation for Organisational Activity Games during which Shchedrovitsky used his methodology of facilitating collective thinking to create solutions and produce innovations.\(^{60}\) The games were organised with a specific goal of solving a problem at a factory, school, or administrative organisation (e.g. the problem of students’ low achievement and the goal of changing educational approaches to solve it). Games often lasted several days. They took place at retreat sites or other locales removed from participants’ actual work environments to ensure the possibility that a new outlook on the problem could emerge during the game. Employees of the organisation were brought together and split into groups, the work of which was facilitated by “game-technicians”. Their role was to lead the group through a productive and generative discussion, manage the challenges that arise in group activity, and lead the group’s thinking towards a productive resolution of the game. A unique feature of the games built on Shchedrovitsky’s theories was the strategy of “schematisation” – or the process of creating visual representations of key points of discussion to organise and synthesise the group’s

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57Georgiy P. Shchedrovitsky, Ya Vsegda Byl Idealistom [I Have Always Been an Idealist] (Moscow: Shchedrovitsky Institute of Development, 2012).
thinking. Between 1979 and 1991, Shchedrovitsky organised and facilitated more than 90 Organisational Activity Games across the former USSR, many of which informed his writing and theorising. 

Shchedrovitsky’s ideas spread through the Circle’s networks and were picked up by various organisations across the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia, including businesses, universities, government agencies, as well as non-profit organisations. One of Shchedrovitsky’s acolytes explained how this methodology was deployed as a technological tool for constructing the future and reforming various social practices:

Methodological thinking was conceptualized as a kind of projecting. The project approach exerted a strong influence on Shchedrovitsky, especially since his Marxist perception of the world presupposed some kind of technology that made it possible to conceive and create the future. Projecting looked to be such a technology; methodologically-oriented scientists thought that on its basis they would be able to reform the existing scientific disciplines and other social practices. (emphasis in the original)

The term “projecting” echoes the notion of “blueprinting”, or the process of following a predetermined pattern as a guide for building. Those who participated in games engaged in “projecting” activities, creating patterns for others to implement or copy.

The notion of “projecting” and “blueprinting” is central in Shchedrovitsky’s pursuit of reforming pedagogy. Mocking Sukhomlinsky’s call to teachers “to give away their hearts” in his lectures, Shchedrovitsky called for a design of a new pedagogy. But unlike Soviet educators of his time, he was driven by the vision of creating pedagogical blueprints for technological precision of human production. The outline of the pedagogy that Shchedrovitsky advocated was laid out across two of his works: Shchedrovitsky’s lectures delivered at the Moscow Institute of Physical Education in the 1980s and Pedagogy and Logic, originally written in the 1960s and published only in 1993. In commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Pedagogy and Logic, Shchedrovitsky’s son, who worked with and further developed Shchedrovitsky’s intellectual legacy, noted that “pedagogy as production of humans” was one of Shchedrovitsky’s main intellectual contributions.

Shchedrovitsky defined pedagogy as a science based on logic that comprises “laws and mechanisms of teaching and upbringing processes”. Despite surface similarities, his pedagogical theory represented three significant departures from the Soviet constructions of pedagogy. The first departure in Shchedrovitsky’s teaching was his questioning of what constituted “a human being”. Based on his readings of texts in philosophy, logic, and social sciences, Shchedrovitsky concluded that “humans” can be perceived as empty spaces in social systems that can be easily replaced by others. Discarding constructions of “human beings” as agents with their own passions, ambitions, and aspirations, Shchedrovitsky proceeded to state that pedagogy should treat “human beings” as objects of influence and change:

The product of teachers’ work is ‘people’ as members of society, i.e. individuals able to carry out necessary social activity and establish relationships amongst themselves, according to the norms of social interaction. The raw material of teachers’ work is untaught or

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61Yuriy Pakhomov, Igrotechnichesky Bukvar [Game-Technicians’ Primer] (Moscow: The School of Cultural Politics, 2004).
62Davydova, Biografiya.
63Rozin, Georgy Shchedrovitsky’s Concept of Activity and Thought-Activity, 249.
64Sukhomlinsky, Sertdtse Otdayu Detyam.
65Shchedrovitsky, Georgiy P. Logika i Pedagogika [Logic and Pedagogy]. (Moscow: Kastal, 1993), 9.
insufficiently taught individuals, unable to do that which they would do after teaching and upbringing were applied to them. The activity of teaching and upbringing, at least nowadays, consists of teachers intentionally influencing students, changing them, transforming them from one state into another. (emphasis in the original)\textsuperscript{66}

Stemming from this position that educated individuals were mere “products” of the educational process, pedagogical research had to identify how to transform human beings into predetermined designs. Approaching social systems as machines where various elements fulfilled different functions, Shchedrovitsky made the case for a clear identification of functions different people would perform in the economic systems and for using pedagogy to mould them for these functions. This technocratic construction of pedagogy reflected a fusion of philosophy, logic, and engineering.

Shchedrovitsky’s technocratic redesign of pedagogy became even more clear in his discussions of what knowledge teachers need for working with students:

(1) Knowledge about all the substantive characteristics of the initial product of their practical activity, 2) knowledge about the substantive characteristics of the object to be changed, 3) knowledge about tools and means of activity, 4) knowledge about actions that can be undertaken with these means and their sequence.\textsuperscript{67}

This construction of pedagogy and teachers’ use of pedagogy rested on a formula of inputs and outputs, as well as the inclusion of tools to be used to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of the educational process. The stark dehumanisation and objectification of learners emerged in their designations as “products”. They were no longer agents with free will and possibilities of open-ended becoming, but “object[s] to be changed”.

The quote above also points to the second departure in Shchedrovitsky’s work: the reconfiguration of the relationship between children and the context of their lives. Even though Shchedrovitsky claimed that he was building on the work of sociocultural theories of activity developed in Soviet Russia, in his lectures he argued that differences in people’s environments shaped their capabilities. Rather than viewing contexts as limiting or enabling human development the way they were approached by Vygotsky and others, Shchedrovitsky saw contexts as deterministic:

We have to acknowledge that abilities, similarly to psychological make-up in general, are rigidly determined by external means that affect all children and vary within what is allowed consciously or socially according to different circumstances [or contexts].\textsuperscript{68}

In his lectures on pedagogy, Shchedrovitsky suggested that educators had to accept the differences in order to avoid wasting resources on those who failed to develop certain capabilities because of their circumstances.\textsuperscript{69} Instead, teachers should only work with what children brought into the classroom: those who were better prepared should be challenged more, those who were behind should be given easier tasks. After all, they

\textsuperscript{66}Shchedrovitsky, Logika i Pedagogika, 37.
\textsuperscript{67}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{68}Ibid., 62.
would not be performing the same functions in society and therefore did not require the same level of preparation. This teaching provided a basic justification for inequality and unequal educational outcomes.

The third departure in Shchedrovitsky’s work was the emphasis on the tools of psychology to influence “human production” referred to in the quote about teachers’ knowledge as “means” and “tools”. From Shchedrovitsky’s perspective, teachers had to use psychological techniques that would make students malleable and susceptible to external intervention – the changes introduced by the teacher as an external force had to be absorbed by the “objects of intervention”. Departing from the focus on trust, relationships, and shared pursuit of knowledge advocated by Soviet educators, Shchedrovitsky created models for the strategic use of psychological interventions for human redesign and “pedagogical blueprinting”.

Technocratic pedagogy and social control
Shchedrovitsky’s new pedagogy represented “a craft of engineering” where participants in educational processes were “projects under construction”. Pedagogical research, according to Shchedrovitsky, was supposed to establish technological precision to blueprint new generations for specific functions. Kukulin described this approach as radical constructivism: instead of approaching human beings as agents, this new pedagogy treated them as objects that can be moulded, shaped, and manipulated for any purposes that political elites would envision. To an extent, this focus on “production of humans” may resemble well-known slogans of the Soviet era that schools were supposed to produce a New Human Being. But Shchedrovitsky took that vision significantly further, seeking to establish precise formulas for future functions students would perform in the economy and developing tools for psychological interventions that would mould them into predetermined patterns. The task of developing these precise formulas in Shchedrovitsky’s proposals belonged to the “pedagogue-designer” who would “design the blueprint for the person of the future society”. This person would determine the purposes of education in the society and translate those purposes into models of “pedagogical production” of suitable human beings. Located at the top of the hierarchy of educational decision-making, the “pedagogue-designer” was not accountable to any groups, organisations, or agencies for the directions of the future society s/he would blueprint. A crucial element in conceptualising teacher’s work was Shchedrovitsky’s observation that teachers should treat children according to the contexts that had already made them unequal in their capabilities, thus preserving their position in the social hierarchy. This perspective on the context of students’ lives paved the way for the subsequent pathologisation of diversity promoted by Shchedrovitsky’s acolytes in the post-Soviet era. Ultimately, blueprints of future societies rested on the assumption of inevitable inequality that can and should be maintained.

71Shchedrovitsky, Pedagogy and Logic, 45
72A similar lack of accountability and overall oversight of Shchedrovitsky’s psychotechnicians and anthropotechnicians contracted by business and corporations to “change” their employees became an area of contention. Ultimately, these roles mean that some people would assume Übergang roles of controlling, guiding, and moulding others (Aydarova, Teacher Education Reform as Political Theatre),
Importantly, however, Shchedrovitsky’s theories of pedagogy as “human production” played a crucial role in his efforts to disrupt the Soviet regime. Foreseeing the collapse of the Soviet Union, Shchedrovitsky used the network of methodologists he created and the Organisational Activity Games he was conducting to create an elite class that would rule the country.\textsuperscript{73} The disruption of the Soviet rule he pursued, however, was not an attempt to gain freedom and establish democracy. Rather, it was an effort to clear the path for a more rationally organised technocratic regime that would be even more authoritarian than the Soviet state. In one of his lectures in late 80s, Shchedrovitsky stated, “I do not see any difference between totalitarianism and non-totalitarianism. I believe that totalitarianism is the only future form of organisation for any human society”.\textsuperscript{74} Shchedrovitsky’s games reflected how this thinking was enacted in practice. As one of his followers explained, “the general methodological norms and game scenarios [were] set or approved by Shchedrovitsky himself”.\textsuperscript{75} If there was a conflict and someone refused to follow his norms or accepted his scenarios, that “offender” was sent into another room, thus “negating any other form of thinking different from that confirmed and protected by the head of the MMC”.\textsuperscript{76}

In sum, from the perspective of critical theories deployed in this paper, Shchedrovitsky’s construction of pedagogy was based on technocratic principles (Figure 2). By removing students’ humanity from considerations of teaching and learning, Shchedrovitsky’s theory of pedagogy denied students’ “ontological and historical vocation to be fully human”.\textsuperscript{77} Furthermore, the “constant dialectical relationship”\textsuperscript{78} between individuals and the world was erased, treating individuals as the targets of intervention and change, while leaving the unequal and unjust world around them unexamined. This erasure, combined with the authoritarian suppression of dissent, paved the way for educational approaches geared towards the production of spectators rather than actors.\textsuperscript{79} In that regard, the interconnections and interpellations between Shchedrovitsky’s theories developed in late socialism and neoliberal transformations of educational discourses in post-Soviet Russia offer a unique insight into the role of pedagogy in the rise of technocorporate regimes\textsuperscript{80} in the post-Soviet era.

**Neoliberal era: a teacher to adapt students to the world**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russian society went through a period of tumultuous change, moving away from the socialist planned economy to the capitalist market-based society. In the 1990s, education reforms targeted primarily legal frameworks and structural arrangements. In the early 2000s, however, new neoliberal visions for educational change emerged. First, the relationships between the state and the system of education were redefined, with the state becoming an overseer rather than the provider

\textsuperscript{75} Rozin, “Georgy Shchedrovitsky’s Concept of Activity and Thought-Activity”, 252.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 55.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 50.
\textsuperscript{79} Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*.
\textsuperscript{80} Fischer, *Technocracy and the Politics of Expertise*. 
of educational services. Next, efforts to change the contents of education, educational approaches, financing of schools, and teacher preparation emerged. These efforts were led by a network of policy actors that comprised academics, educational researchers, data analysts, and others. Experts in this network moved in and out of government positions, private-sector projects, and consulting for international organisations. Together, they put out position statements and set in motion a wave of educational reforms that dramatically reoriented the educational system and changed teachers’ role in the society: Strategy 2020, Our New School, Federal School Standards, Teachers Professional Standard, the Concept Teacher Education Modernisation, among others. Working in tandem, these policies dramatically changed the purposes of education. Instead of knowledge production and creation, schools became responsible for facilitating students’ “personal development” within the parameters of the neoliberal framework of creativity, innovation, and compliance. These parameters identified the “behaviour archetypes” of the technocorporate regimes into which students should be developed, thus foreclosing possibilities of open-ended human becoming.

**Technocratic pedagogy in action**

Even though reformers rarely admitted their allegiance to Shchedrovitsky’s ideas publicly, technocratic pedagogy (Figure 2) served as the foundation for reform proposals they put forward. As one of the reformers explained in an interview, his connections with some of the policy actors as well as his work on educational reforms emerged when he began to participate in the games Shchedrovitsky organised in the 1980s:

> [With Shchedrovitsky], it was games, but it was also texts. Shchedrovitsky’s texts that among methodologists are called “bricks” (Rus. kirpichi), Pedagogy and Logic, to use official language . . . . At the same time, I, as any mathematician, started looking for literature on how to prepare a teacher. I did not find much, but what I found was something along the lines of “You gotta teach teachers to give their hearts away to children”. Why should a teacher give away their heart and what children are going to do with it remains unclear. (Interview 55; February, 2014)

This quote captures the departure from the humanistic pedagogy developed by Sukhomlinsky during the Soviet period and the adoption of Shchedrovitsky’s Logic and Pedagogy as a guide for designing a new educational paradigm for the neoliberal era that comprised four principles.

The first principle represented the psychologisation of teachers’ roles: instead of psychology being one of the sciences that informed teachers’ work, it became the driving force in teachers’ roles and one of teachers’ main tools of influencing students. Teachers’ responsibility for students’ “upbringing” and “personal development” were reframed through the lens of psychology. Based on the new Teachers

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82 Ibid.
83 Ibid; Aydarova, “Knowledge for the Elites, Competencies for the Masses”.
84 Ibid; Aydarova, Teacher Education Reform as Political Theatre; Aydarova, “Knowledge for the Elites, Competencies for the Masses”.
85 Aydarova, *Teacher Education Reform as Political Theatre*; Aydarova, “Knowledge for the Elites, Competencies for the Masses”. 
Standards, teachers were responsible for “identifying students’” behaviour and personal problems, creating “a psychological portrait of a student”, “cooperating with other specialists as a part of psychological, medical, and pedagogical team”, and “applying to their work psychological approaches, such as cultural-historical, activity-based, and developmental”. Increased focus on psychology in teachers’ work required modifications in preparation. For instance, one of the reformers argued that all teachers should be required to take a course in applied psychology and psychotechnics, which would include “practicum of psychological diagnostics, psychocorrection, and psychotechnical construction” that would examine “the methods of social-psychological techniques and psychology of pathology”. “Psychotechnics” echoed Shchedrovitsky’s call for using technical precision in moulding individual students and blueprinting the society of the future.

The psychologisation of teachers’ work emerged alongside calls for the individualisation of teaching. Unlike common conceptions of individualisation as a possibility of allowing students to pursue their interests, individualisation in the reformers’ proposals focused on teachers solving students’ problems. As the lead author of teachers’ professional standards noted in one of his interviews, “Nowadays, there are no children without problems”. For this reason, teachers were called to work with students’ problems by “directly discussing students’ problems with them” and using “individualised pedagogical situations” to lead students to thinking through the problem. Reformers also argued that students’ problems should dictate what content would be taught in class since abstract content knowledge is “too removed from students’ daily lives” but their personal problems “constitute a ‘more real’ life of a child”. The move towards “students’ problems” as determinants of instruction resembled Marcuse’s concept of false concreteness. The ultimate goal of teachers solving students’ problems was to shape students’ value orientations, worldviews, and personalities. Evoking the tropes of the “changing world” reformers explained that teachers needed to teach students to “adapt to the world”. Students’ “adaptation” was seen as particularly important given the “unstable society, with unequal opportunities”. The focus on students’ individual problems as the centre of instruction echoed Freire’s notion of subjectivism “which postulates people without a world”. Instead of working with students to address the problems in the world in order to transform it, individualisation focused on changing students as isolated objects suspended in space with no social or relational ties to each other or to the context of their learning.

Individualisation of teaching became intricately linked to a new categorisation of students. This categorisation reflected the pathologisation of diversity, which described students based on “deviation from some imagined norm” and

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87 Kukulin, Alternative Social Blueprinting.
88 RIA Novosti, 2016.
89 Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man.
90 Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 50.
positioned "their problems as internal while simultaneously ignoring structural inequities". Instead of emphasising the importance of teachers’ work with all students, as was done in the past, new teachers’ standards delineated new categories of students: “socially insecure children who have found themselves in difficult circumstances, migrant children, orphans, children with special needs, children with health problems, children with deviant behaviour, children with addictions, etc.”. By dividing children into different categories, reformers emphasised that each category would require the deployment of different psychological techniques for regulating student behaviours and moulding students’ personalities. Using the tools of psychology, teachers would identify which students would become elites and which ones needed socialisation to prevent them from becoming delinquents. It is important to note that this construction of difference was not necessarily attempting to capture identity markers of social groups in a diverse society. Instead, this differentiation predominantly focused on the problems that certain children posed for the teacher, schools, or society. These new categorisations of students obscured social class, ethnic, and linguistic differences that students brought to school and reframed diversity as a problem to be solved with the help of psychological interventions. These categories echoed Shchedrovitsky’s departure from the sociocultural theorists’ focus on schools compensating for the challenges created by students’ backgrounds to treating students’ capabilities as unalterable outcomes of their circumstances.

Finally, the new paradigm reflected depoliticisation. Issues of social inequality that could affect students’ learning experiences became depoliticised across policy texts. They emerged not as an outcome of injustice or unfair distribution of resources, but rather as a part of a natural world order where market forces allowed those who worked “hard” or possessed extraordinary talents to find themselves at the top. Those who found themselves at the bottom were there because of their own laziness and their own poorly made choices. According to the new teacher education standards issued in 2016, teachers were no longer expected to have a broad cultural and political horizon, the ability to analyse reality around them, or the knowledge of how to prepare students to become actors ready to transform the world. In working with students from diverse backgrounds, teachers had to rely on the knowledge of psychotechnics to adapt them to the world, rather than working together with their students to intervene in the realities around them. Equipped with those tools, teachers were positioned to preserve the status quo of a hierarchical society, supporting the spread of a conservative social change that normalised inequality and injustice.

94Aydarova, Teacher Education Reform as Political Theatre; Aydarova, “Knowledge for the Elites, Competencies for the Masses”.
95Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man.
96Apple, Can Schools Change Society.
Conclusion

Discursive shifts in the constructions of teachers’ roles and pedagogy analysed in this paper reflect the agendas set forth by political elites. During the Soviet era, when political elites pursued social transformation, teachers were encouraged to use humanistic pedagogy to prepare their students as actors who could transform the world. When the regime collapsed and political elites sought to maintain the status quo of unequal social systems, a new paradigm of technocratic pedagogy was set in motion. The psychologisation of teachers’ work focused on equipping teachers with tools to solve problems within students to “adapt them to the world”, whereas the pathologisation of diversity positioned children from diverse backgrounds as objects that needed an external intervention to keep them from sliding into delinquency. The depoliticisation of education eliminated spaces of social critique, positioning teachers as agents of social control who prepare students to be spectators willing to accept the status quo. This analysis shows that it is not only the political system that shapes pedagogical approaches, but also the elites’ overall orientation towards social change.

This exploration bears important insights beyond the Russian borders. While Shchedrovitsky’s teaching may appear unknown even for most educators in Russia, his focus on the rigid determinism of children’s abilities and his calls to use schooling to blueprint subjects according to the parameters determined by technocorporate regimes echo refrains from educational policies in the USA and other international contexts. Rooted in technocratic traditions, for example, standards deployed by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation along with CCSSO’s proposals similarly psychologise teachers’ work, depoliticise teachers’ knowledge, and deploy pedagogies of pathologisation. With technical constructions of teachers’ roles becoming more common internationally, a conservative social change seems to be the future not only for Russia, but also for many countries around the world, such as the UK, Australia, the UAE, and others.

This paper advances the conversation on pedagogy by shedding light on how political elites’ expectations of teachers’ roles in the society shape discursive constructions of pedagogies they should deploy. Using Russia as a case study, this analysis offers insights for why liberatory, emancipatory, or culturally sustaining pedagogies remain on the periphery of teacher education policy and practice. Teachers’ technical skills of teaching core subjects or managing classrooms remain at the centre of most empirical research on pedagogy because such studies preserve the alleged political neutrality of the teacher education enterprise. As high-leverage or core practices research gains more ground, dimensions of critical consciousness, deep knowledge of social processes and structures, activist dispositions, or commitments to restorative

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justice remain absent from these frameworks. The issue is not just a lack of evidence that these elements matter in constructions of teachers’ work, but rather a lack of interest among the political elites and the society at large in a revolutionary change. These observations point to the need to consider how scholarly conversations about pedagogy and teachers’ roles in tackling social inequality relate to broader debates about the need for a social transformation in the society at large.

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100Philip et al., “Making Justice Peripheral”.