

# *History in Person and Person in History: The Case of Preparation for Work in Russian Schools before and after 1991*

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**Abstract.** *The issue of exploring historic transformations in social processes with regard to the individual development or social position is not new in social sciences; and yet history appears to be one of the most complex and controversial issues in social scientists' debates. This article contributes to the ongoing theoretical discussion of studying an individual in history and history in an individual. At the basis of the argument is a case study of transformations in preparation for work in Russian schools as a result of the 1991 political change, and the role of those transformations in students' construction of future working lives. I argue that the structural nature of the social activity can be used as the first methodological entry point for studying historical aspects of social processes; the concept of personhood, understood as a socially formed system of long-life functions, forms a methodologically more abstract level of linking history and individual development. I conclude that when history is taken seriously in social research, analytic processes become all-inclusive in the analysis of social processes and individual development.*

**Keywords:** *history, historic method in social sciences, individual development, cultural mediation, activity, personhood, Russian education, post-Soviet education*

## **Introduction**

The question discussed in this article arose in the political climate of the social transformations in Russia after the change of political regime in 1991. Following the period of Perestroika at the end of the 1980s, Russia finally declared an end to the Soviet regime and beginning of a new historic era – postcommunism.

In this political climate individuals' relationships with the labour market changed. This was accompanied by changes in the Russian system of education. These two interconnected transformations implied that the ways in which the system of education prepared young people for the world of work may have changed, and that was likely to affect young people's future working lives. Therefore a research question emerged which asked how preparation for work in Russian schools changed and what this entailed for young Russians. This article reports about theoretical and methodological explorations of this issue on the basis of an empirical case study which was carried out in a secondary school in the city of Perm, Russia. I will start by explaining the socio-historic context in which the empirical problem of studying transformations in preparation for work in Russian schools emerged. I will then move to discuss approaches to historic method in social sciences and will argue that the fundamental concepts of social-cultural and activity theory research are most appropriate for this study. Based on this theoretical discussion, I will then introduce the case study and argue how the fundamental concepts of the socio-cultural and activity theory, helped establishing temporal and spatial boundaries and selecting the actors for the case.

### **Socio-historic Context of Preparation for Work in Post-1991 Russia**

The political changes unfolding after 1991 in Russia were accompanied by great social upheavals, including the collapse of some industries and mass redundancies. The total number of unemployed rose from 3,8 million people in 1992 to 7,5 million people in 2000 (Federal Statistics Service, 2006). Most importantly such an abrupt transformation in Russia left a lot of people unprepared to learn adapt to the new socio-economic situation (Jones, 1994; Kitaev, 1994). Russian people began to develop ways of survival in the transformed economic situation, such as opening small businesses or getting several jobs. For the first time since the creation of the Soviet Union Russian people got introduced to the notion of unemployment which had been forbidden by law in the Soviet times.

In addition, the Russian labour market was undergoing a process of westernisation. Individuals searching for jobs were faced with a necessity to learn about new types of jobs such as 'managers', 'promoters', IT support specialists, Human Resources officers, and about new ways of how to find a vacancy and apply for a job. For example, such phenomena as 'recruiting agencies', 'resumé', temporary work' or 'maternity leave cover' did not exist in the life and vocabulary of Soviet people.

However, there is some evidence to suggest that different parts of the population learnt to adapt to this new situation in different ways. Thus Klimentova (2006) claims that younger people acquired new information faster and more efficiently than older people. In her opinion young people saw the world in a completely new way without attributing any Soviet interpretations to the ongo-

ing events. There might be some reason in Klimentova's view as the new Russian state made every effort possible to get rid of the old Soviet/ Communist ideology. New social policies focused on one overarching aim: to dispose of the legacy of the Soviet regime which did not allow individuals to take control of their own lives (Jones, 1994). Thus the policies introduced privatisation and decentralisation to replace the centralised control of the state.

Similar movements occurred in the system of Russian education. Post-1991 reforms, introduced in Russian education, reflected the general political drive of the new government to introduce decentralisation and regionalisation in order to develop regional independence. Educational policies emphasised de-ideologisation, differentiation and diversification of the curriculum. However, according to Webber (2000), the new reforms focused on solving the crisis in education without specifying what it was, and without an in-depth exploration of its parameters. Thus educational policies from the end of the 1980s and during 1990s aimed to "take the state out of education" (Webber, 2000, p. 35).

At the beginning of the 1990s Russian educational literature promoted the new educational reforms by declaring an end to the dominant pedagogic concepts and by emphasising the need to de-ideologise education. The new reforms did not always achieve what they set out to deliver. Kitaev points out, that "while the system is still very strongly centralised, which puts brakes on development, some changes, which are supposed to contribute to development, are too hasty and therefore they add to the chaotic situation in the country (Kitaev, 1994, p. 111). These considerations point out the importance of not seeing history as a linear and mono-directional process. Despite the fact that changes were introduced, there was little evidence to suggest that they took root in the education system.

The concerns about slow progress in the transformation of the education system and growing instability in the country, turned educationalists' attention back to the actual product of education: young people. Educationalists related a growing crime rate, anti-social behaviour, falling moral values and, most importantly for this research, poor adaptability to the world of employment, to the chaos in the system and practices of school education (Jones, 1994). There seemed to be a growing concern that education in Russia did not have enough capacity to cope with these social problems. This was strongly related to what was considered to be a loss of the single ideology. Some educationalists pointed out the existence of mutually contradicting visions. The latter point signifies that history does not only move forward; both, the past influencing the present, and the present reinterpreting the past, create a dissonance in educational approaches.

So it was possible to assume that contrary to the claims of the on-going process of de-ideologisation, old means of state control were still present in schools and other institutions, and could be powerful in the effect they were producing on individual development. In particular, I was questioning young people's preparation for the world of work. At the time when adults were expe-

riencing immense difficulties in adapting to the new labour market, I was wondering how young people managed to learn to live in a world where the adults they communicated with struggled to survive. I was strongly interested in the role of the school in preparation of students for the world of work. I was aware that in the Soviet times school had exercised a strong control over the development of young people; if the assumption that the Soviet past was not removed from institutions through the introduction of new policies was correct, then young people in schools had to deal not only with a completely different present but also with a past which probably did not make much sense any more.

### **Dealing with History in the Context**

The problem that I set out to explore was a historical problem, particularly a problem of studying historical development of an educational process in Russia before and after 1991. From this point of view it seemed logical to start by studying the history of preparation for work in Russian schools through an exploration of the main educational processes that were part of it. In the centre of the debate at that time (1999-2000) was discussion of the role of *vospitanie* (up-bringing and nurturing, translated from Russian) – the main pedagogic practice associated with preparation of young people for adult life. In Russian educational theory and practice, *vospitanie* is defined as an intentional process of pedagogic relay whereby children and young people are involved in situations and activities deemed necessary and important for their personal and social development. *Vospitanie*, a pedagogic practice, which does not equal to teaching (which is normally associated with a relay of academic knowledge) is expected to penetrate and transcend all aspects of a young person's development, including formation of independence, system of values and sense of citizenship. *Vospitanie* is taught as part of a teacher-training curriculum at teacher training establishments. As the literature was pointing towards a continued interest in *vospitanie*, it seemed important to trace down its roots.

The conceptual roots of *vospitanie* can be traced back to the philosophical ideas discussed in the 'Journal of *Vospitanie*' edited by Chernyshevsky (1828-89) and Dobrolubov (1836-61) (Zaida, 1980). These thinkers promoted 'socially useful labour'. Raising children in a community where equality of participation was promoted. Collective responsibility was considered one of the vital values upon which *vospitanie* had to be based. These ideas can be traced in the educationalists' work of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ushinsky (1824-70), Shatsky (1978-1934), Krupskaya (1869-1939) and Makarenko (1888-1939) also emphasized labour as a driving force for personal and community development. Being part of a 'collective' (a purposely built community) enabled individuals to acquire ethical norms of conduct accepted in society. *Vospitanie*, according to teacher training textbooks used between 1970 and 2000 in Russian Universities (e.g. Babanskii, 1988; Kalashnikova, 1997), was considered the main pedagogical activity that aimed to impact personal and social development.

The analysis of these textbooks has also demonstrated that in addition to vospitanie, preparation for work in Russian schools included another educational process – professional orientation. Professional orientation seems to have a shorter history than vospitanie; its main function is to help students in schools to make an adequate career choice. It was especially important at the beginning of the Soviet times when the state was in need of a work force; professional orientation ensured a strong propaganda of manual work occupations and “encouraged” students to make the “right” choices. The initial documentary study of professional orientation revealed that although it was still present in schools as part of the overall pedagogic process, not enough effort was invested in developing it further.

Thus it transpired that central to the investigation should be two processes, vospitanie and professional orientation. It seemed that Russian educational literature attached a significant amount of attention to these two pedagogic processes. It was less obvious how particular historic moments in Russian society affected the development of these two pedagogic processes. As the discussion below demonstrates, studying vospitanie and professional orientation historically proved to be a problematic research issue which required a complex but refined theoretical solution.

### **Historic Method in Social Sciences: Its Role in the Study of Transformation of Preparation for Work in Russian Schools**

It appears that including history within the social sciences research field is still considered to be problematic. According to Bryant and Hall (2005) history is not understood uniformly by social sciences and in addition it is not often considered seriously as part of social science research. Braudel (2005) also criticises social sciences for “not accepting history or duration as dimensions necessary to their studies” (p. 254). There are several reasons that underpin this problem. One of them is that the ways in which history is interpreted depends on the paradigm within which the research is conducted. In social sciences the main difference is between what Wallerstein (2005) refers to as nomothetic and idiographic approaches. Within the former perspective time and space are treated as obstacles; within the latter, time and space become analytically irrelevant. Another reason concerns the differences that exist among scientific traditions. Thus history, as a field of study, traditionally exercised a chronological study of events through which sequences are established and causality is explained in a sequential manner. In some psychological approaches the past has been considered as a mental property of an individual, e.g. “[...] our pasts are always mental in the same manner in which the futures that lie ahead of us are mental” (Mead, 2005, p. 238). This implies that in psychology, history may be perceived as unique as each individual. This hinders analyses of collective perspectives of history, which is necessary to explore vospitanie and professional orientation that have been created as collective and community based activi-

ties. Sociology could be seen to be able to resolve this issue but as Aminzade (2005, p. 295) justifiably notices: “Many studies of long-term processes such as state formation, capitalist development, or the emergence of a world system, are carried out at a level of abstraction that precludes attention to the temporal characteristics of events.” As has been pointed out above, identification of temporal characteristics of vospitanie and professional orientation is paramount for this study.

Despite this scientific disparity in social sciences, there are a number of issues that are considered in research studies if history is seen as part of the research concern. These are, among others, relations between the past, present and future; the duration of a historic period; understanding of relations between time and space; causality of events; the perception of history as systematic or non-systematic and defining a unit of analysis. All of these issues need to be considered when exploring how vospitanie and professional orientation have changed in response to the post-1991 transformations in Russia; and how teachers and students were interpreting the socio-historic situation at the time of the research. As has been mentioned, the documentary analysis demonstrates that although preparation for work has some continuity in the system of Russian education, the nature of the causality of such continuity is less obvious. The temporal boundaries of the transformations in preparation for work in Russian schools also seem to need a more clear definition and rationalization than simply establishing a boundary between pre and post-Soviet scenarios. In terms of space, it is not obvious whether preparation for work should be considered as dispersed in different locations or concentrated in some particular contexts, in which case it is important to know how time is related to particular spaces. Finally and most importantly, with regard to the role of actors participating in vospitanie and professional orientation, it is necessary to find out if the interpretation of the past was strictly individual or shared collectively. Therefore, what first appeared as a straightforward exploration of a current context from a historic perspective is in fact a complex issue requiring a theoretical approach that responds to the above issues in an exhaustive and systematic manner.

In terms of relations between the past, present and future, social sciences reflect on the issues of duration. Bergson's view (1990, in Abbot, 2005) is that of subjectivism and individualism. He sees durations as inclusive to an individual and centred on a person; no external clock can measure a personal view of time. For Mead (2002) there is no single line of duration. Past and future, in his view, are matters of ideation, and every new present re-writes all the past. These two approaches are hardly suitable to the theoretical and empirical issues explored in this article, as vospitanie and professional orientation have been created and sustained through a collective effort, and therefore, a concept is needed, which will help analysing different points in time as linked to each other in some way. Braudel's (2005) vision of the *Longue Durée* is more suitable to the purpose than the other approaches. “Each “current event”

brings together movements of different origins, of a different rhythm: today's time dates from yesterday, the day before yesterday, and all former times" (Braudel, 2005, p. 253). However, the *Longue Durée* does not explain how far into the past the search should proceed for the aims of the research. Thus, although vospitanie has origins in educational thought and practice of the 19th century, this does not necessarily imply that this distant past has to be fully incorporated into the analysis of the transformations of preparation for work in Russian schools after the fall of Communism in 1991. Aminzade's (2005) broad answer to this problem is that "The notion of duration implies a unity defined by a beginning and an end, or a constancy of the event, or sequence of events over a defined length of time" (p. 298). However, there are still questions remaining such as "How to define a beginning and an end? What is constancy of events and how to measure it? Which length of time makes a particular duration?"

The above questions point to the problem of boundaries, often referred to in social sciences as a unit of analysis. Indeed, the concern with history usually leads to conceptualization of time, but defining temporal boundaries seems impossible without defining where this period of time was spent. Wallerstein (2005) believes that time and space do not always figure together in social sciences, and that this is what prevents social scientists from defining temporal and spatial boundaries appropriately. "Analysis takes place within the framework of historical systems that are both historical and systemic, neither nomothetic nor idiographic, and whose core-periphery distinction is an organising principle of the functioning of the historical system and not of its organization of branches of knowledge. Time and space, or more precisely TimeSpace become(s) the primordial of analysis" (Wallerstein, 2005, p. 288). Wallerstein's concept of TimeSpace seems to be based on the principles which are appropriate for studying preparation for work in Russian schools because it considers a unity of time and space and it encourages questions about whether preparation for work should be studied from the middle of the 19th century, or just Soviet and post Soviet times. At the same time, it questions whether this research should consider the whole educational system of Russia, or some regions, or perhaps just one school. However, Wallerstein's definition of TimeSpace does not explicate methodological implications of locating boundaries of a TimeSpace empirically.

It appears that fundamental ideas drawn from the legacy of Vygotsky (1986) and Leontiev (1978) may offer clues to solving the problem of defining a TimeSpace, both theoretically and empirically. Vygotsky (*ibid.*) connected time and space through the concept of cultural mediation. He maintained that a human was developed not through direct encounters with the environment but through the appropriation of cultural tools, which had been developed before. For Vygotsky the main cultural tool was the language that a child was introduced to through communication with others, most importantly adults. The child then learnt the meaning that was attributed to a particular object in the

way it was introduced to him or her. This process of appropriation became known as internalisation. However, the child also interpreted the acquired meaning in her own way, i.e. by making personal sense of it (externalisation). Thus, although internalisation implied a certain degree of continuity of cultural tools, externalisation ensured that processes of creativity and innovation were sustained. As a result of involvement in such cultural processes a child developed “higher mental functions” which differed in Vygotsky’s view from primitive functions, which were characteristic of animal behaviour. It is important to emphasise that cultural mediation was not restricted to the conceptualisation of the processes of interaction between a child and adult. Vygotsky attributed transition from natural functions to cultural ones not only through ontogenesis but also in the development of human history. It was implied that the process of cultural mediation ensures a certain degree of accumulative continuity among successive generations. What the concept of cultural mediation achieves is that it links semiotic tools to particular cultural spaces; the specificity of a particular culture depends on what has been mediated over the course of history.

Time and space seem to be brought into a unified and systematic whole in a concept of activity. Although present in the form of an idea in Vygotsky’s work, the concept of social activity was fully developed by Leontiev (1981). A social activity is defined as a social practice that develops through the process of cultural mediation, and aims at meeting a particular social need. The concept of a social need is particularly important for understanding what social activity is. A need is always social and collective in nature, and addresses a particular problem. Leontiev draws on tribal hunting as an example. In ancient times people hunted on their own in pursuit of satisfying their own hunger when it arose. Alone however, they could not hunt as successfully, nor could they hunt for larger animals. Uniting of people into tribes implied that there was a need that was higher and more important than immediate hunger. Together men could bring more food and were able to plan for colder seasons. Gradually, hunting became a highly ritualised and regulated activity where people co-ordinated their actions to meet a collective need. Leontiev refers to it as an object oriented activity where an objectified social need motivates a group of individuals to act collectively. The object-motive is central to an activity (Foot, 2002; Popova & Daniels, 2004). If it is impossible to identify an object-motive, it is most likely that there is no activity. Thus, what appears to connect a particular activity temporally is the continuity of the object-motive. It seems theoretically possible to identify when the object-motive first appeared and began to define a particular activity in the shape and form it will evolve over time. Once the object motive is known, it seems possible to trace its development and transformations over time.

Based on these theoretical ideas, preparation for work can be conceptualised as a combination of two processes, *vospitanie* and professional orientation, which are activities with two distinct but interrelated object-motives.

Vospitanie has traditionally focused on raising individuals according to the demands of the state, and professional orientation was responsible for equipping students with tools for finding an occupational niche where they would both be more useful to society and realising their potential. Considered as social activities, vospitanie and professional orientation can be viewed as processes which included both macro and micro social factors, i.e. cultural mediation implies that what is mediated is not an outcome of immediate interaction only but a product of an ongoing activity.

Activity Theory is also useful in terms of resolving an issue of structural boundaries of TimeSpaces. According to Leontiev: "Activity [in its generic sense] is the nonadditive, molar unit of life for the material, corporeal subject. In a narrower sense (i.e., on the psychological level) it is the unit of life that is mediated by mental reflection. The real function of this unit is to orient the subject in the world of objects. In other words, activity is not a reaction or aggregate of reactions, but a system with its own structure, its own internal transformations, and its own development" (Leontiev, 1979, p. 46). With regard to the historical method in social enquiry, the concept of an activity provides opportunities for studying social processes systematically; it allows segmenting social reality into "TimeSpaces" which can be studied empirically. Most importantly, according to Leontiev (1979), in an individual's experience activities are experienced in their hierarchy, thus some object-motives dominate others. This implies that at the same moment in time an individual may be potentially involved in a number of social activities. This means occasionally an individual has to overcome a crisis of motives, i.e. one object-motive becomes more dominant. Such dominancy does not only depend on the free will of the individual, it comes as a result of making sense of the cultural meanings generated in these activities. The meanings have their history and are located in the socio-historic context of a particular activity. Particularly important for the discussion of the structure of an activity is the more recent development in Activity Theory by Engeström (1987), Engeström, Mietinen, Punamaki (1999) and others. This research expands the notion of the collective in the activity. Thus, in addition to the notions of a subject who works on the object-motive by resorting to particular cultural artefacts (Figure 1), the recent model considers supporting and constraining mechanisms which move the activity forward (rules), distribution of power relations and roles in the activity (division of labour), and it also includes other parties who have an interest in the activity but are not necessarily the main actors (community) (Figure 2). All structural components of an activity are interrelated and form a system; an activity system.

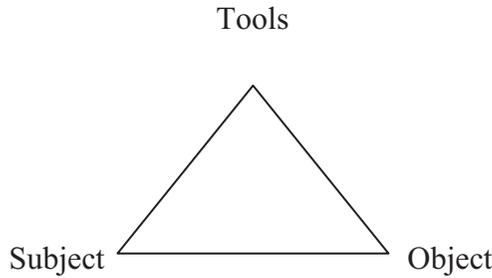
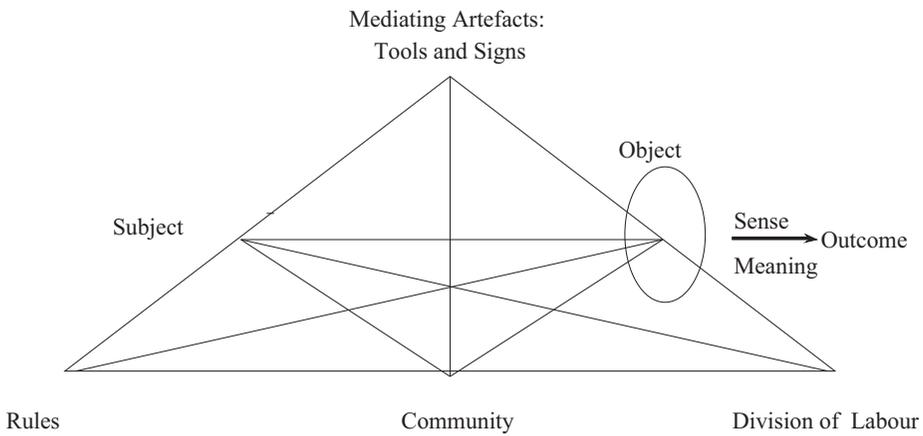


FIGURE 1 Model of Cultural Mediation



The structure of a human activity system (Engeström, 1987, p. 78)

FIGURE 2 Expanded Model of an Activity

The activity theory approach described above tackles another important issue in a historic study; relationships between human agents and material objects. Compared to other intellectual traditions dealing with this issue, for example the Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) (Callon, 1986; Latour, 2005), which claims that all objects are part of the social and therefore should always be part of the sociological enquiry, Activity Theory singles out conceptually linked aspects of social reality and focuses an enquiry on them. Thus, considering the object-motive, subject, tools, rules, community and division of labour separately and in conceptual unity existing among them, provides a researcher with a valuable entry point to the study of social practices, their history and individuals who are part of these practices. ANT rejects the notion of structure in social networks, instead opting for constant fluidity. In contrast the concept of activity implies an underlying structure; this does not preclude, however, that activities stay unchanged and that researchers have assumptions about which categories to study. On the contrary, activities are fluid but they evolve through the process of cul-

tural-historical mediation.

The discussion above has established a theoretical framework which has been applied to the study of a case, which is described and discussed below.

## **The Case Study**

The above discussion provides an important theoretical background for considering the transformed context of preparation of young people for the world of work in Russian schools and the effect it produced on students' preparedness for work. Based on the conceptualisation of preparation for work as a combination of two pedagogic activities, *vospitanie* and professional orientation, it appeared possible to construct a case study that was thought of in terms of the duration of these activities, particular TimeSpaces within which the case study could be undertaken and particular points of transformations that could be ascertained.

The city of Perm, situated in the Ural region, is considered to exist at the periphery compared to Moscow which attracts most extreme cases of innovation. The city of Perm being more provincial than Moscow but large enough to show signs of the post-Soviet innovation was a perfect place to conduct this research project. The case study school in the city of Perm was chosen based on the preliminary interviews with staff at the Perm State Pedagogic University. They pointed out that a mainstream secondary school might be the best site for a case study because it might have preserved some focus on *vospitanie* and professional orientation, whereas more specialised schools which appeared after 1991 focused predominantly on academic achievement. A mainstream secondary school in one of the large residential areas of Perm form the base of the case study.

As was mentioned in the previous sections, it was decided to conceptualise *vospitanie* and professional orientation as two activities which have a long history of development. However, the aim of the research was to compare the pre- and post-Soviet scenarios as they were represented in the current context of a school. Taking into account the possible maximum age of the teachers who were in employment in the period of 2000-2002, when the research took place, it was decided to select participants who began their teaching career in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. The 1970s were characterised by the predominantly Soviet structure and processes at the labour market; the 1980s showed signs of transformations because of the Perestroika movement; the 1990s can be defined as the post-Soviet time during which the move from the Soviet state control to more democratic policies and practices was initiated.

Thus a TimeSpace in this particular consideration of *vospitanie* and professional orientation can be defined as the realisation of these activities by school teachers who gained particular notions of pedagogies in different political and social contexts. The assumption was that the teachers practiced *vospitanie* and professional orientation not only as a reaction to the official pedagogic agenda

of the post-Soviet reforms but also as a legacy of training and experience that they carried from the times when their initial identity of a teacher was formed. Thirty teachers were asked to participate in the case study. Ten teachers started their careers in the 1970s, ten in the 1980s and ten in the 1990s. In addition, thirty students (both female and male) were asked to take part in the case study. The students were fifteen years old and at the point when they had to decide whether to stay at school (which would prepare them for the entry to the University) or to leave school and join a further education college (which would result in acquiring a vocational qualification). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers and students. The interviews were devised to gain teachers' views of vospitanie and professional orientation as they practised it at the beginning of their career and at the present time. The interviews with students aimed to identify their position in the pedagogic activities with regard to their preparedness for the future world of work.

In addition to the above interviews, it was decided to explore the kind of trajectories of employment individuals were constructing after 1991, thus responding to the political and social transformations in the country. This additional element of the case study complemented this study of preparation for work by identifying those important personal functions that individuals had to resort to in the transformed labour market. Thirty individuals were interviewed about their working lives; ten individuals went to school in each decade (1970s, 1980s and 1990s). In each age group there were representatives of five different professional areas: business people, civil servants, qualified workers, unqualified workers and unemployed.

Analysis of the case study followed theoretical principles of the socio-cultural and activity theory pointed out in previous sections. All narratives were analysed in terms of activity systems or a network of at least two activity systems. Subject positions, tools, rules, division of labour were considered and the transformations in the object-motive were identified. Thus "snapshots" of activities were taken. In the case of the teachers, snapshots of vospitanie and professional orientations were made; then the activity systems were analysed from the point of view of what references they made to the past and to which particular points in the past. In the case of the interviews with students, their subject position was identified in the activity systems they shared with the teachers and within their family life. The interviews with adults were analysed as a succession of activity systems; the changes in the object-motive were considered as crucial points of change in the working lives of professionals.

Analysis of the interviews with teachers demonstrated that all of them conceptualised their pedagogic activities as a combination of vospitanie and professional orientation. The structure of pedagogic processes as they described it was similar. However, ideologically they imbued the activities with very different ethic messages. The teachers from the 1970s group referred to the ethics of the Soviet pedagogy which emphasised hard work and prioritised working occupations. The 1980s group made more references to the present demands

of the labour market, i.e. they emphasised the need for more University graduates of certain professions such as lawyers. Teachers from this group thought of *vospitanie* as an important activity but considered the family as its main subject. Teachers from the 1990s group made more references to the future by projecting images of the future employee that they thought would contribute to the development of Russia. These teachers emphasised the free will of students and their creativity. The dominant pedagogy described by all thirty teachers, however, made boundaries of knowledge acquisition very narrow and opportunities for exploration of alternative options limited. The fact that the teachers' conceptualisation of *vospitanie* and professional orientation differed ideologically meant that the pedagogic message they mediated through these activities could create disorientation and lack of stable support for students.

Analysis of the interviews with students demonstrated that the subject position in the network of activity systems in which the majority of students were involved was not autonomous. Most of the students based their trajectories of preparation for work either on what their parents wanted them to do or what their parents could offer them after their graduation. Only eight out of thirty students participated in activities run by clubs outside the school. Thus, a girl who wanted to be a designer practiced her drawing skills. A student who wanted to become a professional ballroom dancer competed internationally. Another student was seriously working on software design and his classmate attended a zoological club because he was preparing to be a veterinarian. These eight students participated actively in the network of school, family and after school activities.

### **Problems of Linking History and Individual**

Analysis of the interviews with adult professionals demonstrated different approaches in the ways they managed social transformations and adapted to the post-Soviet changes in society. However, it proved extremely difficult to draw any conclusions about the particular personal tools they used to cope with the newly emerging difficulties and take advantage of the newly created opportunities. Activity theory analysis helped to segment the duration of the professional life into activity systems. What appeared to be missing from the analysis was a conceptual approach that could explain why changes in the working lives occurred, i.e. why some professionals initiated change and some preserved a high degree of continuity in their working lives. From the socio-cultural and activity theory perspective this meant a need for a more precise conceptualisation of the link between individual development and the historical development of activities. A more precise conceptualisation of professional trajectories, especially in terms of overcoming the social problems caused by the 1991 events, could potentially throw light on the conceptualisation of students' projections of their future trajectories. It seemed that further theoretic-

cal work was required at that stage of the research.

It seemed logical to turn my attention to the considerations of identity and personality in the socio-cultural and activity theory research. The socio-cultural and activity theory perspective is helpful in positioning an individual in an institutional activity that was initially created to provide her with particular tools of identity. Socio-culturalists (e.g. Chaiklin, 2001; Cole, 2000; Edwards, 2001; Engeström, Engeström, Suntio, 2002; Rubtsov, 1999; Valsiner, 1998; Wertsch, 1993 and others) see school as a formative social institution that has potential for providing conditions where young people set foundations for their future life course. The ways in which school pedagogies are structured and delivered affect individuals' capacity for constructing who and what they are (Chaiklin, 2001, Hedegaard, 1998, Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1991; Wardekker, 2001). Holland and Lanchicotte (2007) explicate the theoretical underpinning of this view by explaining that cultural mediation is part of the collective historical processes in which individuals are inevitably drawn into:

A typical mediating device is constructed by assigning meaning to an object and then placing it in the environment so as to affect mental events. It is important to remember that Vygotsky saw these tools for the self control of cognition and affect, as above all, social and cultural. "Assigning meaning" and "placing in the environment" are not just individual acts. Rather, mediating devices are part of collectively formed systems of meaning and are products of social history (p. 110).

Saxe and Esmonde (2005) criticise the socio-cultural and activity theory for not focusing on "the dynamics of historical change itself and its relation to the conceptual activities of individuals". They also argue that many socio-cultural studies are not developmental. "That is, they do not offer ways of understanding processes of peoples' developmental trajectories as they engaged with historically situated practices" (p. 173). Such concerns are related to the relationship between identity formation and history, which this study has been trying to tackle. Within the socio-cultural and activity theory such studies are located mainly in niches of anthropology (e.g. Holland, Lanchicotte, Skinner & Caine, 1998; Holland & Lave, 2001) and cultural psychology (e.g. Valsiner, 1998).

Anthropological research considers an individual in history as participation in the dynamic processes of cultural mediation within social activities. Research questions that anthropological research asks, defines its analytic boundaries; it is mainly concerned with identification of the processes which instigate the transformations in identity. Thus in the studies of identities in Alcoholics Anonymous (Holland et al., 1998) the focus is on identifying how a person acquires new identity tools. It concludes that as a result of participating in AA as an activity, a person acquires particular cultural tools specific to an AA setting, and imagines herself as having a different identity. The re-

search conducted within the domain of cultural psychology also focuses on the process of identity/personality formation within cultural worlds. In fact, Valsiner (1998) argues that

“[...] collective culture is person-anchored and not a ‘property’ of social units. It is of no use to speak of ‘American collective culture’ or ‘the collective culture of high school No 4, but it is possible to speak of the collective culture that organises the life of John or Sally who studies in high school in a town in the United States” (p. 31).

Both, anthropological and psychological approaches are useful in exploring the socio-cultural nature of individual functioning; they raise questions about the embeddedness of what Holland refers to as identity and Valsiner calls personality, in a particular historical process. However, the anthropological approach is not interested in the structural representation of the relationship between activities and identity; and the psychological approach does not provide a conceptual framework with which to analyse sets of narrative data. Therefore, a different conceptual tool is required to tackle these issues.

An important breakthrough in the research came when I realised that in their conceptualisation of *vospitanie* and professional orientation, irrespective of ideological differences, teachers in the case study school, focused on the development of personality. For this research I translated this concept as personhood. The term that is used in Russian psychological and educational literature is ‘*lichnost*’ (личность). It is a Russian word that originates from the root “lich” which has connotations with “face” and “person”. The term personhood was chosen as an English translation in order to avoid confusion with related terms such as identity and personality. Personhood is neither “personality”, nor “identity”. In the tradition of cultural-historical and activity theory personhood should be understood as a functioning of mature psyche whereby a person forms a relationship with a hierarchy of activities she participates in; through the conflicts which inevitably arise between different object-motives of the activities, personhood reveals itself as a social unity which is integral with societal development, although its processes of seeking individual meanings from the surrounding reality makes personhood active and unique. Personhood is a social system within a larger system of society. Personhood has been the object-motive of pedagogic activities in Russia, but it is not necessarily the focus of research. If the theorisation of identity in socio-cultural anthropology and of personality in cultural psychology aims to study identity or personality, personhood can be seen both as the ultimate aim and as an intermediate analytic concept that helps explaining the processes within activities.

I found that conceptualisation of personhood by Dodonov (1985) is particularly useful in demonstrating the above point. Dodonov, while working from the same theoretical base as Holland et al. (1998) and Valsiner (1998), also considers personhood as a “functioning system”.

Each personhood represents a unity of general, special and individual. When we characterise a certain personhood, we aim to talk about special and individual components of its structure, in other words we disclose its individuality. In order to understand somebody's individuality better, it is necessary to be 'armed' with a notion of invariant architectonics of this person's personhood, which he or she shares with other people, who are not like this person at all (Dodonov, 1985, p. 37).

The main message to be taken from Dodonov's approach is that an individual's trajectory (of whichever duration) should be analysed in terms of its main functions. He argues that there are a number of important elements that personhood may incorporate but listing them will not lead to a comprehensive analysis. Analysis should start from identifying elements or characteristics but should be completed by defining the functioning system of personhood. Personhood is defined as a **"self-organising, purpose-oriented 'part of society; its general function lies in realising an individual way of social being'"** (Dodonov, 1985, p. 37).

Dodonov (1985) points out four personhood functions, which in their unity enable an individual's transfer from one point in time to another.

Worldview is a fundamental formation of mature psyche (mind) that includes most important knowledge that individuals have about the world and their attitude to it. Based on these, individuals conduct recognition processes when generating purposes and aims in their life and making assessments of different events. Worldview contains ideals, i.e. conceptions of general purposes of human life.

Orientation is a mature system of important purpose programmes that defines a meaningful unity of human active behaviour which 'contra flows' accidents of reality. Orientation of personhood can be revealed in individuals' formulated needs associated with their attitude to life.

Character is a psychological formation that contains 'stable' emotional attitudes (relations) of a person to typical situations in life and stereotypes of cognitive and behavioural 'schemes' that help reacting to these situations.

Abilities are defined as 'formations' of personhood that contain the knowledge and skills of a person that have been formed on the basis of his/her in-born qualities; abilities enable success in mastering 'technical' aspects of activities.

Returning to the discussion of the case study, in their interpretations of vospitanie and professional orientation, teachers singled out personhood as the object-motive, irrespective of the age group they represented. Structurally,

personhood occupied the same position in *vospitanie* and professional orientation. As was discussed earlier in the article, it is through the study of transformations in the object that changes in the whole activity could be identified. Personhood became a concept that was able to link different parts of the analysis. In the case study, students, who also participated in *vospitanie* and professional orientation, could be seen both as the focus of teachers' activities and at the same time active subjects of their own preparation for the future world of work. In other words, they were also involved in the negotiation of their personhood. This implies that conceptually, professionals' participation in different activities throughout their life could also be seen as motivated by the development of personhood (Figure 3).

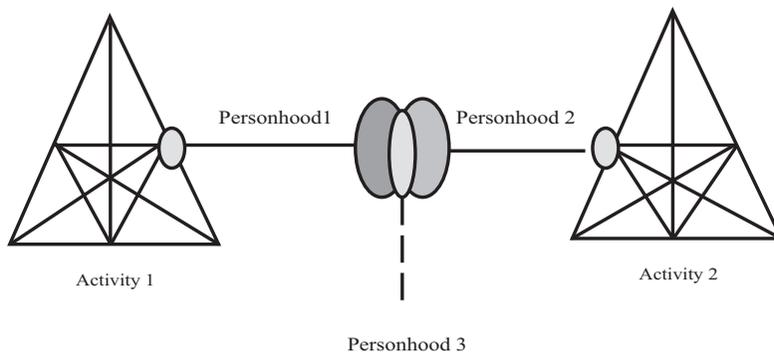


FIGURE 3 Personhood as the shared and negotiated object-motive

The concept of personhood functions contributed to the overall analysis of ways in which preparation for work in a Russian school, regarded as an interaction of activities (Figure 3), made an impact on the development of students, conceptualised as personhood. This idea made it possible to interpret professionals' narratives about their working lives as a continuous development of personhood functions through participation in a network of activities. Analysis of the interviews with professionals revealed that their personhood functioning can be defined in the following terms:

- Worldview was defined as broadening, if an individual expanded her awareness of professional activities and the labour market on the whole; if a person constrained the knowledge acquisition to one particular professional area or to nothing in particular, worldview was defined as narrowing.
- Character was defined as a personhood function which was responsible for stable affective accounts of reality. Character was defined in two ways. On the one hand, it was considered in terms of ambition – an affective function which either prompted an individual to aim to achieve

high or keep expectation relatively low. On the other hand, character was regarded in terms of ethic which was defined as professional if individuals demonstrated particular dedication to their profession or occupation, or personal, if individuals focused on their personal lives as a source of motivation.

- Abilities were regarded as a function which demonstrated how individuals used their talents and capabilities. Some professionals focused on one (usually professional) skill, others tried to involve a variety of talents in the development of their working trajectory.
- Orientation, a leading function of personhood, was considered in terms of a combination of four different purpose programmes. Being oriented towards a profession implied that an individual planned a career carefully within a particular professional field. Orientation at survival was related to the social crisis in Russia; individuals oriented towards survival if they prioritised being able to live through the crisis successfully. Individuals were oriented towards “other people”, if they prioritised popular notions of success in work and careers. Orientation at the “self” implied that individuals aimed to satisfy their individual interests without much regard for popular notions of success.

As a result of the analysis of interviews with professionals, eight individuals revealed having personhood functions which helped them overcome the social crisis of 1991. These participants demonstrated similar personhood functioning during the time of crisis. Their worldview was broadening, i.e. transformations from the pre- to the post-Soviet activity systems in their working life were characterised by the broadening of professional and general knowledge. Ambition was high or rising, i.e. analysis of the transfer from the pre- to the post-Soviet activity systems demonstrated that the wish to succeed was rising during their working lives. They used a full range of abilities, i.e. during the Perestroika time and after 1991 these individuals engaged in learning new skills. This was helped by the broadening worldview. These eight individuals developed a strong sense of orientation (irrespective of what it was), i.e. they developed a purpose programme that guided them through the difficult time of the post-1991 events. In the Soviet times some of them had a very different orientation but it was a guiding force in their lives. One of the interviewed individuals, Lena, a young businesswoman, started her working life as a graduate of a psychology faculty. She soon realised that finding a job was difficult and she did not seem to be interested in psychology as much as she initially thought. She obtained a job as a secretary in a furniture-manufacturing business. She learnt the trade with the help of more experienced colleagues, and after a while, opened a similar business of her own.

Thus analysis of the interviews with professionals generated ‘values’ which were applied in the analysis of students’ trajectories of preparation for work. As was mentioned before, one group of students (eight students out of thirty)

developed active subject positions in the network of activities which prepared them for the world of work. These students' ongoing engagement in the pedagogic activities was characterised by the broadening worldview, rising ambition, a widening range of abilities and a strong, mainly professional orientation. This small number of students participated actively in after school clubs and used the school as the provider of academic qualifications. Other students from the case study sample were involved in the family activities which seemed to preserve a Soviet way of functioning; parents, like the Soviet state in the past, offered their children ready-made solutions and did not involve them in the searching of the appropriate path. For example, Misha was told by his mother that he would work with her in her sales business after he graduates from maritime college. This obvious disparity did not seem to concern Misha as he seemed to have never questioned the fact that his life was being arranged for him. Such an approach did not broaden these students' worldview. Teachers, as was explained before, did not agree on a pedagogical approach with regard to *vospitanie* and professional orientation, despite sharing the same conceptual apparatus. The Soviet pedagogy with its emphasis on narrowing the boundaries of knowledge and emphasising the development of one particular activity (i.e. what the person could do best), contributed to the creation of activity settings in the school where it was difficult for students to develop personhood functions which could assist in overcoming the social crisis.

It appears that despite the post-1991 policies, which aimed to take the Soviet past out of the school practices, the Soviet pedagogic messages were still present in activity settings of the case study school. Analysis of the case study also revealed the structural endurance of *vospitanie* and professional orientation during the last 30 years. Students' preparation for the world of work was affected by historical transformations in the pedagogic activities. Those who were not involved in extra-curricular activities did not seem to have sufficient support from the school to develop personhood functions, which would help them meet the demands of the post-1991 labour market. Thus it is through defining of students' personhood functioning, that the role of *vospitanie* and professional orientation has been clarified.

## **Conclusion**

In the concluding part of this article I would like to return to the theoretical challenge that motivated me to embark on this journey. I was interested in understanding how individuals negotiated their development through participation within the dynamic of historical transformations. My research journey was not particularly easy because as the discussion of historic methods in social sciences demonstrated, interpretations of history depend on the particular research field and research questions asked by the scholars. A short overview of debates in social sciences about approaches to the inclusion of history in social research, pointed out that fundamental concepts of the socio-cultural

and activity theory, i.e. cultural mediation and activity, are most appropriate for this purpose. Cultural mediation explains the process of duration and cultural development of individuals, whereas an activity imposes a particular structure to the study of history. I also pointed out that when history and an individual are brought together into one study, the focus is placed either on the activity itself or the individual. I argue that an escape from this dichotomy can be found in the concept of personhood, which does not emphasise either the self or the environment. In particular, the functional approach to personhood by Dodonov (1985) offers theoretical tools that are positioned at the level of conceptual abstraction which allows one to see personhood as an ongoing and changing system of functions, which regulate the relationship between activities and individuals. Activities which are carried out by individuals are imbued with history, as are individuals themselves. Personhood functions show how activities and individuals develop over time. A general and relatively neutral definition of personhood functions means that they could be considered in relation to any socio-cultural activities. Considered as 'invariant architectonics of human functioning', their analytic capacity does not change depending on the context of the research. However, because of the structural coherence of personhood functions (they are part of the same system), it is possible to apply them in the analysis of a particular research question, thus providing a narrower focus to the study of individuals' development through social activities.

An important point in the consideration of history in social research is a multi-level and multi-faceted process of analysis. History is a complex process, thus following its course is not enough; on the contrary, structural analysis appears extremely important. However, once structural analysis has been carried out, another level of analysis is needed. This time, the need is to bring different TimeSpaces back together into a coherent whole. In the research described in this article this was achieved with the help of the concept of personhood. It has to be noted that this concept may be less useful when the objective of the activity under consideration is not personhood itself (e.g. activities that aim at the production of material items). Although in this particular research the socio-cultural paradigm was most useful, analytic boundaries should be kept open. I would like to conclude with the quote which summarises the general orientation and motivation for conducting historical social research:

Once the full historicity of social phenomena is registered analytically, the partisan pleadings of the rival ontologies lose their intelligibility. For how is it possible to assign a causative primacy to either agency or structure, or to derive, constitutively, the macro from the micro, when all such distinctions are sublated within the 'totalization in process' that is the socio-historical? (Bryant and Hall, 2005, p. VIII)

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