

Plenary report

Investment in Education – Long-term Investment

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Investment into education is a kind of long-term investment. Certain social groups are able to make such investment and motivated to do that, first of all, it is middle-class. Marginalized groups do not invest in anything and the most advantaged groups prefer short-term investment, e.g. into natural resources, arms or even criminal-related activities. So the question is: how to develop the middle social class or, in other words, civil society in Russia.

I would like to refer to the recent research of students of mathematic faculties of Russian pedagogical universities by G. S. Kovalenko. Only 4.1 % of alumni are going to work at school after graduation. As far as I know, there is a deficiency in well-prepared teachers in British and American educational systems as well as in the other countries with a few exceptions. Teachers have become far away from the traditional notions of a person from middle social class. How the teacher as a marginalized figure can be a translator of knowledge and competences and how (s)he can offer ideas for investing into education acceptable for the middle-class?

Secondly, it was very important to connect the concepts of investment, well being and security and education in one project. The closer is a person to the middle-class the more secure for him(her)self and for the others (s)he is. When I was a student I rent a room in the flat of a highly-skilled but heavily-drinking mechanic. He had a small dog named Pushok and when he was drunk he used to say: “Pushok, I do love you” and then ask meditatively: “Should I kill you?”. Such people, like some Dostoevsky’s heroes, have no other recourses to express their affection.

Returning back to the topic of the teachers, I want to remember the word by the great Brazilian educator Paulo Freire who stated that all the schools – he meant Brazilian ones but it refers also to the other countries – has narrative teaching in their core. Education is all the retelling. I have shown three slides here: what changes happened in industry, medicine and education in the last three centuries. It is very interesting that there were not many profound, revolution changes. The reason is the same: translator of the innovative ideas is a marginalized member of society.

The state cannot arrange funding for everything. Serious investors who think about the future invest into education. A positive example of such investment is computerization of schools – nowadays in Russia there is not a school without internet and a computer class. But at the same time 32 % of Russian schools have toilets outside the school building – 20 – 30 meters away.

I would like to emphasize several important principles of investing into education. Money is a limited resource, so we must apply the principle of concentration of resources and targeted program funding. Informatization is a positive example, I am sure, improvement of toilet conditions will also have positive impact but the main target is a teacher.

How can we make a teacher’s position equal to the middle-class? Teachers are marginalized but, on the other hand, many of them take that conditions very serious and end in monologue and manipulations in the classroom. Our President has recently quoted Churchill’s words that a teacher possesses colossal power and these words were sometimes understood literally. I already receive letters saying: “Our class master says that the President confirmed her unlimited power...”

As I know from practice as well as many texts, the more *we* try to manipulate with the teachers the more they, like all the normal people, will resist the changes. I am sure that none of quick radical steps can change the situation. As Martin Buber said, a teacher is the fragile core of education.

Since funding is limited the most important investor's position is: modern school requires absolutely different type of teacher. The changes will proceed very slow but it is the specific of education in contrast with oil-mining. If we are afraid to initiate slow changes we will never obtain any results.