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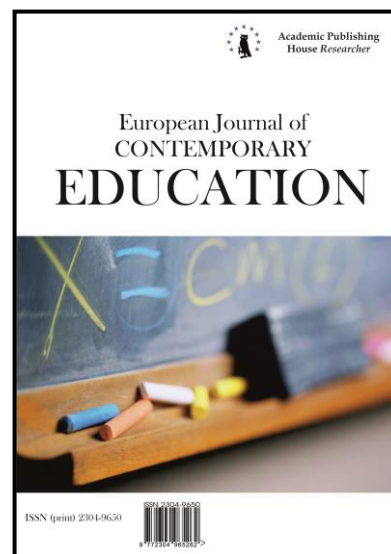
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Curriculum Development in the Kharkov Educational District of the Russian Empire: Best Practices in 1861

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Abstract

The 1860s was a time of intense development of the system of education in the Kharkov Educational District. The achievements were given a high assessment by the Administration, with the District's Trustee, Lieutenant General D.S. Levshin, going on to be later appointed in charge of the Moscow Educational District. However, to date there has been no dedicated research on D.S. Levshin's role in the management of education at the time. This paper seeks to fill this gap by exploring the activity of the District Administration in the area of curriculum development by way of circulars issued in the Kharkov Educational District in 1861.

It was established that D.S. Levshin, working in association with well-known pedagogue N.A. Lavrovsky, advocated a shift from direct regulation and introduction of curricula from above to creation of an environment in which teachers are not afraid to display initiative and curricula are designed at the grassroots level. The major undertakings in the area at the time included the following: 1) overhaul of the school control system (with school inspectors encouraged to focus on a direct link between the curriculum and the student's academic progress, acting more as advisers rather than controllers); 2) introduction of teacher's congresses at which to consider issues associated with course content and delivery; 3) modification of the format of teachers' meetings (with such meetings turning into "teachers' colloquies" intended to inspire discussion about relevant issues concerning teaching and learning). These best practices aimed at building a democratic pedagogical environment remain perfectly relevant today.

Keywords: history of pedagogy, teaching methodologies, historical pedagogical views, Kharkov Educational District, D.S. Levshin, N.A. Lavrovsky.

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1. Introduction

The 1860s was a very important time for the pedagogical community of the south of Russia. As evidenced by the case of Novocherkassk Gymnasium, it is in this period that the younger generation of teachers began to raise in earnest a number of special pedagogical issues, most importantly those related to how to teach (Peretyatko, Zulfugarzade, 2020: 1007-1008). “Experienced music teachers have stated, and famous performers have confirmed, that holding your bow over your violin’s strings or pressing your piano’s keys in a certain way will produce especially powerful playing – why then do they not pause for a moment to think (do we, actually?) that the craft of managing the soul of a child during their first moments in school is not an easy one?...”, wrote A.A. Radonezhsky, a young language and literature teacher at Novocherkassk Gymnasium at the time (Radonezhskii, 1861: 100). Essentially, it is during this period that many in the region came to realize that the teacher must not only know their subject well but also be a pedagogue capable of passing their knowledge on to the student. This is where they almost instantly began to question the usability of existing curricula, most of which took absolutely no account of students’ learning abilities and were focused mainly on having them rote memorize all kinds of abstruse material (Peretyatko, Zulfugarzade, 2020: 1003-1005).

Understandably, in that climate, a group with a weighty say in the matter was the Administration of the Kharkov Educational District. The District’s officials were faced with the task of not only coming up with new curricula but also explaining the logic behind those curricula to both young teachers and those from the older generation, who were accustomed to a completely different logic behind the design of academic courses. Note that in Novocherkassk Gymnasium, for instance, some teachers’ meetings featured heated discussions between older teachers, who defended the scholarliness and strictness of traditional approaches, and young ones, who begged to differ, as may be evidenced by the following statement: “It often happens that the same student who can fluently articulate a grammar rule and all exceptions to it may be bewildered when you ask them to provide a couple of examples to back up their words. In the child’s mind, the Russian language of which they have a proper command and a grammar from some Vostokov are two totally different worlds that have hardly anything to do with each other” (Artinskii, 1907: 185).

The situation in the education sector of the south of Russia in the 1860s is arguably similar to the current state of affairs in the Russian education system. At that time, officials were faced with the task of overhauling curricula, with the primary focus on ensuring that the result of pedagogical activity is a person who is able to apply the knowledge acquired in school in real life, rather than reproduce it mechanically. Similar objectives have been espoused by Russia’s Ministry of Education. More specifically, in 2019 the Ministry’s official website even carried a news story entitled ‘New FSES’s [Federal State Education Standards] to Help Teach Students Analyze and Apply Knowledge in Practice’ (Novye FGOS..., 2019). That being said, implementing new education standards is something many teachers cannot see the point of or even frown upon nowadays too. For instance, when the authorities undertook to implement a new FSES in Russian schools the previous time in 2012, researcher E.A. Sidenko published the findings from a survey of 658 teachers who were undergoing career enhancement training (Sidenko, 2012: 7). Sixty percent of respondents said they were outright against the implementation of new FSES’s, with 42 % of those being against the implementation of the actual new education standard, and 18 % being against the implementation of any innovative type of activity in schools. Thirty-seven percent of respondents said that either themselves personally or their educational institution did not have the capacity to implement the new FSES, while just 3 % admitted to be actually implementing it at that moment (Sidenko, 2012: 8-9)! While it may be too early to bring up statistics relating to the new FSES’s adopted in 2021, the issue has already sparked heated debate and strong criticism. For instance, academician at the Russian Academy of Education E.A. Yamburg stated in 2019 that “it is certain that a scrupulous and experienced person will not work by the new FSES’s” (Shvedchenko, 2019). Thus, despite all the differences between the situations in the 19th and 21st centuries, issues faced by the Russian education system both in the 1860s and in the 2020s are pretty much the same – there was a need back then and there is a need at present to rebuild it in such a way that the main result of school education will be not mechanically ingested knowledge but an ability to apply the knowledge acquired in school in real life, and in a climate of resistance from a portion of the pedagogical community at that.

The present paper analyzes the changes to school and gymnasium curricula proposed by the Administration of the Kharkov Educational District in 1861. Analysis of this issue may be particularly useful from the standpoint of the history of pedagogy, as the history of regional pedagogical thought in pre-revolution Russia has been underresearched, with the swing-round in opinion on the part of southern Russian pedagogues in 1860 remaining completely unresearched. The significance of that swing-round cannot be overestimated, as it is subsequent to it that many in the south of Russia came to realize the special nature of pedagogy as a science, an idea accurately expressed by the Director of Novocherkassk Gymnasium, S.S. Robush, who argued that pedagogues need to be prepared differently from members of other professions, suggesting that future teachers must be taught not to “develop a command of large amounts of information” but “develop their practical ability to teach” (Robush, 1867: 129). Thus, as imperfect as they were, 1860s school and gymnasium curricula in the south of Russia were the first experience of developing courses of study based on the requirements of pedagogy (e.g., assessing the student’s cognitive level, establishing clear objectives for teaching, etc.), as opposed to the logic underlying the disciplines taught. At the same time, the analysis presented in this paper is of relevance from the standpoint of present-day issues in Russian education as well, as it helps gain an idea of the way the authorities in charge of the regional education system successfully advocated in the past new pedagogical ideas in a pedagogical community that was not always readily accepting of them. While it is certain that many of those best practices cannot be directly duplicated today, the principal ideas espoused by the Administration of the Kharkov Educational District in the 1860s seem well worthy of attention today, despite all the changes that have taken place over the course of the last century and a half.

2. Materials and methods

The history of education in the south of Russia in the pre-revolution period has been explored quite extensively (Belyakova, 2003; Karpenko, 2006; Sit’ko, 2009). However, the focus in previous research has been predominately on the quantitative performance of the education system (e.g., number of educational institutions, number of students, etc.), while there is currently a complete paucity of research examining issues relating to teachers’ pedagogical views and instructional support for the learning process.

In the early 1860s, there were two prominent individuals in the Kharkov Educational District whose contribution to the development of Russian pedagogy is well worthy of separate consideration.

Based on the minimal information available on the first of the two, Lieutenant General D.S. Levshin, after a short stint in charge of the Kharkov Educational District, he was appointed to a more senior role – the Trustee of the Moscow Educational District. Well-known scholar A.V. Nikitenko says the following about D.S. Levshin: “Levshin deceived my expectations. I thought he would make a poor trustee, as there was something somewhat shallow about him, but eventually he turned out to be a top trustee. Horse sense and a kind, well-wishing heart offset any other qualities in him. Most important, he never claims to know everything and specifically something that he does not, as is so typical of officials. Besides, he is willing to take advice from others, but he will do so without becoming a slave to them” (Nikitenko, 1955: 429-430). A slightly more critical characterization of D.S. Levshin was provided by another contemporary of his, B.N. Chicherin, who saw the trustee as a person who was “without the slightest idea of either science or teaching” – but who, nevertheless, was not hindered by that from being “the kindest patriarchal general of the olden days” (Nikitenko, 1955: 632). Judging by these characterizations, while he was poorly versed in pedagogy, D.S. Levshin’s personal qualities and his willingness to take advice from others perfectly compensated for that.

Indeed, many of the circulars issued in the Kharkov Educational District in 1861 are inclusive of the opinions of members of the Trustee Board. In his activity, D.S. Levshin relied upon reports by Kharkov University professors, the most active of these being the second of the two – N.A. Lavrovsky, a well-known scholar and promoter of science, later appointed Rector of the University of Warsaw, whose contribution to the history of pedagogy in the south of Russia merits special recognition. His life and legacy remain inspirational for many scholars (Kulish, 2013; Makarova, 2013; Fabrak, 2014). However, as noted by Ukrainian researcher S.M. Kulish, “there has yet to be produced an integral picture of N.A. Lavrovsky’s activity in Kharkov University and the

Kharkov Educational District as a theoretician and a practitioner in pedagogy at the time” (Kulish, 2013: 90).

Therefore, the present study drew upon circulars issued in 1861 in the Kharkov Educational District as source material. As part of an analysis of these circulars, a set of documents were isolated dealing specifically with curriculum development in schools and gymnasia, which were then matched against the outcomes, mainly those in Novocherkassk Gymnasium. This helped gain an idea of how D.S. Levshin became “the best trustee” with the help of N.A. Lavrovsky.

Note, however, that both the subject matter of this study and its source base permit an understanding only of the methods that were used to implement new curricula in the Kharkov Educational District in the 1860s but by no means of the particular complications and difficulties that most certainly attended this complex process. Therefore, while the picture painted in the present study may seem somewhat idealized, the activity of D.S. Levshin and N.A. Lavrovsky in the early 1860s may well be regarded as highly successful and the methods used by them to implement curricula as overall efficient.

3. Discussion

It is for a reason that the present work is focused on documentation from the Kharkov Educational District for 1861 specifically – it contains examples of both direct intervention on the part of the District Administration and indirect intervention on its part in the curriculum development process, with the latter perhaps being of even more significance. The thing is that the education system in the Russian Empire at the time was still quite decentralized, with the curriculum normally designed by educational institutions themselves and then ratified by the Administration. For instance, in 1863, the Administration of the Kharkov Educational District undertook an analysis of all gymnasium curricula used at the time with a view to selecting the best ones. The resulting document stated that most of the time the learning program “was designed by the teacher in keeping with their own view of the subject, without being pressured by official textbook requirements” (Artinskii, 1907: 191). In that climate, it was crucial to get every school and gymnasium teacher to grasp the new requirements for education, rather than mechanically substitute one curriculum for another.

On April 14, 1861, N.A. Lavrovsky delivered a speech at a meeting of the Trustee Board of the Kharkov Educational District. Formally, it was an interim report on new requirements for inspection of primary schools. In actual fact, it went far beyond that narrow focus (Tsirkulyar, 1861d: 13). Commencing his address with a criticism of the then-existing system of control over the education system, N.A. Lavrovsky stressed that “education tends to outright fail to achieve its objectives and tends to be in miserable condition” specifically in schools where they appear to fulfill strict requirements from the District Administration to a T: “student examination lists are maintained with proper accuracy; the same goes for class registers; there are teachers’ meeting registers in place”; etc. (Tsirkulyar, 1861d: 14). With that in mind, he suggested that a primary focus in inspecting the schools be on the actual content of the educational process, rather than on documentation for the control thereof. N.A. Lavrovsky was convinced that directions to this effect from the Administration of the Kharkov Educational District were nothing more than “general expressions” (Tsirkulyar, 1861d: 14). For instance, in terms of course content, it typically was directed that one only see to it that “each course is delivered with proper graduality and timeliness and by way of teaching materials and study guides approved by the school’s senior leadership” ((Tsirkulyar, 1861d: 14). However, as noted by the Kharkov professor, “very often” the case was that where this requirement was formally fulfilled “the quality of instruction was poor and meaningful academic outcomes were truly meager” (this statement was meant to characterize not only the practices of the Kharkov Educational District but any educational institutions where the primary focus was on having to follow the established curriculum unconditionally) (Tsirkulyar, 1861d: 14). As a result, as argued by N.A. Lavrovsky, fuzzy requirements created “ideal” conditions for “arbitrary rule by inspectors” (Tsirkulyar, 1861d: 14). In terms of issues of student assimilation of the material, the scholar was of the view that knowing the material and being able to formulate it in your own words does not necessarily mean that you comprehend “the actual significance of that knowledge in life”, with knowledge detached from real life doomed to be “consigned to rapid and permanent oblivion, with little to no effect on either the student’s mental or their moral development” (Tsirkulyar, 1861d: 14-15).

Accordingly, N.A. Lavrovsky suggested focusing not on inspecting a school for how well the education process was reflected formally in documents, including syllabi and curricula, but on auditing “1) the knowledge of teachers themselves; 2) their ways of transmitting knowledge; 3) learning outcomes” (Tsirkulyar, 1861d: 15). The professor provided an in-depth commentary on each of the above items. Many of his observations remain valid today. Essentially, most of what N.A. Lavrovsky proposed was quite simple and easy to verify. For instance, in terms of one’s command of a subject, teachers were required to have fundamental knowledge of the subject (e.g., history teachers were expected to be able to represent certain “glorious historical figures and events” in “living images and in organic conjunction with life at the time”) – and, most importantly, pedagogical knowledge (“being familiar with the latest developments in the area of didactics of the discipline they teach”) (Tsirkulyar, 1861d: 15). N.A. Lavrovsky’s wishes were more diverse when it came to one’s “ways of transmitting knowledge” (the most crucial of them being “lively and diverse” instruction, given the age of learners in primary school) (Tsirkulyar, 1861d: 17). This is the area he seems to have been most focused on. While not demanding that the teacher strictly follow formal rules, N.A. Lavrovsky advocated the need to check “whether each class is an accomplished whole with a brief introduction in the beginning and a brief overview in the end; whether there is an organic link between each individual class and all of the preceding ones; whether an effort is made to make the student clearly aware of the actual objectives behind teaching a particular subject to them, which may be crucial to arousing in students a lasting interest in learning” (Tsirkulyar, 1861d: 17). Finally, in terms of control over “learning outcomes”, while N.A. Lavrovsky did not deny the importance of assessing the student’s knowledge via formal grades, he was convinced that in primary school what mattered more was to know “whether the student’s interest in learning and their love of a certain subject or group of subjects *have* actually been aroused” (Tsirkulyar, 1861d: 18). According to N.A. Lavrovsky, organizationally speaking, a school would best be inspected across the three items by way of visits to classes in all subjects and via informal one-on-one “chats” with each teacher about teaching (i.e., inspectors would not have a duty to perform a formal audit of the text of the curriculum and would have to get an idea of its content from their conversations with teachers and visits to their classes) (Tsirkulyar, 1861d: 15).

On balance, an ideal educational institution as seen by the Kharkov professor would look as follows: instruction at it would be delivered by teachers well-versed in their subject and the fundamentals of pedagogy; the learning program would be designed in such a way as to factor in learners’ developmental characteristics; the learning program would be logical and oriented toward a specific goal that all participants in the educational process would be aware of; as a result, students would not only acquire formal knowledge and develop an ability to apply it in practice but would also develop a personal interest in the subjects studied. While we could debate the strengths and weaknesses of the above pedagogical concept, its obvious upside lay in addressing the various aspects in a seamless, systemic, and coordinated manner. N.A. Lavrovsky’s wishes regarding the learning program were based on his other wishes: the teacher’s pedagogical competence was inevitably conducive to each class having to be an accomplished whole; their scholarly competence implied the ability to structure the course in a logical manner; their desire to get the students interested could be best fulfilled through explaining to the latter what they were learning the subject for.

The most significant and complicated question remained – how was the Administration of the Educational District to achieve this kind of organization in the schools, including in terms of curricula? N.A. Lavrovsky entertained no illusions whatsoever and realized that educational institutions at the time were quite far from living up to his ideals (Tsirkulyar, 1861d: 18). However, the pedagogue proposed an unexpected move: he suggested starting with rebuilding the relationships between officials and teachers. N.A. Lavrovsky believed that, while it is via administrative inspections that school life could be radically changed, the school inspector must approach the teachers not as a controller but more in the role of a mentor, one who is “perfectly competent, fully familiar with the latest didactic requirements, fair-minded, scrupulous, and unfailingly amicable” (Tsirkulyar, 1861d: 18). But the most important part of the inspection process was, in his view, to be attending teachers’ meetings, with the primary focus being not on the reporting part but on the exchange of best practices in “eclectic, refreshing, and lively ways” – it is at such meetings that various “pedagogical and didactic issues” were to be resolved (and that is in addition to the inspector’s mandatory “friendly chats” with each teacher about instruction!) (Tsirkulyar 1861d: 18-19). Thus, one was to familiarize oneself with the latest pedagogical

requirements, including those relating to curriculum content not so much by way of directions from the Administration as via informal well-meaning communication between officers and teachers. What is more, officials were to assist teachers by regularly attending teachers' meetings and responding to questions that arose.

All of N.A. Lavrovsky's presentation was published in circulars for the Kharkov Educational District on June 15, 1861 (Tsirkulyar, 1861d: 13-19). It had been presented to the Russian pedagogical community earlier, literally right after the professor's address – in the April issue of the Journal of the Ministry of Public Education (Lavrovskii, 1861). This is an indication that N.A. Lavrovsky's ideas were also shared by the Trustee of the Kharkov Educational District, Lieutenant General D.S. Levshin, and the rest of the District's Trustee Board. All this helps not only better understand the expectations with regard to the learning program of those in charge of the education system in the south of Russia in the 1860s and their take on its value in the learning process but also get an idea of the theoretical basis for various pedagogical requirements and their place in one's notion of the future development of the Russian education system.

On June 8, 1861, D.S. Levshin enacted a new edition of 'Instructions for Inspection of Secondary and Lower Educational Institutions within the Kharkov Educational District' (Tsirkulyar, 1861e: 18). Although this document dealt with the supervision of not only schools but gymnasia as well, it incorporated many of N.A. Lavrovsky's proposals. Specifically, the following were established as the objectives for inspection of educational institutions: 1) "assess both the overall level of education and the technical knowledge of teachers" in them; 2) "gain an insight into the teaching methods" used in them; 3) "get an accurate idea of actual learning outcomes" in them (Tsirkulyar, 1861e: 18). Auditing the educational part, just as proposed by N.A. Lavrovsky, no longer required serious work on documentation. Instead, the inspector was to personally attend classes and conduct private conversations with teachers (Tsirkulyar, 1861e: 19). Yet the senior management of the Kharkov Educational District was not yet going to the same lengths as the professor would have done, keeping as part of the inspection program paperwork auditing, which, however, was now used to assess not the level of education in an educational institution but only the level of paperwork management in it (Tsirkulyar, 1861e: 21). Similarly, D.S. Levshin recognized the significance of instructional assistance from the inspector to the teacher (it became an official duty of the inspector to familiarize the teacher with "the best principles of teaching"). He, however, did not enjoin inspectors to engage in discussions with teachers, unlike what had been proposed by N.A. Lavrovsky (Tsirkulyar, 1861e: 18-19). On the whole, there is an impression that, while the Administration of the Kharkov Educational District did acknowledge that N.A. Lavrovsky was right on many of the issues, it decided to refrain from dismantling the existing inspection system entirely and maintain a certain degree of continuity with former rules for inspection.

Consequently, the new 'Instructions for Inspection of Secondary and Lower Educational Institutions within the Kharkov Educational District' incorporated some of the former requirements for curriculum – the very requirements that N.A. Lavrovsky regarded as "general expressions". It was still required that courses be delivered "with proper graduality and timeliness" (Tsirkulyar, 1861e: 19). Furthermore, the requirement to provide instruction "by way of study guides approved by the school's senior leadership" was supplemented. The teacher was now permitted to depart from the use of prescribed teaching materials and study guides if they had valid reasons to do so (Tsirkulyar, 1861e: 19). Thus, while most of N.A. Lavrovsky's proposals relating to changes to curriculum were not incorporated into the new version of the document, what, in actual fact, *was* implemented is the most crucial of his ideas – the primary focus was now not on how well classes aligned with the adopted curriculum but on how effective a particular course was, with teachers encouraged to adjust the learning program if that could help achieve better academic outcomes.

Thus, while the Administration of the Kharkov Educational District was fully aware in the early 1860s of the instructional outmodedness of many of the existing curricula for primary and secondary education, it approached the issue in quite an irregular manner. It is impossible to understand why it responded this way if you do not take into account the fact that it was part of its overhaul of the education system, which was to reorient schools and gymnasia from fulfilling formal requirements set by the Administration to ensuring the maximum efficiency of the learning process. Even at the prescriptive level, changes were made not to provisions regulating the activity of educational institutions but to instructions for officers concerned with inspecting them. The focus was shifted from auditing a school's paperwork to auditing its educational process and

from punishing to seeking improvement. Of relevance here is a view maintained by another Kharkov University professor – F.V. Tikhonovich. His suggestion, published in circulars for the Kharkov Educational District, was that, in the event an instructor found a teacher's methods of instruction to be ineffective, the former was to “suggest using a method that is more appropriate and useful and then try to demonstrate how it works – not only in words but in action as well, by engaging in an actual demonstration in front of the students in the presence of the teacher, so that everyone could see how instruction is to be delivered by way of the new method” (Tsirkulyar, 1861e: 22). Accordingly, instead of establishing clear-cut requirements for new curricula, the Administration of the Kharkov Educational District left it entirely up to teachers to decide what to include in the learning program, officially empowering them to depart even from already adopted curricula. At the same time, inspecting an educational institution now involved conducting an informal assessment of each teacher's learning program not from the standpoint of its alignment with certain standards but in terms of how well the material was assimilated by the learners. To get the teachers to better understand the new requirements, it was decided to include in circulars for the Kharkov Educational District, along with a set of new prescriptive documents, a report by N.A. Lavrovsky (the one that formed the basis of those documents); the report, which provided insight into many different aspects, was written in a breezy style (apparently, the District Administration did not entertain the illusion that the Journal of the Ministry of Public Education was read by all teachers).

Inspection records for schools and gymnasia within the Kharkov Educational District began to indicate the effect of the new requirements as early as May 1861. While curricula were not always audited by inspectors, it was done quite frequently, with regularly poor student knowledge believed to actually be the result of using a deficient learning program. A perfect example in this respect is an audit of the activity of Kupyansk Uyezd School, which found student command of Russian, arithmetic, and geometry at the school to be “paltry and weak” (Tsirkulyar, 1861f: 88). Having articulated this fact, the inspector provided a detailed breakdown of the school's instruction in Russian, noting that in their Russian language classes “the children would be presented with dry grammar rules to learn by heart, with no practical application thereof encouraged; practical activities, like dictation, articulate and responsible reading, prose rendering of poems, and composition writing exercises, [were] totally overlooked in the classroom” (Tsirkulyar, 1861f: 88). Consequently, it was to be communicated and explained to the teachers that most student learning gaps were actually the result of using an outmoded learning program.

The practice of following good programs in a literal and uncreative, if formally valid, fashion was now looked upon in the Kharkov Educational District as a drawback of the school. A noteworthy example in this respect is an inspection conducted at Fatezh Uyezd School, instruction in which at the time can be summed up by the following quote: “All academic subjects were taught in the volume specified in the school's constitution and curriculum and using pre-approved teaching materials. No departures from and no special peculiarities about the instruction method have been observed. Everything is conducted in accordance with the established procedure” (Tsirkulyar, 1861f: 94). However, as suggested by the inspector, the satisfactory, but by no means brilliant, academic progress of students in the school was a natural effect of the approach described above (Tsirkulyar, 1861f: 94). For instance, in divinity, the audit revealed a sharp differentiation among students, with satisfactory performance exhibited only by capable and diligent students; most of the school's students solved arithmetic and geometric problems correctly but slowly; in history and geography, a good command was combined with a dislike of the subject (Tsirkulyar, 1861f: 94). In general, it was clear that no school would ever achieve remarkable results until the curriculum was adapted to meet the needs of individual students and teachers.

Most inspectors at the time favored making thoughtful changes to the curriculum, which they believed would help ensure greater effectiveness of the educational process at a school and, hence, improve its overall performance. This was particularly the case in gymnasia where well-educated teachers approached the curriculum in a more thoughtful manner. Specifically, in Kursk Gymnasium the philology course was expanded through the addition of foreign literature and Church Slavonic, and the geography course – by way of “providing to students interesting information taken from various memoirs and travel notes”, while the jurisprudence course was modified in such a way as to have the “primary focus” on criminal law (Tsirkulyar, 1861f: 89-90). Note that in the last two cases the teachers also removed from the program certain “trifles” and “redundant details” prescribed by the textbook (Tsirkulyar, 1861f: 90). Wide use was made of

books not included in the program by the Administration as study guides (e.g., a “great history teacher” named Neslukhovskiy supplemented textbook material with works by S.M Solovyov and D.I. Ilovaiskiy) (Tsirkulyar, 1861f: 90). What is more important, while inspectors generally displayed an understanding and interested attitude toward initiatives of this kind, there, however, were also cases of attempts at improvement through modifying the program failing (the reasons behind the failures were then identified and analyzed). For instance, in Kursk Gymnasium, while the quality of instruction in the modern languages (French and German) was overall decent, most learners’ command of grammatical forms was an area that still needed work, which affected the quality of their translations tangibly in terms of accuracy (Tsirkulyar, 1861f: 90). The inspector’s conclusion was that the problem was caused by “practice-based learning being privileged over theory-based learning” (i.e., students were engaged more in practical activities than the learning of rules). While overall acknowledging the value of this approach, the inspector noted that it would not work where there were just 2 to 3 classes per week (Tsirkulyar, 1861f: 90).

Essentially, the most important merit of the new inspection system lies in recognizing that the success of the teacher’s learning program is directly related to the student’s academic success. In light of this, even in primary schools, some teachers may well have unconsciously engaged in adapting the learning program for their course to their own individual characteristics. This was particularly the case with the Russian language course. As revealed by audits, in some schools this subject was taught “with the predominant focus on practice”, while in others it was “a combination of theory and practice” (Tsirkulyar, 1861f: 85-97). However, the use of both of these approaches was fine with inspectors as long as it produced good results. It was even fine to use a slightly outmoded curriculum, as evidenced by the case of Sudzha Uyezd School, headed at the time by an elderly trustee (his exact age at the time was not specified, but it was known to be his 45th year in service) (Tsirkulyar, 1861f: 92). The school still had in place practices such as cramming and study of topics quite remote from real life. For instance, as established by an audit, the divinity course involved “rote learning of texts”, and the Russian language course required translation from Church Slavonic into Russian, a practice that was no longer around in other schools (Tsirkulyar 1861f: 93). Having said that, despite the fact that the use of rote learning without mixing in practical activities was something generally frowned upon by the Administration of the Kharkov Educational District, in this particular case the inspector reported with satisfaction that most of the students attending the divinity course had “a working command” of course content (Tsirkulyar 1861f: 92-93). Even more curious is the inspector’s review of the school’s Russian language instruction. Despite the fact that students had incomplete mastery of grammar and made minor mistakes, the inspector refrained from criticizing the teacher, as the latter’s techniques were believed to have had “a significant effect on the children’s development” (Tsirkulyar, 1861f: 93). Overall, in spite of quite a few critical observations about the performance of Sudzha Uyezd School, the activity of its teaching staff was described as “low-key but effective enough to achieve the objectives set” (Tsirkulyar, 1861f: 92).

Thus, the method used to rebuild schools and gymnasia within the Kharkov Educational District to meet the new requirements, including in terms of curriculum, was quite permissive. It did not require completely forsaking the former principles of teaching. On the contrary, if educational institutions managed to reach their primary objectives and ensure acceptable development for their students they were allowed to continue using admittedly outmoded methodologies and learning programs. Perhaps, it is taking this particular approach that saved the Kharkov Educational District from destroying what was working well: contrary to N.A. Lavrovskiy’s views, the majority of schools within the District posted satisfactory academic results for 1861 (Tsirkulyar, 1861f: 85-97). At the same time, with the process of rebuilding the education system having been launched, devoting more attention to the curriculum by way of inspection helped ensure that in all schools and gymnasia learning programs would gradually take on a form that met the latest requirements.

Another noteworthy fact is that most of the above-mentioned school inspection findings were published in circulars for the Kharkov Educational District. This enabled teachers to learn about the experience of their colleagues from other educational institutions, both positive and negative but always specific. Accordingly, this helped ensure that they take their cue not from foreign pedagogues or those based in the capital, who worked in totally different conditions, but their colleagues from neighboring uyezds and governorates. It must be noted that it is the exchange of

real experience that the Administration of the Kharkov Educational District deemed particularly crucial to making course content as effective as possible.

Back in September 1860, D.S. Levshin noted that relevant pedagogical issues are almost never discussed at teachers' meetings in the District's schools and gymnasia. Based on his observations, most teachers' meetings involved "examining the school's receipts and expenditure and setting the dates of promotion and final exams" (Tsirkulyar, 1861b: 7). The Trustee Board recognized that this state of affairs was unacceptable, while N.A. Lavrovsky also came up with a few interesting points on the matter. In his view, school and gymnasia were in acute need of "powerful means of stimulating and sustaining activity among instructors", for without such means teachers were turning into but formal executors of prefabricated programs, consigned to stooping "to mechanical delivery of textbook content, which not only is devoid of any educational value but actually is harmful, year after year page by page" (Tsirkulyar, 1861b: 7). It is regularly held teachers' meetings at which to discuss methods and ways of teaching that were seen as the most obvious and down-to-earth means of motivating teachers and providing them with instructional support. Owing to a systematic approach taken by the Administration of the Kharkov Educational District, this solution was, obviously, to improve the education system as a whole, not just curricula. In the context of the present work, of particular relevance are the following quintessential thoughts from D.S. Levshin: "They [teachers' meetings] help maintain education in secondary and lower educational institutions in harmony with the terms and requirements of present-day didactics. Any change and improvement in the method of teaching a particular subject that becomes a fact in present-day didactics or is recognized as useful by an instructor based on their personal reflections on the matter or teaching experience can become known to all instructors in attendance, discussed by them, and explored by them in terms of both theory and practice" (Tsirkulyar, 1861b: 7-8). As can be seen, the District Administration again placed emphasis on that changes in the educational process must emanate not from orders and directives but from teachers' inner understanding of the current development of pedagogy, an understanding founded on information obtained both from external sources and from personal experience. As in other cases, to make teachers better aware of the logic behind the latest changes in the education system, the Administration published in circulars for the Kharkov Educational District a directive to all secondary and lower educational institutions enjoining them to hold twice a month teachers' meetings to discuss relevant pedagogical issues, with a detailed rationale for the decision provided (Tsirkulyar, 1861b: 7-9).

Unfortunately, the issue of how crucial this transformation was to the development of pedagogy in the south of Russia remains unresearched. It is known that the new form of teachers' meetings, or "teachers' colloquies", did eventually become a major form of discussing and resolving urgent issues in Novocherkassk Gymnasium (Artinskii, 1907: 184). It is at these meetings that young and old teachers engaged in discussions about rebuilding the learning program. The largest amount of attention was normally devoted to discussing the learning program for philology, history, and geography. For instance, geography teacher I.P. Pryanishnikov was advised to rebuild his course completely – it was recommended that he begin not with mathematical geography (e.g., explanation of mathematical laws governing a climate, day and night length, etc.) but with physical geography, which was to help get the children interested in learning it (Artinskii, 1907: 192). Similarly, history teacher A.S. Zmiyev was advised to begin instruction in his subject not with world history but domestic history – so as to make the material more interesting and comprehensible for the student (Artinskii, 1907: 193). Philology teachers had debates regarding the ideal relationship between the theoretical and practical parts in teaching Russian (Artinskii, 1907: 185). Thus, the policy pursued by the Administration of the Kharkov Educational District helped quickly launch the process of rebuilding and enhancing the learning program at the grassroots level, with teachers themselves, through debate, searching for optimum ways to design a curriculum.

N.A. Lavrovsky suggested going even further and introducing annual congresses to be attended by teachers from different schools. While recognizing that the problem with arranging large-scale activities of this kind was distance and a shortage of railroads at the time, he believed that it was quite possible to organize smaller congresses – "for teachers from, say, three to five uyezd schools" (Tsirkulyar, 1861c: 7). Essentially, the idea of holding teacher's congresses was received welcomingly by both D.S. Levshin and the Ministry of Public Education – but with one little reservation: it required funding. It was obvious that pedagogues sent to a congress would

need to receive financial remuneration, and those expenses were to be borne by uyezds schools, most of which at the time were not particularly well-off (Tsirkulyar, 1861c: 7). Under those circumstances, D.S. Levshin again acted carefully – in May 1861, he directed the principals of all gubernia schools to share with him their opinion concerning the holding of teacher’s congresses (Tsirkulyar, 1861c: 7).

The Kharkov Educational District would go on to implement the practice of arranging teacher’s congresses, including large-scale ones. Quite often, the central issue at a teacher’s congress was designing curricula to a uniform template that would be most effective for the challenges teachers face. For instance, in the Province of the Don Cossack Host, they started to arrange such congresses in 1862, with the central topic at them most of the time being “discussing and developing more or less general principles of providing instruction in subjects within a course of study” (Artinskii, 1907: 188). At times, there were congresses held for teachers from all over the Kharkov Educational District. One of such events was devoted exclusively to creating a single program for teaching Russian philology. By the mid-1860s, it was clear that the biggest challenge was posed by gymnasium programs for teaching Russian. Some very interesting speculations to this effect were voiced to the District Administration by Novocherkassk pedagogues: “None of the gymnasium subjects has caused so much disagreement, disorganization, and disunity in the teaching community as our own language. All existing textbooks on this subject have to this point been found unsatisfactory. Yet no one has proposed anything satisfactory. While we have discarded the old ways of teaching the native language, the new ones have yet to produce tangibly better results. As a consequence, each gymnasium is doing it its own way, keeping to its own views and convictions. Hence, the lack of certainty and the absence of a good system – and, consequently, total disunity in teaching the native language as part of the philology course” (Artinskii, 1907: 222). In that climate, the Administration of the Kharkov Educational District resolved to call a congress of philology teachers from all gymnasia. The objective for the congress, which took place in 1867, was to draw up “a most detailed plan for teaching the Russian language”. A special condition was established requiring the participants to communicate with each other via a “real life exchange of opinions”, as opposed to in-house documentation (Artinskii, 1907: 223). Indeed, the resulting program would be successfully employed in practice going forward. Without going into detail, it is worth noting that it envisaged both taking account of students’ developmental characteristics and maintaining the link between theory and practice. It was decided to teach the Russian and Slavonic languages in Grades 1–4 and Russian literature in Grades 5 and 6, with a focus on the application of previously learnt grammar rules and identifying specific theoretical rules for “poetry and prose” in various works of literature, with the course of study concluding in Grade 7 with revising and reinforcing the material covered (Artinskii, 1907: 223). Thus, while the idea of teacher’s congresses proposed by N.A. Lavrovsky turned out to work pretty well in creating curricula, the full implementation of the practice of holding teacher’s congresses was affected by lack of funding.

As can be seen, the Administration of the Kharkov Educational District was engaged in the 1860s in a gradual and consistent building of a system that envisaged teachers being key initiators in rebuilding the education system, including in terms of enhancing the learning program. With that said, where teachers were unable to achieve the objectives set, the Trustee Board could step in with a rough program of its own and provide an explanation of the logic behind it. There was a case of this kind in 1861; it dealt with drawing up a program for teaching Latin from Grade 3, as opposed to Grade 4 (Tsirkulyar, 1861a: 8). Initially the task of creating the program was entrusted to a chief teacher in the District’s only gymnasium where Latin was already being taught from an earlier age (Tsirkulyar, 1861a: 8). However, the program produced by the teacher failed to gain the support of the District’s Trustee Board, leading the latter to design a program of its own (the basis for the Board’s program was formed by the ideas contributed by the above-mentioned Kharkov University professor F.V. Tikhonovich) (Tsirkulyar, 1861a: 8).

Members of the Trustee Board placed the primary emphasis specifically on what children were to be taught in Grade 3. Apparently, the program proposed by the gymnasium teacher was focused primarily on learning words by heart, which was found to be misaligned with pedagogical requirements for the design of a learning program. The Board’s criticism of the approach can be expressed by the following quote: “Just learning words without doing any translation is quite useless and even harmful in learning a language. <...>. Memorized words become a real part of students’ knowledge when they are committed to memory while the student is having a thought,

i.e. during an act of translation; any acquired linguistic material, be it words or phrases, must be applied instantly, i.e. in an act of translation” (Tsirkulyar, 1861a: 8). Accordingly, as an alternative to memorizing words, the Trustee Board of the Kharkov Educational District, suggested engaging thirdgraders in translation, for which it recommended using “Kühner's grammar”, while it was suggested that vocabulary and rules of grammar be learnt as part of analyzing a text (Tsirkulyar, 1861a: 9). It was noted separately that students were to translate both from Latin into Russian and from Russian into Latin, the rationale being that “this is needed not because it teaches the student to speak Latin but because it provides much greater potential for them applying in practice much of the previously learnt grammar and vocabulary” (Tsirkulyar, 1861a: 9). As always, the recommendation was accompanied by a detailed explanation, and in this case it was stressed that translation from Russian into Latin, compared with translation from Latin into Russian, requires a firm, rather than rough, command of grammar, as well as an ability to choose among different Latin words with similar meaning (Tsirkulyar, 1861a: 9). Similarly, students in Grades 4–7 were, too, mainly to engage in translation activities, but learners in this group were to translate not adapted texts but original ones, with a gradual increase in complexity and diversity. For example, for Grade 4 it was recommended to use works by Julius Caesar (for the “breezy, and therefore riveting, and down-to-earth writing style”). Poetry translation was allowed in limited amounts; it was to become a regular part of the program starting in Grade 5 only (Tsirkulyar, 1861a: 9).

Even where it was a turnkey learning program designed through the efforts of the District Administration, some initiative was still expected on the part of teachers, who were allowed to suggest both including in the program translations from unlisted sources and, conversely, leaving out translations from recommended ones (Tsirkulyar, 1861a: 10). As a noteworthy example, it was allowed, in teaching Latin versification, to replace a “Jacobi-based” study guide with “a custom study guide designed in close alignment with student needs” (Tsirkulyar, 1861a: 9). Finally, teachers were encouraged to find a convenient time during lessons to “explain to the class the ways in which life in ancient times was different from life in modern times”, as this was thought to be useful both in terms of their future study of history and “accustoming” them to attentive reading and analysis of life around them (Tsirkulyar, 1861a: 9).

The above case clearly indicates that the Administration of the Kharkov Educational District did have the ability to produce quality curricula of its own design, and most of its programs were in keeping with the needs of the time, were pedagogically and scientifically well-grounded, and took account of children’s developmental characteristics. However, as shown above, it preferred not to do it. Even in the above example, the task of initial development of the program was entrusted to a gymnasium teacher (incidentally, quite characteristically, the teacher’s name was not mentioned in any of the circulars for the Kharkov Educational District; nor was there provided a detailed overview of his failed program) (Tsirkulyar, 1861a: 8-10). Essentially, the District Administration tried to act in the same ideal role as the one it had assigned to school inspectors – that of a considerate consultant and mentor to students. Apparently, this produced good results, with Latin instruction in the District’s gymnasia becoming top-grade, irrespective of specific programs. For instance, Novocherkassk Gymnasium was allowed to keep using its existing curriculum for Latin, whereby Latin instruction was to begin in Grade 4, up until the mid-1860s, the reason being that learners in Grade 3 were overloaded as it was and increasing the number of teaching hours could place an extra strain on the teacher, leading to a decline in the quality of instruction (characteristically, the maximum teaching load at the time was 22 lessons per week) (Artinskii, 1907: 171). Note that, subsequent to adopting a new program, the gymnasium managed to deliver some excellent academic results, with its Latin exam performance bringing back in 1866 “fond memories of past success with the classical languages” (Artinskii, 1907: 210).

4. Conclusion

“With the era of the reign of fear in our schools irrevocably drawing to a close and the intimidation system giving way to meek measures, it is time now that inspectors in our schools started to be likened not to a lightning storm that will punish just for the sake of punishing but to a friendly guest who will seek to invigorate the monotonous routine of study and organize and guide the student’s energies, serving as a kind middleman between the distant school and its senior management”, wrote N.A. Lavrovsky in 1861 (Tsirkulyar, 1861d: 19). This quote accurately reflects the policy pursued by the Kharkov Educational District at the time. While it was fully aware of the

issues facing the education system at the time, the most salient of which being its outmodedness, ineffectiveness, and detachedness from real life due to its excessive focus on theory, the District Administration did, however, refrain from using tough punitive measures. Instead of just punishing weak and indifferent teachers and instead of introducing new rules and curricula in a strictly top-down manner, the District's Trustee, D.S. Levshin, strove to inspire the actual educational process, with a focus on getting each school and gymnasium to prioritize conscious improvement of the actual learning process over formal compliance with administrative directions.

What became the primary measure aimed at improving the curriculum in schools and gymnasia was inspecting the educational institution. Subject to inspection was now, however, not the written version of the curriculum – instead, the inspector was to visit each teacher's classes and then have a private conversation with them. The inspector was to draw, on that basis, conclusions about the relationship between students' academic progress and the quality of the courses attended by them. The key upsides of this approach were its flexibility and explicit focus on learning outcomes. While the Administration of the Kharkov Educational District, essentially, was in favor of practice-based teaching methods being employed and the use of problems and assignments prevailing over a focus on theory and rote memorization, there were cases where inspectors approved the use of formally outmoded but still efficient curricula, as well as cases where, conversely, gaps in the student's knowledge were found to be the result of their willful disregard for the course's theoretical part. The period's school inspection materials indicate that inspectors actually quite often acted as advisers focused on identifying strengths and weaknesses in the curriculum.

Another crucial measure undertaken to get teachers to prioritize thoughtful instruction over mechanical delivery of course content was the introduction of “teachers' colloquies” in all schools. Teachers' meetings, which formerly had been used to discuss mainly administrative and economic issues, were now employed for the exchange of best teaching practices. For instance, in Novocherkassk Gymnasium, teachers' meetings involved active discussion of the sequence of units in a course, with adjustments being made as necessary. In addition, the go-ahead was given for the convening of teacher's congresses, where best teaching practices could be exchanged among teachers from different educational institutions. By the late 1860s, such congresses had become a tool for unifying Russian philology curricula – instead of introducing a new curriculum in this subject in a strictly top-down manner, the District Administration directed that teachers in all of the gymnasia develop it personally.

Thus, the success in education in the south of Russia in the 1860s was directly associated with the original reforms initiated by D.S. Levshin and N.A. Lavrovsky, who had understood that initiative and readiness to innovate cannot be inculcated into members of the pedagogical community through directions from above and administrative control alone. They rebuilt the education system as much as they could, with a focus on encouraging initiative from below and making control over educational institutions not punitive but helpful in student development. This helped initiate the process of creating new curricula at the grassroots level, with the District Administration now intervening only under exceptional circumstances (which, to its credit, it would be doing in quite a professional and competent manner).

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