

# The Journey to the Origin

Any modern person, whoever he may be and whatever he may be engaged in, would agree that knowledge in all its aspects is the basis of the progressive development of mankind at all stages of its history. Disagreements in understanding the role and place of the processes of obtaining and applying knowledge begin, perhaps, when discussing and shaping practical steps in the conditions of a particular country, a particular historical period, in relation to various aspects of life and activity of these or those communities.

It is noteworthy that the countries most successful in the development of systems for obtaining and applying knowledge are characterized by a departure from a purely utilitarian approach. Knowledge and its active carriers and agents – educated people – are an important value not only and not so much in terms of solving practical problems and tasks of socio-economic development (economic growth) as in terms of creating conditions and prerequisites for creating a harmonious society.

To paraphrase a well-known aphorism, we can say that “there is never much knowledge. Nevertheless, each country and society has not only to form incentives for development and acquisition of more and more modern knowledge, but also to take into account the real opportunities that they have in a given period of time. A striking example is modern Russia, in which the economic-oriented approach has prevailed. Its essence is that the content and scope of education should fully meet the requirements of the environment in which a person lives and works (will live and work), and beyond that there is nothing and no reason to teach him.

The path of Russia’s formation of the domestic approach to the system of knowledge and education over the previous 300 years was not an easy one. Before 1917 this process was characterized by the desire for a kind of elitism – primarily in higher education, as well as in the system of gymnasium education. At the same time, however, considerable attention was also paid to elementary school, which for the majority of the population was the main one. Education at both universities and gymnasiums was based on the study of classical subjects and disciplines, both social and natural sciences.

As B. P. Weinberg noted<sup>1</sup>: “How to conduct the most rational training in a specialty depends to a large extent on the type of this specialty, but still one can give guidelines common to all sciences. As the first of these general guidelines I will give a paradoxical in form, but deeply correct in essence advice: “knowledge is not in knowledge, but in knowledge of where to find”<sup>2</sup>.

This allowed graduates of grammar schools and universities to acquire sufficient knowledge to be able to consciously choose their future in a wide range of professions. Importantly, this approach also contributed to the formation of citizens of the country working for its future: “If religion teaches people life: ‘love your neighbors as yourself,’ then science instills in its adherents: ‘love not only your neighbors, but also your distant ones as yourself. If a man of life in general puts the interests of his family, his class, his city, his associates, his fellow tribesmen in the first place, then for a man of science all are equal<sup>3</sup>.”

An important role was given to students’ independent work. A. S. Lappo-Danilevsky<sup>4</sup> emphasized that “only knowledge acquired by oneself, based on one’s own experience, only knowledge which cannot be learned and transmitted, but is conscious, experienced and open – only such knowledge is reliable...”<sup>5</sup>.

Many of the best features and traditions of the Russian system of obtaining and transmitting knowledge were preserved and developed within the framework of the Soviet educational system. Including such fundamental features as fundamentality, depth, the leading role of the teacher-educator. At the same time, the system as a whole was focused on the tasks of the country’s development. Thus, at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s it was noted that “with regard to school as the main form of training, certain measures of its reconstruction were outlined which boiled down to increasing the efficiency of classes,

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<sup>1</sup> Weinberg Boris Petrovich (1871–1942) was a Russian and Soviet physicist and glaciologist. He is the author of the USSR’s first manual on magnetic exploration.

<sup>2</sup> *Weinberg B. P.* Experience of the methodology of scientific work and preparation for it. M.: Worker of Education, 1928. 96 p. [P. 87].

<sup>3</sup> *Weinberg B. P.* People of life, think of future generations. Social Tasks of the Experimental Sciences. Moscow: Typography of I. D. Sytin, 1907. 40 p. [P. 3]

<sup>4</sup> Lappo-Danilevsky, Alexander Sergeevich (1863–1919) – Russian historian, one of the founders of the methodology of historical science in Russia.

<sup>5</sup> *Weinberg B. P.* Experience of the methodology of scientific work and preparation for it. Moscow: Worker of Education, 1928. 96 p. [P. 89].

bringing the school closer to production and creating the necessary organizational and material guarantees for its further development”<sup>6</sup>.

One of the undoubted achievements of the Soviet educational system is its universal nature with a generally high level of primary, secondary and, even more so, higher education, and the very orientation to the tasks of socio-economic development: “For successful development of research work in a certain branch of knowledge or in a certain part of the country it is not enough to realize the need for such work, but you need to create the appropriate environment and still have to create the necessary staff for this work. On this last point, too, the individual constituent parts of the USSR have encountered serious difficulties. In many cases it has been clearly revealed that there is an insufficient cadre of both “engineers” of science – highly talented creators of new methods and organizers of collective scientific work – and “technicians” of science – well educated and conscious executors of the plans elaborated by creators and organizers, and at the same time direct managers of the so-called “technical personnel” of research institutions<sup>7</sup>.

The authors of this issue bitterly regret to note that the system of learning and education in contemporary Russia (since the period of “radical” reforms) is characterized by the oblivion of many of the features and characteristics noted above (papers by O.A. Donskih; E.M. Dorovskikh, A.V. Savvateev). A piercing pain of loss is imbued in A.V. Savvateev’s “manifesto for saving the mass school. The approach to all levels of education implemented during the modern period is based on the primitive conviction of reformers that the fundamentals of education are excessive for the vast majority of students, and on the supposed “practicality” of getting the “right competences” “here and now”. Obviously, this approach has nothing to do with the objectives of the multifaceted development of the human personality, which is declared by modern society.

As an opposite example, we can refer to the experience of China, which is developing a modern national system of mass education step by step. In March 2023, the report of the Chinese Government

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<sup>6</sup> Plan for Providing the USSR National Economy with Specialists (1929/30–1932/33). State Planning Commission of the USSR. Central Commission on Personnel. Moscow: Plankhozgiz (State Planning and Economic Publishing House), 1930. 288 p. [P. 7].

<sup>7</sup> Weinberg B.P. Experience of the methodology of scientific work and preparation for it. Moscow: Worker of Education, 1928. 96 p. [P. 3].

(paragraph 9) emphasized: “We have taken concrete steps to improve people’s living standards and accelerate the implementation of social programs. We have formed a more accessible and high-quality education. Education is vital to the country’s prosperity. Our budgetary expenditures on education have exceeded 4 percent of GDP and have generated substantial growth in per-student spending. We are progressively overcoming the weak links between different levels of the compulsory education system in rural areas, as well as solving the problem of overcrowded classes in urban schools; we have already largely solved the problem of schooling of rural migrant children in cities. The nine-year compulsory education enrollment rate in the country increased from 93.8% to 95.5%<sup>8</sup>.

The modern education system is based on the study of basic social and natural science disciplines. But in addition to the formation of profound knowledge, it must also contribute to the education of citizens of their country. Therefore, in education, as nowhere else, it is important and necessary not accounting and reporting units and indicators, but qualitative indicators of work. We have the “groundwork” of past experience, we have an understanding of the direction of the movement. A key figure in this process is the teacher-educator-mentor. On how effectively and how quickly we can solve the problem of real increase of his status and role depends the success of our progress on the way of development of modern knowledge and education.

Editor in chief of ‘ECO’



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<sup>8</sup> Report on the Work of the Government (II) 政府工作报告(下) Delivered at the First Session of the 14th National People’s Congress of The People’s Republic of China —在第十四届全国人民代表大会第一次会议上 Li Keqiang, Premier of the State Council 国务院总理 李克强 March 5, 2023