

Committee III
Nationalism AND World Unity:
Educating for the 21st Century

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DISCUSSANT RESPONSE

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to Papers by M. Titma and V. Shadrikov

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NATIONALISM AND WORLD UNITY
EDUCATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Chapter 3.

NATIONALISM AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Comments on the foregoing papers: M. TITMA
V. SHADRIKOV

by W. WIELEMANS

Introduction

The papers related to this section/chapter are allied; however, they also show many differences.

Notwithstanding the fact that both authors deal with the educational system in the Soviet Union, their presentation is considerably different. After reading the two papers one has the irresistible impression that Shadrikov takes a view point that is loyal to the official policy, and consequently, pictures a quite positive image of the recent changes in the field of education in the USSR. Titma, on the contrary, being an Estonian (?), comments adversely upon the educational policy of the Soviet Union.

The authors explicitly contradict each other concerning the degree of literacy in the period before World War II. Shadrikov states that at the end of the thirties illiteracy was practically eliminated in the Soviet Union (p. 3). However, Titma makes clear that the figures related to the rate of schooling and literacy were intentionally manipulated in order to sketch a positive image of the educational development in the USSR (p. 2).

Titma's paper stresses on the relations between the peripheral and central regions in the Soviet Union. In that frame he explains the issue of nationalism. Shadrikov depicts the problem of ethnic and cultural diversity in the Soviet Union in a broader international context. He expects the only solution will be a reconciliation between this cultural diversity and the universal unity of humanist values and norms: "...unity can exist only in diversity, and diversity can be based only upon unity" (p. 3). In other words, the paper of Titma concen-

trates on diversity, whereas Shadrikov draws attention of the relationship between unity and diversity.

M. TITMA: EDUCATION IN THE USSR AS A FACTOR OF NATIONAL RE-AWAKENING


Summary and Comments

1. The paper of Titma seems to be a product of 'Glasnost'. It contains a number of facts concerning education in the Soviet Union that up until today were almost unknown. Most of the facts mentioned in his paper were concealed, obscured or denied. I enumerate the most important:
 - In the USSR there are considerable regional differences as far as educational participation is concerned. In the most developed regions only 2/3 of youth attained a secondary school, and in the backward regions of Central Asia the degree of participation is only 1/3; this in spite of the decision of 1970 including that all children should receive a secondary education.

This considerable low and unequal educational participation is obscured in official statistics because of a manipulation of the figures, e.g. "some secondary schools in Central Asia, existing only on paper, provided high school diplomas like other schools" (p. 2).
 - Secondary education in the USSR contains about three different types of education, viz. 'general secondary education', 'specialized secondary education', 'vocational education'. The development of these types in various regions did not proceed on the basis of ideological considerations, but was due to a typical colonial spread of the industry. "As all resources belonged to the institutionally organized branches of the economy, the whole system of vocational education was shaped by them" (p. 3-4). As a result, the distribution of educational opportunities all over the Soviet Union is very unequal, viz. strong concentrations in cities and major industrial centres, and very little opportunities in regions of Central Asia and of Transcaucasus.
 - Titma mentions a "lack of a pragmatic direction in solving personal as well as occupational problems..." (p.5) related

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to the content of education. This could be surprising since in Western Europe the explicit orientation towards practice has always been perceived as one of the major characteristics of education both in the USSR and in her satellite states.

- The Soviet Union has not succeeded to part the educational outcomes with the factor of social determination. The negative effects of the intergenerational transmission of culture are still very considerable in the USSR. "The average grade of the young man or woman is directly related to parental education... Our research material suggests quite clearly that the process of levelling by means of passing on the content of education was only partially successful" (p. 7).
2. Titma's paper contains some indistinctnesses:
- His research material does not allow a careful interpretation since the way in which the results have been processed is not indicated. In addition, the numbering of tables and figures in the annexes do not correspond with the references in the paper.
 - It is not very clear what the meaning could be of 'specialized secondary schools'. This type is identified as "meant to train professionals"; however, what could it include to train 'professionals' at the level of secondary education? Moreover, it is said that the purpose of this type of schools has recently been changed; the main objective now being "to train mainly skilled workers" (p. 3). Thus, what could be the difference compared to the so-called 'vocational schools'?
3. Titma seems to identify 'culture' with 'national culture': "... the basic structures of culture which as a rule are expressed in national cultures" (p. 8). Is the author not aware of the existence of subcultures as well as of international cultural phenomena and certain religious traditions and attitudes (as it appears from the conflicts with Moslems in the South of the Soviet Union)?
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4. Titma seems to have a remarkable belief in the potentials of education: "National awakening revealed the actual potential of each nationality that was largely determined by education as a force which shapes the personality. The elite of each nationality, essentially shaped by education, molds the will of the people" (p. 8). Is this belief not too optimistic or rather unrealistic? Especially sociological research proves that education is not a strong lever at all as far as both the socio-political impact and the socialization of national elites are concerned. The 'influencing power' of national and international structures as 'determinants' of behaviour and development should not be disregarded.

V. SHADRIKOV: SATISFYING ETHNIC AND CULTURAL NEEDS IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION. A USSR PERSPECTIVE

Summary

The central theme of Shadrikov's paper is the relationship between "meeting the ethnic and cultural requirements in the sphere of education" (p. 1) on the one hand and "universal humanistic mission of education" (p. 1) on the other. The tension between these two educational objectives is illustrated by means of the recent history of the Soviet Union.

Shadrikov states that since the thirties in the USSR the ethnic and cultural identity of peoples has to a certain extent been oppressed. However, this ethnic and cultural diversity was already somewhat threatened immediately after the Revolution because of the introduction of a Eurocentric model of education. But especially during the totalitarian Stalin regime the Soviet Union should have tried to reduce these differences. According to Shadrikov the enfeebling of this diversity is a sign of decline: "It is history... that is coming to understand the ongoing levelling and uniformity as an omen of an imminent decline" (p. 3).

These ethnic and cultural differences, however, break now surface once again: "For decades totalitarianism forced them deep inside, but now they have come on the surface. The pro-

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cesses are getting worse due to the so-called 'ethnic paradox' which is a feature of the contemporary world: the internationalization of culture amplifies the level of ethnic-national self-awareness" (p. 4).

A solution to this tension between cultural diversity and internationalism could be found, Shadrikov states, in a careful balance between them: "While stressing the ethnic (national) component in the content of education, we must strike a careful balance with world culture, and try to see the evolution of the national culture itself" (p. 5). In other words, Shadrikov does not attach great importance to the preservation of a certain culture; the establishment of certain conditions which could guarantee a continuing development of that culture seems to be more important. In this regard, Shadrikov ventures another definition of culture. Closely bound up with this definition he also feels the need of another definition of education and schooling: "Education should be transformed from a means of instructing the individual to a mechanism for developing culture forming a picture of the world with man in it" (p. 6).


The task of education is not the transmission of knowledge and culture, but to 'construct' culture in an ongoing process of dialogue. Shadrikov states that the recent changes in the educational system of the Soviet Union are considerably inspired by these new definitions of the role of education. In this regards, he indicates innovations in the educational objectives, in the content, the structures and the didactics.

1. Objectives of education

I would like to draw attention to two citations:

"...school education has a culture-forming character, which should present an integrated and harmonious system of material and spiritual cultural values, the culture of economy and of labour, of politics and law, a communicative culture of family relationships, etc." (p. 6)

"Soviet school is based on the dialectic principle of the unity of three basic features: ethnic, national universal, enabling the individual to feel that he or she belongs to his or her native people, and at the same time is a citizen of the country, and a subject of the world civilization" (p. 7).



2. Contents of education

Shadrikov mentions three levels of educational management which will influence the educational content, viz.: the (central) Union, the different Republics, and the Academies. The 'academic component' relates to the concrete curriculum.

3. Structures and didactics

The Soviet Union tries to abandon all kind of authoritarian methods of teaching and concentrates above all on the development of the personality of the pupil. (The paper of Shadrikov is not complete on this matter since the announced Table 1 is missing.)

Concluding, Shadrikov is conscious about the fact that there is a considerable difference between intentions and the implementation of these intentions. However, he strongly believes that education could play a very important role "in promoting understanding among nations and respect for human rights" (p. 10).

Comments

1. Shadrikov's paper is not easy to understand because both the content (in English?) and the form. The choice of words could easily cause misunderstanding (e.g. does 'republican' mean 'Soviet Republics?').
2. Concerning his argument I would draw attention to the way Shadrikov intends to solve the tension between cultural and ethnic diversity, on the one hand, and the so-called 'world culture', on the other. In order to solve this problem he proposes to strive for harmony and to eliminate conflicts. Education could play an important role in the pursuit of it, since in schools this consensus could be negotiated and cultivated. If this objective could be reached, then we all will live in a peaceful coexistence, which moreover will bring about enrichment for all.

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Although, this seems to be a laudable utopia, it is unlikely that it will be realized. Are conflicts (cultural, ethnic, political, religious...) not a permanent condition of human life and society, and at the same time a vital source of development and innovation?

If this is the reality, then it may well be that education is not for harmony, but for a human, creative and enriching coexistence with ever new conflicts, changes and chances...