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A Discussion of the Practices for Teaching Language Arts Employed in the Kharkov Educational District in 1863: The Case of Novocherkassk Host Gymnasium

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Abstract

At the start of the 1860s, pedagogical thought in the south of the Russian Empire entered a period of brisk development. The administration of the Kharkov Educational District keenly promoted pedagogical research – and did so even among ordinary gymnasium teachers. This led in 1863 to a public discussion about how to teach language arts. A young teacher at Novocherkassk Gymnasium named A.M. Savelyev (later a journalist and high-ranking regional official) approached the administration of the Kharkov Educational District with a detailed description of his classes and a report on the overall situation around language arts instruction with the aim of obtaining professional advice from his more experienced fellow instructors. The response to him came from a Kharkov University professor named N.A. Lavrovsky, a well-known pedagogue in the second half of the 19th century. In addition, the discussion resulted in language arts instructors in the District being asked to share with the administration details of their teaching programs. This discussion may be of particular interest to those interested in the history of Russian pedagogy and may provide a valuable insight into the daily pedagogical process in the gymnasium.

The findings indicate that as at the start of the 1860s the Russian gymnasium sector was in need of a coherent system of teaching the Russian language and literature, with most facilities lacking a proper curriculum and an appropriate textbook. Some teachers would come up with a textbook substitute of their own, and others would dispense with it altogether, resorting, at worst, to going through random texts in class. As a consequence, many students would end up with poor results. To the discussion's participants, the only solution to the problem was creating a quality textbook, which, as many argued, would require systematizing the best practices of various pedagogues, but it was not something that could be done overnight.

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1. Introduction

At the start of the 1860s, pedagogical thought in the south of the Russian Empire entered a period of brisk development. This had been facilitated by increased attention on the part of the administration of the Kharkov Educational District to pedagogical innovation. Specifically, General D.E. Levshin, who was at the head of it, paid heed to prominent pedagogue N.A. Lavrovsky, a Kharkov University professor, who suggested motivating teachers and assisting them in resolving pedagogical issues, instead of punishing them for their failures (Peretyatko, 2021: 799-811). As a result, the District's ordinary provincial gymnasiums (e.g., Novocherkassk Host Gymnasium) began to pay serious attention to issues of pedagogy and move away from scholasticism, i.e. a focus on the thoughtless learning of formulas and rules (Peretyatko, Zulfugarzade, 2020: 689-706).

The year 1863 witnessed a serious discussion in the Kharkov Educational District with regard to how to teach Russian language arts. Details of that discussion perfectly reflect the atmosphere that D.E. Levshin and N.A. Lavrovsky had managed to create among the District's teachers – who could now openly share their vision of the subject, freely debate with each other, and directly point out each other's pedagogical mistakes. With that said, the caveat must be made straightaway that the level of knowledge most of those teachers had about pedagogical science was not very high. In engaging in critical pedagogical enquiry, most invoked no recognized luminaries in the field.

This, doubtless, makes materials from that discussion a particularly valuable source on the history of Russian pedagogical thought as a whole. The pedagogical views of ordinary teachers and employees of provincial educational institutions tend to be rarely explored by researchers. This often is associated with a lack of appropriate sources to draw upon. During the period under review, teachers employed in the secondary education sector would eventually lose a significant portion of their freedoms, with teaching becoming strictly regulated and the role of an ordinary teacher becoming reduced to executing the learning plans and curricula prescribed by the authorities. Understandably, in that climate there were increasingly fewer cases of ordinary teachers speaking out on systemic issues of modern pedagogy. As a consequence, the issue of exploring typical views held by ordinary teachers in different eras, some of which may well have influenced the teaching of certain subjects, has not been properly addressed by researchers of the history of Russian pedagogy up to now. Materials from the discussion that took place in the Kharkov Educational District in 1863 will help gain insight into the actual, rather than formal, attitude of provincial language arts teachers toward their subject, their methods for teaching it, and study guides on it that existed back then. In addition, these materials can help us better understand why secondary education in the Russian Empire evolved in the second half of the 19th century increasingly toward the regulation of curricula and where the freedom granted to teachers was deficient.

Finally, these texts can provide a unique insight into the organization of the daily pedagogical process in the gymnasium. Some teachers kindly shared how they normally conducted their classes, what they regarded as useful for their students, and what they did not see as such. Thus, materials from the discussion that took place among pedagogues in the Kharkov Educational District with regard to how to teach language arts can offer a valuable insight into a whole range of related narratives, some of the more interesting of which will be discussed in the present paper.

2. Materials and methods

The most active part in the discussion about the teaching of language arts in the Kharkov Educational District was taken by teachers at Novocherkassk Host Gymnasium. Accordingly, it will be worth drawing upon 'Copies from the Registers of the Pedagogical Council of Novocherkassk Gymnasium of August 24 and 28, 1863', held in the State Archive of Rostov Oblast (GARO. F. 358. Op. 1. D. 288. L. 16-21). This document offers an insight into the teaching programs and methods employed by junior grade teachers of Russian at the gymnasium. However, of greater significance for this study are circulars for the Kharkov Educational District. This is where we come across a note by A.M. Savelyev, a senior grade teacher at Novocherkassk Gymnasium, entitled 'On Teaching Russian Language Arts in Gymnasiums' (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 65-70), the response to it by N.A. Lavrovsky (Tsirkulyar, 1863b: 105-109), and relevant reports detailing inspections of the gymnasium, which include descriptions of student progress in Russian language arts (Tsirkulyar,

1863c: 12; Tsirkulyar, 1863d: 204). Based on these sources and using the historical-descriptive and historical-comparative methods, the present work will show below how the Russian language arts course was organized and taught by different pedagogues, what the District's administration made of that, and what was achieved by individuals favoring the various pedagogical approaches.

3. Discussion

Arguably, the most significant achievement of D.E. Levshin and N.A. Lavrovsky in charge of the Kharkov Educational District was their ability to get teachers to take initiative in their work. The financial circumstances of those teachers were far from enviable. A.G. Filonov, one of the greatest pedagogues in the history of Novocherkassk Gymnasium, who compiled 'A Russian Chrestomathy with Comments' (Filonov, 1863), which went through several editions, described his own circumstances in 1859 as follows: "As a teacher you are left with two options: you can lead the life of a timeworker, i.e. run around from morning till night, from the gymnasium to the boarding school, from the boarding school to the institute, and from the institute back to the gymnasium; you do all this in one day; you come (or, even worse, are taken) home, drop heavily into bed, and lie there until the next day; or you can sink into irredeemable debt and, having forgone district lessons, stay at home and toil… There is no way you, as a person in public service, could combine district lessons with home classes. You always have to choose between the gymnasium and money, between doing your job and living your life, or between the school and the community – whichever way you want to look at it!" (Filonov, 1859: 163). The administration of the Kharkov Educational District was perfectly aware of the situation and realized that in that climate it was possible to neither force teachers prescriptively to be pedagogically creative nor boost funding for the gymnasium substantially. Ultimately, the decision was made to focus on non-material stimulation of proactive pedagogues, with N.A. Lavrovsky suggesting that one should search for "sound ways to galvanize and maintain the activity of instructors", aiming to ensure that the latter would not "stoop to the mechanical practice of merely delivering textbook content to students page by page year in, year out, an approach clearly meaningless educationally and even detrimental" (Tsirkulyar, 1861: 7).

What became a major form of non-material stimulation (and two-way communication aimed at getting insight into issues faced by ordinary educational institutions) was giving careful consideration to the pedagogical ideas of ordinary pedagogues. In 1863, a Novocherkassk Gymnasium teacher named A.M. Savelyev sent a highly critical note to the administration of the Kharkov Educational District entitled 'On Teaching Russian Language Arts in Gymnasiums'. He acted in this on his own. The District's administration showed a keen interest in the note. N.A. Lavrovsky prepared a written reply addressing the issues raised by the teacher, and the decision was made to publish the note in a Kharkov Educational District circular "with a view to eliciting opinion on this important matter" (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 65).

A few words will now be said about A.M. Savelyev's biography. Born in 1835, he was a fairly young person then (Dontsy, 2003: 431). An 1859 Kharkov University graduate, he had not been in the teaching profession for long at that time (Artinskii, 1907: 321). His proactive and caring stance would help him build a brilliant career. He had worked as a secretary in the Don Regional Statistical Committee (the only scholarly organization in the Don region at the time) and an editor for the Don Gazette newspaper, published one of the first books on Don history ('A Three Hundred Year History of the Don Host'), and passed away when holding the high post of top aide in the Host's administration (Dontsy, 2003: 431). There are characterizations of A.M. Savelyev that describe him as a brilliant teacher (Artinskii, 1907: 210). Thus, as at 1863, A.M. Savelyev was a young but talented and highly proactive pedagogue (at least by the standards of the Don region) who ventured to challenge teaching practice in gymnasiums at the time.

What strikes you the most when you read 'On Teaching Russian Language Arts in Gymnasiums' is the openness with which the author talks to the administration about the issue. He is being completely blunt about his own imperfections in teaching and the poor aspects of his lessons. In doing so, he must have expected not criticism and punishment from the officials in charge of the Kharkov Educational District but assistance, hoping that "the Board of Trustees of the Kharkov District will not overlook my concerns and kindly point out to me the deficiencies in my teaching that I have failed to address" (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 69-70). A.M. Savelyev was, basically, opening up a pedagogical discussion with the administration, wholeheartedly expecting the

officials to embrace this form of interacting with him – and, at the same time, hoping that the discussion would "inure to the common good" (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 70).

The candid text by A.M. Savelyev offers a number of unique observations from an ordinary teacher about the way instruction in language arts was conducted in the early 1860s in Russian gymnasiums. A.M. Savelyev stresses therein that the problem was not only the absence of a good textbook in Russian language arts but also the fact that in the absence of an appropriate textbook each instructor would teach language arts in their own way. This was even reflected in the choice of the course's theoretical foundations: "Some teachers may like Belinsky's theoretical conclusions, some may prefer Buslayev's folk epic theory, and others may set much store by Chistyakov's teachings" (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 65). Another serious issue was teachers' freedom in the choice of literary works to use in class, with this area characterized by some really absurd practices. For instance, one of A.M. Savelyev's fellow teachers based his judgment on the "vastness and diversity of the world of language arts" to cover in class whatever, literally, came to hand (e.g., covering "Homer alongside Griboyedov", followed by "Sophocles alongside Nekrasov") (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 66).

The most curious observation made by A.M. Savelyev is that gymnasium teachers of language arts composing instruction notes was a matter of status in the early 1860s: "The word 'notes' is a magical one with gymnasium students. An instructor who uses notes in class is considered a good teacher. So does it make you a lousy one if you do otherwise?" (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 65). Many would chase after status and compose instruction notes not because they were confident that such notes were better than the textbook but because they simply wished to prove their intellectual superiority over their fellows in the profession: "Teachers tend to substitute their own notes for a textbook not because they have an inner urge to employ notes as a necessity but simply out of self-esteem, a desire to flaunt their knowledge. Yet, if a predecessor of theirs used instruction notes too, they will pan that material and brand it as rubbish" (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 66). Unfortunately, in that climate of poor teacher training, the practice of composing instruction notes would have dire consequences – something A.M. Savelyev learned the hard way. The pedagogue admits in his note that his lessons were of little benefit initially.

"I had to move in total darkness, groping my way", A.M. Savelyev writes describing the situation he was in after being appointed as teacher of language arts. He admits earlier that his university education did not provide him with much knowledge. Savelyev goes on, stating the following: "I did not know where to start, what to do, and what sources to use. At the same time, my self-esteem spurred me on to do something about it; the desire not to sink in the eyes of others made me work hard and assiduously. My predecessor used notes; accordingly, I saw it fit to do so, too" (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 67). As we can see, A.M. Savelyev did not even consider the possibility of using a textbook in teaching the course. Instead, he composed his program based on a set of articles by V.G. Belinsky, which he, allegedly, had resolved to utilize solely because they were "to hand" (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 67). The approach did not work. According to A.M. Savelyev, while he was aware that it was necessary to "move from facts to theory and derive rules from examples", in practice it was impossible to substantiate V.G. Belinsky's theories via specific examples from the material covered in class, so he confined his instruction to pure theorizing (e.g., to "bare theoretical notes on poetry, supported with no facts" or "logical and psychological definitions" (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 67)). After some time, having realized his failure, the young teacher reconsidered his views and decided to forsake the use of lofty theories and confine his instruction in Russian language arts to an approach where students would "learn more facts" and would derive from them "brief notes about the various types of compositions" (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 67).

However, the problem did not end there. As we can see, A.M. Savelyev attempted to confine his instruction in language arts to teaching the evolution of its genres. While he regarded this approach as fairly modest, relative to his own initial ambitions and, perhaps, those of his fellows in the profession, composing instruction notes even for a program like this would turn out to be quite a difficult task for someone who was an ordinary teacher (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 67). A.M. Savelyev realized that it was impossible to gain insight into the evolution of a genre "without tracing the key historical aspects of its development in different cultures". However, despite having successfully completed a program of study in the Department of History and Philology, he, allegedly, was "not familiar with European literature" (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 67). As a result, most of the examples he employed in covering the evolution of the genres were pretty strange. For instance, in teaching

drama, he drew upon Sophocles, V.A. Ozerov, W. Shakespeare, F. Schiller, and J.W. Goethe (strictly in that order!) (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 67).

In this context, it is worth invoking A.M. Savelyev's 'Best Practices from Teaching the Modern History of Russian Literature', likewise published in Kharkov Educational District circulars. Note that Savelyev positioned this text as "a section of his instruction notes", i.e. a part of the handwritten textbook that he used for instruction at Novocherkassk Gymnasium (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 66). Judging by what he relates in the above text, A.M. Savelyev's endeavor to teach language arts in the form of teaching the evolution of literary genres was a failure. In large part, the problem was his poor knowledge of philology. The pedagogue based his textbook on works by only a few, mainly well-known, Russian scholars and literary critics: "In composing my instruction notes, I drew upon critical articles by Belinsky and monographs by Polevoy, Pletnev, Nikitenko, Galakhov, and Vodovozov" (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 66). Note that A.M. Savelyev personally had not even read some of the works mentioned in 'Best Practices from Teaching the Modern History of Russian Literature', with much of his knowledge thereof coming from reading reviews by the above critics (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 66). Lastly, his program did not address in any way the evolution of the Russian language, although this was important for gaining a comprehensive insight into the evolution of genres in this language. The young teacher was aware of this shortcoming but could do nothing about it, as he "did not know a single composition on the history of the Russian language and stylistics" (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 66).

Yet A.M. Savelyev's homemade textbook was not as bad as one could have expected under those circumstances. The program's modest nature is what benefited him – the pedagogue pursued maximum simplicity, shunning complex generalizations and redundant frills. Compositionally, he constructed his course with a focus on the consecutive study of Russian writers from the period between the 18th and the early 19th centuries such as A.D. Kantemir, V.K. Trediakovsky, M.V. Lomonosov, G.R. Derzhavin, D.I. Fonvizin, N.I. Novikov, N.M. Karamzin, I.A. Krylov, V.A. Zhukovsky, A.S. Pushkin, A.V. Koltsov, M.Yu. Lermontov, and N.V. Gogol-Yanovsky (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 70-78; Tsirkulyar, 1863b: 85-105). Literary eras and literary genres were covered only in the context of the work of these authors, with there being no summarizing sections. Each author had a separate section devoted to him (except for A.D. Kantemir and V.K. Trediakovsky, who were considered jointly) (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 70-72). The sections, written in simple language, contained only general information, some of which was inaccurate.

Let us consider, as an example, the work's sections on D.I. Fonvizin (incidentally, A.M. Savelyev renders this author's last name as "von Wiesen") and N.M. Karamzin. These two sections have a similar structure, as do most of the sections in the work. A.M. Savelyev first provides an author's biography. Then he talks about a person's creative work. D.I. Fonvizin is described as a satirical writer who condemned "what Kantemir armed himself against" (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 77). Savelyev lists as Fonvizin's major works the comedies 'The Brigadier-General' and 'The Minor', which he personally seems, however, not to have read. Indeed, he regards Starodum as the protagonist of not 'The Minor' but 'The Brigadier-General' (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 78). A.M. Savelyev provides a brief characterization of both comedies and describes their main characters. Yet he keeps it rather general (e.g., "The main objective in the comedy 'The Brigadier-General' is to deride superficial education that boils down to traveling to foreign lands, absorbing the niceties of French-style etiquette, and speaking French" (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 77).

A.M. Savelyev considers N.M. Karamzin as a reformer of the Russian language and the founder of sentimentalism in Russian literature. Here is what he says about the writer: "Prior to Karamzin, our literature was dominated by a Latin speech construction model focused on the use of long periods. We did not have a good model for Russian speech – folk language was rejected by the educated community and thus remained at a low level of development; members of the nation's upper-class society did not speak in Russian; scholars used bookish Russian at work but spoke the language differently. Karamzin was the first to introduce into our language a new speech construction model, which was akin to that employed in living languages such as Italian and French" (Tsirkulyar, 1863b: 88). Whereas A.M. Savelyev is wholly supportive of this language reform, his attitude toward sentimentalism is somewhat ironic – to him, it is all about "effeminacy of feeling" (Tsirkulyar, 1863b: 87). As far as specific works by N.M. Karamzin, A.M. Savelyev does mention them ('Poor Liza', 'Letters of a Russian Traveller', 'Martha the Mayoress', and 'History of

the Russian State', and 'Natalya the Boyar's Daughter') but does not provide characterizations thereof (Tsirkulyar, 1863b: 87-88).

Thus, from a contemporary viewpoint, A.M. Savelyev's 'Best Practices from Teaching the Modern History of Russian Literature' is essentially a collection of popular essays on Russian writers, a deeply secondary one, with a number of factual errors at that. However, in the period's climate of the absence of a satisfactory textbook in Russian language arts, a text of this kind could well be of use as a basic book for instruction in the subject. As regards the opinion of Savelyev's contemporaries of his work, of interest is the detailed analysis thereof by N.A. Lavrovsky. In the view of this Kharkov University professor, genre-wise the text is not a textbook but a collection of essays, with each "not devoid of vivacity and attesting to the author's interest in the subject, his focus on scrupulous digestion of the material at hand, and his ability to put it to good use" (Tsirkulyar, 1863b: 108). It is not hard to notice that the actual positive qualities of A.M. Savelyev's composition singled out by N.A. Lavrovsky indicate a lack of originality on his part – this kind of praise is more appropriate in respect of a textbookish compilation than of an original text. Yet what was seen by N.A. Lavrovsky as a more serious flaw in A.M. Savelyev's work is that between the essays on the writers there exists "little internal connection – the reader is unable to trace the continuity of phenomena in the development of our literature" (Tsirkulyar, 1863b: 108). We get to go back to the fact that A.M. Savelyev did not manage to teach language arts as the history of the evolution of literary genres. Judging by the contents of his substitute for the textbook, his approach would not let one trace the literary evolution and would merely reduce the study of the history of literature to the study of the work of an atomized bunch of individual authors.

N.A. Lavrovsky found fault with both the general concept and the content of A.M. Savelyev's text. The professor found some of his characterizations of the Russian writers incomplete or inaccurate. The worst, in his view, was the essay on D.I. Fonvizin. He noted the artificialness of the parallel between D.I. Fonvizin and A.D. Kantemir and the absence in the essay of a description of the "literary phenomena" that had an effect on the work of the great Russian satirical writer (Tsirkulyar, 1863b: 108). As for the essay on N.M. Karamzin, N.A. Lavrovsky found fault with the following statement, which he even provided word for word in his report: "Prior to Karamzin, we had little of what one could read in Russian, as everything written before him was overly heavy and solemn, tending to be focused on portraying some heroic, non-existent world, with some unnatural, imaginary characters taking the stage" (Tsirkulyar, 1863b: 108). In addition, he expressed a regret that the work totally overlooked the literary significance of 'History of the Russian State' (Tsirkulyar, 1863b: 108).

However, despite all the flaws in the work, N.A. Lavrovsky did recommend it for publication (Tsirkulyar, 1863b: 109). This recommendation indicates that N.A. Lavrovsky's assessment of 'Best Practices from Teaching the Modern History of Russian Literature' is close to ours – while the Kharkov professor knew that the work had shortcomings and realized that it could not replace a real textbook, he saw it as a passable substitute while no such textbook was available. Thus, despite the inability of A.M. Savelyev's Russian language arts course to teach the theory of literature or at least provide students with insight into the evolution of literary genres and styles, it would still be able to provide them with basic knowledge in the subject.

We will not dwell here upon A.M. Savelyev's reasonings on which grade particular sections of the language arts course were to be taught in, as most of them are linked too closely with the realities of the 1860s Russian gymnasium sector and may be hard to understand if you are unfamiliar with those realities. Nevertheless, worthy of consideration are some of his arguments of a general nature. A.M. Savelyev taught fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh grades. The Ministry of Public Education had prescribed a set of directions on what to cover in these grades in Russian language arts class (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 68-69). However, whereas for fourth and seventh grades the Ministry's directions determined, even if in broad strokes, if not specific topics and works to work with, at least an array of themes to work on in class, things were somewhat different with fifth and sixth grades (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 69). In sixth grade, the stumbling block was "the higher course in grammar", whatever that meant: "Was that historical Russian grammar, general philosophy, or the comparative grammar of some languages not taught in the gymnasium?" (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 68). Yet the situation was the worst with the program for fifth grade. In citing the general items recommended for study, A.M. Savelyev complained that the study of rhetoric was outdated ("it has been a long time since ridiculed rhetoric with its inventions and tonics fell") and students had

difficulty comprehending theoretical information with no examples provided, with the only thing left for him to do being to teach only "general forms of composition and stylistics" (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 68). However, general forms of composition could be covered in 10, at most 15, lessons, with an entire year left for stylistics, instruction in which was hindered by the absence of relevant books at the provincial gymnasium (it was hard to get scholarly works on the history of stylistics for teachers themselves to read up on the subject, not to mention study guides for students) (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 68). As a consequence, for most of the year, the teacher would have to cover material that was not what was required: "I get to work with the major works of Zhukovsky, Pushkin, Lermontov, and Gogol, followed by Shakespeare and Schiller" (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 68). All this indicates that the following problem in the teaching of Russian language arts existed as early as the 1860s (which, arguably, remains unresolved to this day) – requirements set for the course's curriculum by the authorities were mostly too high relative to teachers' actual capabilities. A.M. Savelyev's case is quite telling in this respect – it illustrates the actual limitedness of the knowledge possessed by even a recent graduate of a provincial university regarded by many as a brilliant teacher. In fact, what made him a good teacher was actually his willingness to simplify the course as much as possible, cease to merely relay to students some lofty literary theories, and confine instruction to the practical study of the biography and work of certain writers.

Worthy of separate consideration are A.M. Savelyev's descriptions of his teaching system. He did not teach grades one through three, with many of those under his tutelage being students he received from his fellow teachers whose job was to teach basic literacy skills. However, in practice it was not that simple. A.M. Savelyev noted that many of the students he received had "a solid command of grammar" and were good at dictation – yet many of them made bad mistakes when it came to writing a composition (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 69). The young pedagogue attributed this to students lacking practice in writing texts of their own, suggesting that "individual exercises" be used as part of the curriculum starting in first, as opposed to fifth (as was the convention at the time), grade (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 69).

A.M. Savelyev taught Russian literature, rather than Russian. His text merits note for his description of his own unsuccessful experience, which he positions as something typical: "In the beginning, most of us who completed a course of study at the university tend to follow the style of our own college professors, copy their techniques in our own work, and conduct our lectures in the same way they did" (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 68). However, this approach proved ineffective in practice: "Conducting lectures in the manner of your own professors proved totally useless for the most part" (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 68). As a consequence, A.M. Savelyev had to take the path of maximum simplification. In essence, his method involved normally going over the same material twice. His instruction notes, i.e. his handwritten textbook, served as a brief compendium for students, with information of a more detailed nature provided to them in class (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 67-68). Judging by his somewhat vague description, students did not take notes in class but were to capture at home in their notebooks "what they read and went through in their previous lecture" (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 68). In his subsequent class A.M. Savelyev would go through the contents of the notebooks of five or six students, such notes mainly containing bad mistakes, and only after going through the material for the second time would his students manage to pick it up more or less decently (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 68). Thus, judging by what A.M. Savelyev tells us in 'Best Practices from Teaching the Modern History of Russian Literature', he mainly communicated to his students basic information about literary works and their authors, shunning theorizing and complex themes, which clearly suggests that the average student at Novocherkassk Gymnasium had an extremely low intellectual level.

A.M. Savelyev was perfectly aware of this problem. He even wrote of the danger of him falling into "despair at scores of logical and grammar mistakes found in students' notebooks" (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 68). However, he suggested one simple approach to this – that teachers should accept that students' intellectual backwardness is something normal and should just "teach, regardless of students' current level of knowledge" (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 68). What is more, the young pedagogue placed much of the blame for the intellectual limitations of students at the gymnasium on his fellows in the profession, noting that "they complain about the backwardness of their students and shift the blame onto their predecessors or fellow instructors in an effort to cover up their own sinful sloth" (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 68). While A.M. Savelyev admitted that students might not know something that they were supposed to have gone through with other instructors long ago, he called

on teachers to refrain in such cases from "scoffing at the ignorance of their students and the negligence of their fellow instructors" and just try and explain, where possible, a problematic piece of material from another subject (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 68).

Thus, the note 'On Teaching Russian Language Arts in Gymnasiums' by A.M. Savelyev exposed a whole raft of issues in 1860s Russian provincial practical pedagogy, namely low teacher qualification levels, student backwardness, the absence of a quality textbook in literature, the lack of systemicity resulting from a combination of those factors, and often even the pointlessness of Russian language arts classes. Yet, while the young pedagogue knew that those problems were there, things were a little more complicated when it came to resolving them. A.M. Savelyev believed that the best way to start was to get a textbook, i.e. "something that would serve as a foundation in teaching, limit the arbitrariness of instructors, and, at the same time, force them to strictly follow the system" (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 66). Arguably, A.M. Savelyev was right overall – in that climate of low teacher competence levels, creating a good textbook was the only way to bring at least some organization to the course by putting an end to the use of all kinds of wild pedagogical practices, like the one involving teaching literature by way of having students retell V.G. Belinsky's theories in detachment from specific literary works or having them unmethodically work with random texts merely on the basis of the "vastness and diversity of the world of language arts".

What A.M. Savelyev proposed was a fairly original way of designing a textbook: "Composing a textbook cannot be done by just one person", he wrote, suggesting that such a textbook would inevitably come out very much subjective (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 66). Therefore, the pedagogue suggested gathering instruction notes from all teachers in the District (their "best sections", to be exact) with a view to having members of the Board of Trustees then compile a textbook (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 66). In fact, he sent his 'Best Practices from Teaching the Modern History of Russian Literature' to the administration with this particular aim in mind, rather than to have it published (Tsirkulyar, 1863a: 66-67).

As mentioned earlier, the response to A.M. Savelyev came from N.A. Lavrovsky. It is Lavrovsky who proposed publishing everything sent to the administration by the Novocherkassk teacher, which he explained in the following way: "The notes by Savelyev, which he presented to the Board of Trustees with a particular aim in mind, are perhaps the first phenomenon of this kind in the history of, and perhaps not only, the Kharkov District, one based not on external measures and incentives but solely on a sincere awareness of the need for a collaborative and team-minded attitude toward the development of learning material for the Russian language arts course" (Tsirkulyar, 1863b: 108). Thus, the administration of the Kharkov Educational District decided to back the young teacher's initiative and thus assure the pedagogical community that the Board of Trustees not only would not punish him for his mistakes but even arrange for the publication of his texts – and, on top of that, provide him with advice on teaching the course, something A.M. Savelyev had sought originally.

Such pieces of advice are what most of N.A. Lavrovsky's response was comprised of. With that said, this reply was of a knowingly public nature and was, from the outset, intended for publication in a circular for the Kharkov Educational District. Thus, N.A. Lavrovsky was being faced with a tough task: he simultaneously was to point out the bad mistakes of the inexperienced pedagogue, encourage him to carry on with his pedagogical research, and encourage other teachers in the Kharkov Educational District to employ better pedagogical practices. Therefore, the text by N.A. Lavrovsky is much less open than the notes by A.M. Savelyev and is not so informative as a source for his era. Nevertheless, it provides a better insight into the pedagogical ideals that guided the administration of the Kharkov Educational District in the early 1860s, which may be regarded as fairly felicitous in that climate of underfunded schools and low teacher qualification levels in the area.

N.A. Lavrovsky accepted most of A.M. Savelyev's observations as valid. He admitted that there had yet to be produced a good textbook in Russian language arts, that, despite recommendations from the Ministry of Education, there was not in place a coherent program for teaching Russian language arts either, and that in that climate gymnasium pedagogues all did as they pleased, relying in their teaching mainly on their own instruction notes (Tsirkulyar, 1863b: 105). However, the Kharkov professor opted to refrain from criticizing ordinary teachers and did not even raise the issue of the scholarly and pedagogical caliber of teachers' homemade instruction notes. Instead, he pointed out that in a climate where "it is hard to come across two language arts instructors with identical programs, little good will come out of replacing the notes of one teacher

with those of their successor, with each strictly preferring to go by their own notes" (Tsirkulyar, 1863b: 105-106). Thus, whereas the text by A.M. Savelyev mainly criticizes ordinary teachers, including himself, N.A. Lavrovsky chooses to focus his criticism on textbooks and curricula. What is particularly special about this way of dealing with it is that both the ordinary teacher and the member of the District's administration blamed themselves to a degree for poor instruction in Russian language arts in the District and focused most of their attention specifically on the areas in the organization of the educational process which they were personally responsible for, without shifting the blame onto each other.

As regards the textbook, N.A. Lavrovsky found A.M. Savelyev's suggestions on composing it insufficient. He argued that having the District's administration compile instruction notes from different teachers into a textbook would be of little use for three reasons. Firstly, since the District's Board of Trustees included only one specialist in Russian philology, the Kharkov University language arts instructor, he, essentially, would be the one to be composing the textbook. In other words, having a single person do it left room for subjectivity, something A.M. Savelyev was against. Secondly, the compiling of instruction notes in various educational districts, which made instruction in the subject uniform within them, would not resolve the issue at the national level. Each district would end up using a textbook of its own. Thirdly, N.A. Lavrovsky believed that a good textbook could not be a compilation of texts from different authors but was to be based on "a unity of thought, view, direction, and character" (Tsirkulyar, 1863b: 106). The Kharkov professor argued that a good textbook in Russian language arts could be written only upon the attainment by the pedagogical community of a unity that was "the product of diversity and concerted, transparent, and competent work" (Tsirkulyar, 1863b: 106). Thus, he concurred with A.M. Savelyev in that there was a need to have Russian language arts teachers interact with each other as much as possible and compare their instruction notes, looking for the more effective pedagogical practices. At the same time, N.A. Lavrovsky predicted that creating a good textbook in Russian language arts would involve much more time and effort than A.M. Savelyev allowed and that such a textbook would be not a compilation of existing texts but a new text created by university instructors based on the opinions of multiple school teachers (Tsirkulyar, 1863b: 106-107).

Consequently, for the time being language arts teachers would have to dispense with a good textbook and continue using their instruction notes. Curiously, while thinking this way, N.A. Lavrovsky did accept the pedagogical practice of teachers using instruction notes, which, despite all its shortcomings, he regarded to be better than using a poor textbook. This augmented the significance of teachers designing their teaching program on their own, and N.A. Lavrovsky suggested that in designing his A.M. Savelyev disregard the Ministry's recommendations altogether. The professor suggested splitting instruction in literature in grades four through seven into two logical and consecutive parts – teach the theories of poetry and prose in grades four and five and cover the history of literature in grades six and seven (Tsirkulyar, 1863b: 107). N.A. Lavrovsky noted that A.M. Savelyev was right in suggesting that one ought to "move from facts to theory and derive rules from examples" (Tsirkulyar, 1863b: 107). However, in his opinion, the young teacher erred in hoping that, in going through various texts with him, students would be able to derive a theory from them. This would require a sounder link between the learning material and "the overall objective for the project" (Tsirkulyar, 1863b: 107). What N.A. Lavrovsky saw as the primary objective for a language arts teacher was precisely the choice of appropriate texts to work with: "It is all to be about selecting the right samples to work with and arranging them in such a way as to ensure that a reading activity results in definitions naturally presenting themselves to the student's consciousness" (Tsirkulyar, 1863b: 107). Therefore, in grades four and five instruction in the theory of poetry and prose would need to involve having students read "material covering all kinds and types of prose and poetry", from which they would derive a theory, and in grades six and seven instruction in the history of literature would probably need to be conducted in a similar way (N.A. Lavrovsky did not dwell upon the instruction method for this) (Tsirkulyar, 1863b: 107).

Thus, N.A. Lavrovsky and the administration of the Kharkov Educational District answered A.M. Savelyev's query in full, in as polite and respectful a manner as possible, providing him with recommendations on how to enhance his instruction. However, this was not the end of it. That same year, 1863, but still prior to the publication of A.M. Savelyev's material and N.A. Lavrovsky's response in circulars for the Kharkov Educational District, the District's administration officially requested that gymnasiums within it provide a report on their curricula for a number of subjects,

including Russian language arts. Tellingly, the caveat was also made that the best programs would be eligible for publication, while teachers were asked to express their opinion of the curriculum "based on their own view of the subject, regardless of the requirements of the official textbook" (Artinskii, 1907: 191). This provides us with at least a partial insight into the way instruction in the course was conducted by A.M. Savelyev's fellow instructors, i.e. a group of ordinary teachers subjected to strong criticism in his text.

Russian was taught to grades one through three at Novocherkassk Gymnasium by A.A. Leonov and I.P. Pryanishnikov. Just like A.M. Savelyev, these people had played a certain role in Don history. A.A. Leonov was the more experienced of the two. He started out teaching history and geography in one of the Don region's district schools back in 1840. He switched to teaching Russian in 1841, and in 1850 he was transferred to Novocherkassk Gymnasium (Artinskii, 1907: 332). A graduate of Kharkov University (just like A.M. Savelyev), A.A. Leonov was a well-known poet (his first collection drew a moderately positive reaction from V.G. Belinsky) and opinion writer (his work in this capacity has attracted the attention of modern historian A.A. Volvenko) (Volvenko, 2019: 134-145). I.P. Pryanishnikov, another Kharkov University graduate, had been teaching since 1859 (Dontsy, 2003: 419). He was famed mainly as a brilliant editor at the Don Gazette newspaper (Dontsy, 2003: 419-420).

Unfortunately, no material is available at this time dealing with the teaching programs of A.A. Leonov and I.P. Pryanishnikov. The only surviving piece of information related to this is the contents of a discussion they took part in during a teachers' meeting at Novocherkassk Gymnasium on August 28, 1863 (GARO. F. 358. Op. W1. D. 288. L. 18ob.). The teaching program used by A.A. Leonov was examined in greater detail than I.P. Pryanishnikov's. Its criticism indicates that N.A. Lavrovsky's ideas resonated with the more progressive Novocherkassk pedagogues. Most importantly, A.A. Leonov was criticized precisely for his insufficient attention to the choice of learning material: "Mr. Leonov does not specify in his note the excerpts and articles he would use in the course and the order in which they are to be covered" (GARO. F. 358. Op. 1. D. 288. L. 20). While the Novocherkassk pedagogues did not get as far as the idea that students must themselves derive rules from texts covered in class, as had been suggested for senior grades by N.A. Lavrovsky, they were aware that "ensuring the proper development of students requires selecting one's learning material carefully" (GARO. F. 358. Op. 1. D. 288. L. 20). With that said, A.A. Leonov's approach was not the result of negligence or inattention. He was not interested in the content of a text – he needed a text only as "something to extract grammar rules from" (GARO. F. 358. Op. 1. D. 288. L. 20ob.). On the contrary, the Pedagogical Council argued that "sensible reading and going through the material will be more instrumental in helping students learn their native language than learning its grammar by way of just formally going through the first text to hand" (GARO. F. 358. Op. 1. D. 288. L. 20ob.). As we can see, A.M. Savelyev was quite honest about the way instruction in Russian language arts was conducted in gymnasiums in the early 1860s – some teachers, indeed, would have their students go through totally random texts, without keeping to a more or less articulate program (merely on the basis of the "vastness and diversity of the world of language arts").

However, a more fundamental issue was not even this but that even most of A.A. Leonov's colleagues were unable to understand from his note the specific way in which he normally explained grammar rules to his students: "The description of his method of teaching Russian provided by Mr. Leonov in his note is too general and vague; he does not support any of his arguments with examples or compelling explanations" (GARO. F. 358. Op. 1. D. 288. L. 20ob.-21). Similar fault was found with I.P. Pryanishnikov: "The main problem with Mr. Pryanishnikov's program is pretty much the same as in the case of Leonov – too much vagueness and the instructor's questionable choice of material for reading" (GARO. F. 358. Op. 1. D. 288. L. 21). Thus, instructors who taught Russian to junior grades at Novocherkassk Gymnasium personally did not have a clear idea of what exactly their teaching methodology was and tended to conduct their classes in a relatively unsystematic manner – by way of working with random texts. It is no wonder that A.M. Savelyev might have then fallen into "despair at scores of logical and grammar mistakes found in students' notebooks".

Neither A.A. Leonov nor I.P. Pryanishnikov mentioned anything about using handwritten instruction notes. They had drawn their material from certain works by A.Kh. Vostokov, a prominent Russian philologist, but his guide for teaching at lower educational institutions was

not one of them, and primary use was made of his works on language theory (GARO. F. 358. Op. 1. D. 288. L. 21). The Pedagogical Council demanded that the use of those works be discontinued with immediate effect, as students in junior grades were still too young to "learn theory by way of Vostokov" (GARO. F. 358. Op. 1. D. 288. L. 21). This example evidences what in Novocherkassk Gymnasium was an alternative to A.M. Savelyev's crude instruction notes, used as a substitute for the textbook in Russian language arts. Primitive essays on Russian writers were, doubtless, a better choice for shallow students than fundamental scholarly philosophical works.

We will now attempt to establish just how effective the teaching methodologies of A.M. Savelyev, A.A. Leonov, and I.P. Pryanishnikov had been and see whether taking a more conscious approach to teaching the subject produced a decent result. Fortunately, exams at Novocherkassk Gymnasium held between May and June 1863 were attended by an official from the Kharkov Educational District, who afterwards would provide a detailed account of student performance there.

The performance of those under the tutelage of A.A. Leonov and I.P. Pryanishnikov was very poor. According to the exam inspector, "even those in third grade exhibit a rather jumbled command of the sentence and its parts, are scarcely familiar with the parts of speech, and tend to be poor at parsing sentences, with many resorting to guesswork" (Tsirkulyar, 1863d: 204). Another area addressed by the exam inspector was the highly deficient teaching methodology employed by A.A. Leonov and I.P. Pryanishnikov, which is what he linked the pedagogical failure to: "During the year, written exercises mainly involved rewriting verses and learning them by heart; writing a composition, rewriting a verse into prose, or, at least, retelling on paper what they have read – students did none of this" (Tsirkulyar, 1863d: 204).

A.M. Savelyev did a lot better, although his performance was far from perfect. The progress of students in fourth and fifth grades was recognized as satisfactory, with most managing to complete their written assignments in literature, although student literacy did leave much to be desired (Tsirkulyar, 1863d: 204). The exam for sixth-graders was not attended by an exam inspector (Tsirkulyar, 1863d: 204). What was described in the most detail is the exam for students in seventh, final, grade. Overall student performance in the exam was satisfactory. One student did very poorly, but three did very well on it (Tsirkulyar, 1863c: 12). It was noted separately that students were familiar with the biographies of prominent Russian and foreign writers alike and that they had read top works of Russian and foreign literature "in part, if not in full" (Tsirkulyar, 1863c: 12). Most of the students displayed a skill in writing a composition, although there were some whose texts were quite poor due to "the absence of subject matter and a lack of logical consistency" or were distinguished by illiteracy (Tsirkulyar, 1863c: 12). Thus, the main weakness demonstrated by students at Novocherkassk Gymnasium was in literacy, which A.A. Leonov and I.P. Pryanishnikov had not cultivated in primary grades. Students' knowledge of literature, on the contrary, was systematic, with the exam inspector even remarking that A.M. Savelyev had actually gone with his students through the texts of various major literary works – rather than focusing on just communicating conventional views on them.

4. Conclusion

Materials from the discussion that took place in 1863 among pedagogues in the Kharkov Educational District with regard to Russian language arts instruction helped gain an insight into how this discipline was taught at that time in ordinary gymnasiums in the Russian Empire, what ordinary instructors thought of goals and objectives for the course, and what their teaching programs looked like. Below are the key insights from the research reported in this paper.

1) The teaching of language arts was the weakest area in 1860s Russian practical pedagogy. There was no proper textbook available for instruction in the subject; the curriculum designed by the Ministry of Public Education was obscure even to teachers, with some of its areas being impracticable to cover because of the lack of appropriate literature. Consequently, ordinary provincial gymnasiums experienced a rather chaotic situation with instruction in language arts, with each instructor teaching the course by way of a program of their own and such programs within the same gymnasium tending to have little in common with each other.

2) The average pedagogue had a relatively low level of qualification at the time. To have high status in the eyes of their students and fellows in the profession, language arts teachers would have

to conduct lessons using an improvised textbook, in the form of instruction notes, which was not a very professional approach.

3) At worst, classes were conducted without a textbook and a coherent program altogether. For instance, A.A. Leonov and I.P. Pryanishnikov, junior grade instructors of Russian at Novocherkassk Gymnasium, were unable to provide a coherent explanation of their teaching methodologies, and their classes were confined to rewriting randomly chosen verses and memorizing particular tenets of the theory of Russian based on the fundamental works of A.Kh. Vostokov, which were a little difficult to comprehend for most students.

4) In that climate, both the administration of and the more progressive pedagogues in the Kharkov Educational District suggested simplifying the curriculum and focusing not on theory but on having students read deliberately selected texts to learn the basics of literature. This produced some results – an inspection of Novocherkassk Gymnasium revealed that, while its junior grades, taught by A.A. Leonov and I.P. Pryanishnikov, were characterized by extremely poor student knowledge, the situation improved by the final year of school, mainly owing to the efforts of A.M. Savelyev, who had deliberately simplified the program, with some students exhibiting a decent knowledge of their native language and literature.

Thus, what the program of teaching language arts in Russian gymnasiums needed in the early 1860s was simplifying, not complicating. This case reminds us of the following simple principle, which is often overlooked even in modern pedagogy: trying to complicate the curriculum and expand it with even useful knowledge without having in place a quality textbook and a properly trained teaching workforce may result in poor student knowledge.

Worthy of separate consideration is the discussion among pedagogues at Kharkov Educational District about the prospects of creating a textbook in Russian language arts. As we can see, the pedagogical community was well aware of the need to have one. There was an approximate understanding of what it was to be. A.M. Savelyev and N.A. Lavrovsky, engaged in a debate about it, converged in the view that, firstly, there was a need for a good textbook and, secondly, the textbook was to rely on the real experience of gymnasium teachers. Therefore, it was argued that there was no need to rush in producing it. The debating parties, instead, suggested analyzing, by way of various methods, the teaching programs and suggestions of all teachers in the District and then creating on that basis, rather than on the basis of the subjective views of a single individual or the administration, a textbook characterized by “a unity of thought, view, direction, and character”, a unity that was “the product of diversity and concerted, transparent, and competent work”. The approach where textbooks are created based on the real practical experience of multiple teachers, rather than on the theoretical pedagogical views of a narrow circle of individuals, has retained its validity to this day.

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