

Topical problems of today's Russia

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Priorities of Russian state educational policy

Last years and even decade Russian education along with the whole country has become a scene of social changes that in fact affect each resident of Russia. It has gone through and still experiences *the periods of stabilization* (at the beginning of the ninetieth), *reforms and development* (the middle of the ninetieth), and at last, *modernization* (from the end of the ninetieth - till present 2005).

Today, directing our attention toward the base priorities of the socio-economic development of Russia, we should try to define easy and sharply the social risks on the path to the education reform and to plan the specific steps for succeeding in the objects that the state, society, and education have been facing in the latest historical period. First of all, we mark out the essence description of the education process:

- **Education** - *is a resource of raise of competitive abilities of person, society, and state.*
- **Education** - *is the social institute of cultural identity formation of Russian citizens.*
- **Education** - *is the factor of social confidence gaining and reducing intensity in the multinational Russian society.*
- **Education** - *is a condition of achievement personal and professional success in the process of person's socialization.*
- **Education** - *is a sphere of intellectual education and the basis of the national innovative system of Russia*

From the priority of education as the declaration to the priority of education as the state policy task

At the beginning, I start the discussion of some general issues and problems, which over the obviousness and apparent banality are perceived as the postulates that do not need any proofs, but not as the tasks, the solution of which requires the application of joint efforts.

First of these issues concerns the analysis of conformity of the thesis on the education priority in mass consciousness of the population and in the socio-economic life of the country with the actual state of affairs. It would be advisable to realize for what reasons the thesis on the education priority, on the education value, as well as on sciences sharply differs from the

reality and, as a rule, is at the level of declarations and good assurances. And it would be expedient not only for the sake of rhetoric, but also for the need of understanding the objective social and economic limiters of pre-existing scripts of the education development.

Even though we initially apprehend the achievement of the priorities as a strategic task of the state policy, our next step will be establishing the reasons that are impediments to the education transformation into *resource of the raise of competitive abilities of the person, society, and the state*.

We should similarly estimate, whether the slow processes of transition of Russia from *the industrial society* to *the postindustrial informational society* give the Russian education a chance to take a position of the priority sphere of human resources training not in words but in practice?

Whether it is a time to prove the inadequacy of referring the education and the science to non-productive sphere, and of considering us among the workers of this sphere that is usually financed by a residual principle in a historical situation of transition to the informational society?

Whether it is time to try to understand the limitation and defectiveness in defining the sphere of education only as *the services sector*, and obvious underestimation of the education as the social institute that forms the cultural identity and generality of all of us - the citizens of Russia?

It is time to prove and assert the described above positions, to develop the federal and regional educational programs that promote the transformation of education into the powerful intellectual industry and the factor of the consent achievement in the conditions of the growing social, ethnic, religious, and cultural variety of our society.

At the first sight, all these problems seem to be in external system of the socio-economic coordinates of the state policy in relation to the education sphere. At the same time, without finding the solution to these problems, it would hardly be possible to estimate productively the sufficiency of *the potential of the existing concept of the education sphere modernization* for transforming the education into the condition of achieving a high living standard in the country and providing the citizens safety.

Having these questions comprehended, we will be able to discuss more adequately the efficiency of such important innovations of the concept of the education modernization, as, for example, the quality of school knowledge through the General State Examination; the strategy of introduction into practice the standards of school education; distribution of trade school education models; productivity of the education

informatization; timeliness of the SIFO (State Investment Financial Obligation) practice and start opportunities of the economic mechanism of educational credits in the sphere of vocational training; degree of conformity of the renovated qualifier of the trades and vocational training directions to the requirements of labour market and modern economy.

I emphasize once again that to comprehend the opportunities and the restrictions of the education modernization conception it would be useful to exceed the bounds of education as the limited sphere and to consider the potential vectors of the education transformation within the system of coordinates of socio-economic, intellectual, and cultural development of the country.

Socio-economic characteristic of the education as a non-productive sphere is a barrier on a way to the education system development

Even the brief analysis of the place and function of the education sphere in the industrial society shows, how far from the truth the thesis about the priority of the education is.

First, in any industrial society education has been related to non-productive sphere and numbered among science, culture, public health service, municipal services, etc. in the human services.

In Soviet Union the education relation to the non-productive sphere was substantially made up by the use of education as an essential component of ideology. Hence, the value, the priority, and social prestige of the education system that were substantially derived from the ideology, which set the social standards and norms of education and development of a person through education. Having lost the security function of ideology, the education system experiences the restrictions resulting from being placed it in the non-productive sphere.

In the industrial society infrastructure the education system serves as the separate branch, guarded by the departmental barriers against many other branches, including science, cultures, and public health service and is not “the first among equals” even in the non-productive sphere.

I think, that there is no need to look for the arguments testifying that the wage in our sphere is far less, than in the sphere of industry and economy. Negative dynamics of the pedagogical trades social prestige, fixed by numerous sociological polls, is also derived from referring education to the non-productive sphere.

The strict definition of education as one of the branches of non-productive sphere and, besides, as the branch with postponed and invisible material result, causes the domination of pragmatic utilitarian aim at the on-budget expenditures restriction in the education sphere. Representatives

of the education sphere, struggling constantly for education, perceive this destructive and, as a rule, not openly declared aim as a given reality. And all reforms and conceptions of the education modernization that are carried out within the education sphere come to the education sphere adaptation, to the growth of budgetary reductions, and to the changes of tax policy.

Risk of bringing the education to the human services and social effects of education

The education brought down to the human services is the essential *restriction* on the path leading to the elaboration of various scripts of the education development during the last several years. There is no doubt that this

sphere extends and begins to carry out more and more important functions in the transition to the market economy and the postindustrial society.

At the same time, reducing the education to the human services, man can lose the touch of *the social effects*, made by the education in the society - effects of the society consolidation and forming of a cultural identity of Russian citizens, effects of decrease of risk of socio-psychological tensivity between different ethnic and religious groups of population, and effects of “lift” and achievement of a social equality of groups and individual persons with different opportunities.

All these social effects of education are especially vivid in the infant schools, general education, and additional education of children and teenagers, as well as in the special compensative education of physically and mentally retarded children.

These very effects that express *the essence of education as a major institute of the society socialization*. The same effects confirm historically existing social expectations for the pedagogical profession, especially the teacher profession as the mission and self-values of society.

In case that these effects are not taken into consideration and the education is related to the human services only, the socio-role relations between the society and the education are established at the level of relations between the clients and the sellers of the educational services.

If, regarding the education, the society obviously or implicitly takes social positions of the consumer and the client, then the interactions between the society and the education are established by the principle of a pragmatic exchange (“you - to me, I - to you”); and the opposition “we – they” is formed, breaking the relations of *social partnership* between the education, society, and state.

Owing to such assignment of the roles, there is a great risk of development of the relations between the society, the state, and the education according to the plot of the fairy tale of Alexander Sergejevitch

Pushkin about the small goldfish. The society appears as an “old woman”, i.e. a capricious client who does not proportion his claims to reality.

The state, represented by the controllers of the educational system, has a sad role of an “old man”, which is continually sent with inquiries to the education. And teachers, tutors, and educators play the role of the small goldfish, which runs errands for the society. The denouement of Pushkin’s fairy tale is well-known and instructive. If the society will behave as the client (a despotic “old woman”), it risks to be left with nothing (at the broken trough of education).

Education is a resource of the national innovative system and a priority of the information society development

It will be possible to exceed the bounds of the limitations, imposed on the elaboration of scripts of the education development in the industrial society, only if we settle the

requirements that the education system must meet in the nascent information society.

Today, there is rather high probability that in the state policy the key position will be occupied *by the strategy of creation of Russian national innovative system*. The developed national innovative system is, as everybody knows, a core of any information society.

Processes of rapid growth of information and communication technologies in Russia, access to global sources of knowledge, accelerations of the process of innovations application, distribution of the network management organization and the industry, along with the market demands, prompt the country to the development of the national innovative system as a factor of competitiveness, prosperity, and safety of the population.

In this situation, the education sphere, being the major component of the national innovative system, sometimes spontaneously, sometimes purposefully starts to change in the changing world. Whether the education sphere as the special intellectual industry has any chance to become a priority in new conditions of our state development? It certainly does.

Even an encountered set of the names of the postindustrial society unambiguously shows the potential position of education in the structure of this society: “information society”, “innovative society”, “communication society”, “risk society”, and, at last, “society, based on knowledge”. It is remarkable, that the report on the development of human potential in the Russian Federation given this year in the framework of the Program of the UNO development was entitled “Heading toward the society based on knowledge” (2004).

The information sector starts to occupy more and more imperiously the leading place in the information postindustrial society and there is a transition from the society development, which is based on the natural resources exploitation, to the development, which is based on the use of such a resource as the knowledge, produced by the mankind. In a sense, the relations between life and consciousness are changed, to be more exact, they become complicated: while in the industrial society the existence is defined by consciousness, in the postindustrial society the metaphor, according to which co-knowledge, the joint knowledge, and the distributed knowledge define the existence, is more and more pertinent.

Whether the education sphere will take the opportunity, given by these objective circumstances, to become a priority in the human resources development and citizens of the civil society in actual fact, not only in words? That is a question. And the answer depends on how good we understand the development vectors of the information society and whether we manage to build the leading policy of education development, instead of the reactive one.

To define these vectors and related to them education system requirements, we use as a magnifying glass four aspects, which one way or another set the education development logic and we look through the prism of these aspects at the information society.

The first aspect of development and functioning of any educational system touches on the following problem solution: “*What for the education develops?*” “*Why study?*”

The second aspect touches the problem “*What to teach?*” i.e. a problem of **the education content and development** of those **abilities of the person** that should be transferred to the new generations of pupils and teachers for their successful civil and professional socialization in the information society conditions.

The third aspect of any educational system development is related to the solution of problem of the education technologies choice “*How to teach?*” and “*In what way to teach?*” The fourth aspect of definition of the logic of educational system development provokes the sensitive issue - “*By means of what resources to teach?*”: financial, material, legal, organizational, and, certainly, personnel.

*What for to teach?
Valuable objects of
education*

The answer to the question “**What for to teach?**” touches on the definition of *the valuable subjects* dominating in the information society, which should be considered at the education system

elaboration.

According to the data of several analysts, the dominating valuable object in the industrial society is **the safety ideal**. Putting the safety ideal in the forefront of mass consciousness in the information society (or “a risk society”) is caused by increasing probability of various social and man-caused accidents, which act as side, unpredictable consequence of the application of high technologies.

It is well known, that many of these technologies have a global radius of action. The safety ideal domination results in arising such special social phenomenon as a “fear solidarity”. *Fear factor* (“insecurity”) becomes one of the social consolidation factors of various social groups and movements. In the industrial society, the leading factor of consolidation is *the need factor* (lack of material and social welfare), related to such valuable objects of the traditional industrial society as **ideals of social equality and prosperity**.

Thus, it is possible to state that *the educational policy has a chance to take a priority if it will create the state programs and will support various initiatives agreeable to, at least, three dominating ideals of the information society - safety ideals, social equality, and prosperity. In the information society, education as knowledge of social and man-caused risks, making the consequences of these risks predictable* at individual, group, and state levels, will be as much demanded as it will reduce, for example, the occurrence of social, religious, and ethnic conflicts or man-caused accidents.

Along with the education programs, providing the different kinds of safety, the education programs that help to achieve the ideals of social equality, prosperity, and stability in Russia have been and will always be topical.

By implementation of these programs, *the education as the institute of civil and professional socialization* provides the growth of social mobility of the population, personal and professional success achievement, and development of regulations of tolerance as the basis of formation of cultural identity, communal life, and social consolidation of citizens.

*What to teach?
Mobile education in
the mobile world*

To answer the question “**What to teach?**” i.e. the question about the content of education and about the formation of competence and abilities, it is necessary to consider, first of all, such characteristic feature of the information society, as *increasing rate of changes in the surrounding world*. The conceptions like information stress and information neurosis were not accidentally included into our everyday life.

The education system can help a person to keep up with the changes

flow not losing self, if the credo of the education system in the information society will be the words “Mobile in mobiles” (mobile in the mobile environment), engraved on the submarine of the well-known Jules Verne’s hero - captain Nemo. It is a question of aiming the society at making **the mobile education in the mobile world**.

The term “mobile education” is sometimes used as a synonym of remote education. But remote education basically signifies an external formal characteristic of pedagogical technologies - teaching at a distance.

The essence of mobile education is its flexibility, its unique opportunity *of broadening the accessibility of knowledge*, and, thereby, **the provision of social equality**, due to development of variant programs of school, vocational, and, especially, additional education of adults. The transition to more purposeful implementation **of the principles of variant developing education**, started in the middle of 90th, will help to meet the requirements of the information society.

In the conditions of the information society, the key ability, which is formed in various forms of educational and game activity, as well as in professional work, should become **a learning capability**. The principal psychologists and teachers of Russia time and again emphasized, that the main task of school is **to TEACH TO LEARN**. But their voices have been hardly heard.

Today, development of learning capability and an embodiment of the aim “teach to learn” will help in the strict sense to grasp the immense. The development of learning capability and creation of qualitative programs of professional growth is necessary to begin with the programs for teachers, tutors, and superintendents of schools and other educational institutions.

To put it figuratively, for the learning capability development it is necessary to have a kind of “school for the head master”. **Development of the learning capability of the pupil begins with the development of teaching capability of the teacher**. In this sense, *the system of higher vocational education, including the classical universities’ development of training and retraining programs for teachers, is the key to the general education sphere development*.

Development of the learning capability is closely connected with the information society being doomed (in a sense) to the broad motivation of different kinds of continuous education, transition from the traditional for the industrial society “education for life time” to the constantly renovated “education through the whole life”.

Continuous education becomes a norm, which justifies the slightly changed old saying: “Want to live - be able to study”. Short life cycle of knowledge, skills, and professions in the conditions of the information

society makes the desire to change the places and trades usual and proves that the range of motives of the person can surpass the breadth of interests and special knowledge of trades.

The up-tempo of changes in the information society utterly reveals *the system crisis of the traditional paradigms of education in the different countries of the world*, including Russia.

Therefore, one of the well-known sociologists of Germany has sadly named German national system of vocational education a phantasmal station, from which the trains of human fates leave to the world of dying away trades, the changed flexible sphere of employment, and new labour markets. And in this situation *we mechanically predict the market of trades, being under hypnosis of particular specialization, without posing the problem of socio-economic forecasting of trades that come into being.*

Projection of mobile education in the mobile world, development of learning capability, renovation of knowledge, and change of trades in different forms of continuous education act as the criteria at the discussion of the some innovations in the framework of the conception of education modernization. How to achieve the *optimal balance between universalization and specialization* of the programs of school general and vocational educations?

The universalization of educational programs acts as a precondition of social, academic, and professional mobility in the changing society.

What if this general, almost maniacal infatuation with the forms of vocational education get us in the situation that F.M. Dostoevsky described with irony: When a patient with the cold in the head saw the doctor, who examined him and said, groaning: “My dear friend, you’ve got a cold in the left nostril. You better go to Paris. We do not treat such a cold here”.

What if this experiment on the vocational education will lead to producing the particular specialization of pupils, “the left nostril” experts, which at times are far from the deliberate professional self-determination even in the higher school?

In the conditions of rapid process of knowledge renovation, the social risk of putting into practice *the standards of school education*, which have become old fashioned even before being approved as the law, increases.

Don’t you have a feeling that from the ninetieth there is a permanent *revision* of the projects of standards of yesterday school, while *the work* at the standards adequate to the time has not yet begun? As the result, it may happen that we will make the schoolboys hostages of the education standards of the last century.

All the spectrum of these questions concerning the renovation of the

education or as it called now “the content” requires a discussion.

*How to teach?
Expansion of teacher's
access to knowledge*

After discussion of the question “what to teach?” in the information society we, as it was already mentioned, shall briefly touch upon the question “**how to teach?**” i.e. **the question on the education technologies**. In spite of the obvious necessity of information and communication technologies application in the education system, while trying to find a solution for the problem, we can face the hidden dangers. One of these dangers is a non-agreement between the processes of school computerization and the processes of teachers’ familiarization with the information culture of the information society. Such social drama of school education as the situation, when *the teacher is behind the pupil* in the process of intercourse skills mastering, first of all, the skills of intercourse in the Internet, has been discussed more than once. So far, the best example of the mass effective solution of this problem is activity of the Federation of the Internet Education that has trained more than 100 thousand teachers.

Mastering communication technologies by teachers also solves the often-omitted question of **the teachers’ access to knowledge**. We usually reduce this question only to pupils or students’ access. At the same time, we still have not posed as the state task - the task of creation the conditions for the access to knowledge of schoolteacher or the tutor of vocational education. Without this task solution, efficiency of numerous programs for raising the level of professional skill will remain obviously insufficient for creation an innovative national system in Russia.

The question “how to teach?” is also related to the **technologies of knowledge quality control**. At these technologies development, it is important for us not to stop the search of various approaches to the knowledge quality estimation, while taking great interest in the monopoly of one technology.

In this regard, the *experiment* of GSE (general state examination) adaptation is one of the important lines of the search. There is no doubt in the necessity of practicing more widely *so-called olympiads and competitions* for the knowledge estimation. The ideas of the *self-estimation of knowledge*, for example, by *the voluntary distant testing* of knowledge of both pupils and teachers are worthy of notice. In short, there are many open complicated questions to solve in the development of the technology of knowledge quality control.

*Whose expense to teach
at? Retraining of the
personnel and
innovative potential of
regions*

In the conclusion, I will dwell on the last question, the question “at the expense of what resources” to develop the variant mobile education as the major component of the national innovative system of the information society that is being created in

the country.

One of the priority directions of the education system development is an urgent intense preparation of the education specialists to the life in the information society with its risk, speed, and dangers. Considerable *innovative potential* of such *preparation and perspective regional programs of the education development* has been gained in the regions. Having no full information about these programs, we take the risk of becoming the inventors of wooden bicycles. Perhaps, it is worth to advert to the practice of the Council of regional education leaders and, specifying the education priorities, to discuss the specific steps of the professional retraining and training of specialists with the heads of various regions of Russia and the Russian Union of Rectors. In my opinion, it is extremely dangerous to reduce the problems of additional professional education to the abstract thesis on the education transformation into the object of the state educational policy strengthening. It is important to realize that special retraining of teachers, and first of all, the retraining to educational and information technologies is a key to modern reform of education. Thereupon, I want to draw attention to the advanced program “the Higher School - to school”, which is focused on the given range of questions (the program is enclosed). In the conclusion, I also want to note that it is necessary to discuss the question of training the highly qualified pedagogical staff - the staff for teacher’s training colleges at classic universities.

I suggest, that according to the questions of resources and in other questions, which have been brought up today, the ways of achievement the education priority in the new society that is arising in our sight, and which will become a society, based on knowledge, were discussed.