Does this lack of convergence mean that educational outcomes can only be seen as a reflection of various national cultures and/or political priorities, rather than the (as it were) objective basis of economic development, and which might be susceptible of improvement by technical interventions of various kinds?

The large issues that the very conciseness of this book brings into focus might suggest that brevity is an underrated virtue in the educational literature.

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Politics, modernisation and educational reform in Russia: from past to present, edited by David Johnson, Oxford, Symposium Books, 2010, 176 pp., $48, ISBN 978-1-873927-41-0

The nine chapters in this volume in the Oxford Studies in Comparative Education series discuss various aspects of educational reforms in Russia from the eighteenth century to the present. In his introductory chapter, Johnson suggests three 'permutations' in the Russian context. The first is a climate of engagement of Tsarist Russia, where knowledge transfer was encouraged and educational ideas, frameworks and practices were imported from the West and adapted to Russia. The second is a climate of disengagement of Soviet Russia, where the Communist Party saw the role of education as developing people into active builders of communism and treated knowledge from outside with suspicion. The third is a climate of re-engagement which started under Gorbachev with his policy of *perestroika* and *glasnost*. It is against this background that the subsequent chapters attempt to answer the central question of whether educational change and reforms have been successful at different stages of Russian history and in post-Soviet Russia in particular.

In his chapter, Harris offers an eloquent and detailed historical account of rival roles of Russian state and private education during the nineteenth century and argues that processes such as the nurturing of critical thinking which were 'carried out privately or in small groups, in contradiction to the official state system, proved of central importance in the transformation of imperial Russia' (17). He then shows how in the twentieth century writings that aimed to challenge Tsarist rule were reinterpreted in a 'correct' way and used to validate the socialist order and ideology. While at university in Soviet Russia I remember how we were asked to take notes from numerous writings of thinkers mentioned by Harris and how each volume would be accompanied by 'correct' interpretation supporting the then existing regime.

In the next chapter, Pavlova discusses dualism in discourses on the ways educational modernisation should be achieved in post-1998 Russian education. While all reformers, she states, agree on the ultimate goal of educational reform (the enhancement of social and economic change), they are diametrically opposed as to the ways reform should be implemented, with one group favouring inculcation of market values in the curriculum and the other group preferring preservation of elements of Soviet education. Compromise between these two approaches has been found and both positions have been accommodated in the school curriculum, but according to Pavlova, it has not been a happy 'marriage'. She, however, falls short of providing any evidence either to support her claim or to illustrate the complexity of and conflict between modernists and traditionalists in the reform process.

The relationship between Russian higher education and democracy is the subject of the chapter by Marquand. She argues that 'an enormous amount of "unlearning" is needed' if Russia is to develop into a modern economy and political democracy (72). Whilst her experiences of working with Russian faculty prove that it is possible to democratise teaching methods in Russian higher education institutions, however challenging this might be, these changes on their own are not sufficient. Systemic organisational change of all aspects of higher education as well as of wider society is required, but given the current government's authoritarian approach to running the country, there is very little sign that the Russian leaders recognise or appreciate the need for political democracy.

The chapter by Fedotova and Chigisheva was of particular interest to me because of my own interest in governance and management reforms of post-Soviet Russian higher education. Unfortunately, this chapter is very disappointing in its lack of depth and meaningful analysis. Although the authors offer a useful description of structural changes in Russian higher education, they do not go beyond merely providing factual statements, figures and tables. They state, for example, that 'the educational content of higher education was changed twice' or 'educational standards of the third generation were neither worked out nor put into operation' (94), but do not discuss any possible rationale behind the former or analyse any underlying reasons behind the latter. Similarly, numerous tables and figures are neither sufficiently interpreted nor are any robust explanations of them given.

By contrast, the chapter by Walker is thoroughly enjoyable. It moves into a terrain often overlooked by researchers of Russian education – transition from vocational to higher education. He argues that despite their low status and numerous problems, vocational institutions in Russia are most successful in providing 'an environment in which young people may rebuild their 'damaged' learner identities' (116). While 'this environment [is] instrumental in enabling young people to begin new chapters in their learning careers' they face class-based and gendered obstacles in their transitions to higher education and into better jobs (116). These obstacles, Walker continues, are embedded in the structures (for example, military service for young men and lack of opportunities for young women to build on 'female' professions at higher education level). The author concludes his chapter by looking at a number of current policy developments that may have both positive and negative implications for those wishing to make a transition from further to higher education.

The chapter by Minina focuses on a new university admission process, which combines both school leaving and university entry examinations into a single standardised national written test introduced nationally in 2009. The new test is aimed at preventing bribery and corruption in higher education, providing equal access to higher education to those from remote and rural areas, enhancing mobility, and redressing the deficiencies of the traditional admission system which was almost entirely based on oral testing. Minina is interested in perceptions of the new test among academics in one university department and demonstrates the underlying tensions between its supporters and opponents. Whether one supports or opposes the test, it remains to be seen if this particular reform measure achieves its stated goals in the mid to long-term.

What issues parents in Russia consider when choosing a primary school for their children is the main question explored by Laczik. Drawing on West et al's (1998) work she argues that parental choice of a primary school in Russia is influenced by 'the three Ps': the school's performance, a pleasant feel, and proximity to the school (150). She also adds purse as the fourth P to the mix. While it is not difficult to agree with the author that power of purse is one of the main, if not the decisive, factors either limiting or enhancing school choice for parents in Russia, I would have liked to have seen a more empirically-based discussion on the fourth P.

The final chapter of the volume is a thought-provoking piece by Muckle in which he revisits the main question of whether educational reform in post-Soviet Russia has been successful. In his very engaging storytelling style and drawing on his first hand experiences of Soviet school visits and classroom observations he vividly draws a picture of education in Russia as it was at the time of the Soviet Union collapse and asks how much of this picture survives in the new Russia. Undoubtedly change has been slow and difficult. My own research into Russian higher education reform supports some of the arguments put forward by Muckle. What I saw in the 1990s and early 2000s were mainly cosmetic and superficial reforms, achieved by creating new and renaming old institutions, programmes and courses but leaving the old system's fundamental structures intact. Although the survival and expansion of the Russian education system in the 1990s could be considered as achievements in themselves, they failed to mitigate the overall dismal picture of largely failed attempts at education reform. Thus, it would be interesting to establish the extent to which real change has permeated universities and schools since 2000.

Overall, the collection of chapters in this book is very diverse and eclectic and despite some of its apparent shortcomings it is a welcome addition to the body of research on Russian education and would be useful to all those interested in Russian education system as well as in comparative education more broadly.

Reference

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Managing successful universities, second edition, by M. Shattock, Maidenhead, Open University Press, 2010, 296 pp., £28.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-335-23743-2

The problem, just now, for any author attempting to produce or update a text on higher education management in the UK is that no sooner has it gone to press than it is out of date. Such is the uncertainty in government circles about HE fees and funding, seemingly at what to do as well as how to do it, that it is impossible to predict what the sector will be like next year, let alone within the next five.

Of course, there are those who will argue, Mike Shattock among them, that we have been here before, with successive reviews of English higher education contributing to fundamental changes in the landscape. Or that what we are now seeing is just another stage in a cumulative process which seeks to shift the burden of cost from the state towards those it claims are the key beneficiaries from the investment (although, personally, I am quite glad that we do not have to rely on an individual's willingness to become indebted in order that we have doctors, teachers, engineers – possibly even lawyers).

In the second edition of *Managing successful universities*, Michael Shattock successfully manages to avoid the trap of immediate out-datedness by giving more space to 'the consequences of managing retrenchment and the importance of developing new sources of