

Compiled by Ene-Silvia Sarv  
Tallinn Baccalaureate School  
In-service Teachers Training Centre of Estonia  
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## Modernisation of education in Estonia - brief overview

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### 1. Activities.

The process of the reorganisation of the Education in Estonia from the part of the totalitarian educational system of USSR into independent national education system started in January - March, 1987. This process is going on today as well, but in the independent Estonia.

During its first stage the modernisation of education bore the name and the conception of the "modernisation of schooling". Still in February 1987 the Ministry of Education intended to devote the coming Teachers Congress to "international education" - in the meaning that "international" had in communist system. Those preparations were going on at VÕT ( In-Service Teacher Training Institute -see the explanations at the end) until the first days of March, accompanied by the milder and louder complaints that reached the Minister. Nevertheless since January some of researchers from PTUI (Institute for Pedagogical Research) had started persuading Minister Elsa Gretschkina that it was high time for internal changes in the Estonian school system.

Thus two processes took place simultaneously, which by the beginning of March, 1987 culminated in the Ministers decision to call together a *Teachers Congress* in a few weeks to establish a *new Estonian school policy* and to make the first steps towards a system that would be *independent from the Soviet school system*.

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The first years of the modernisation of schooling can be characterised by considerably intensive and versatile activities. Often it turned out possible to use the existing structures and financial regulations and to implement great and work intensive undertakings in continuing education as usual courses-conferences-seminars. Qualitatively all action methods that had proved their handiness in teachers continuing education in the 80s were used. The use of all kind of forms of collective action and co-operation technologies developed to be especially important. It could not be possible without previous tradition of collective action - the brainstorming and organisation-technical games were used in several schooling centres (for example: Estonian Management Institute, Tartu State University, etc.). The organisation-technical games were cultivated in teachers continuing education first and foremost in organising republic-wide days of physics teachers since the beginning of 80s and in some regular phased courses in 1985-86, also in headmasters continuing education. In organising bigger undertakings the Ministry of Education and VÕT were assisted by the specialists from the Management Continuing Institute and Tartu State University in order to "organise collective cerebral activity".

A short list of activities:

The end of **March 1987** - Estonian Teachers Congress, Tallinn, about 1000 participants, organisers (both essential and arrangements) Ministry of Education, VÕT, PTUI.

The beginning of **May 1987** - 1st brainstorming (2 days), Tallinn, VÕT, 180 participants - survey on Estonian society, 18 work-groups, 3 general sessions, about thousand ideas and proposals (catalogued).

**May-June 1987** - study and systematisation of the 1st brainstorming materials by the group of enthusiasts - researchers and specialists from VOT and PTUI, in the end of May - results published in "Nõukogude Õpetaja" ("Soviet Teacher" - educational weekly newspaper).

The beginning of **June 1987** - meeting to discuss the results of the 1st brainstorming and 2nd brainstorming to find out the main directions for the new curriculum, for narrower circle of educators.

**22-23 June** - Conference for 380 experts to discuss 21 projects for the new curriculum worked out by the various groups of specialists, teachers etc. The main model for future structure of education in Estonia was chosen and the guidelines for groups of subjects were worked out.

The beginning of **July 1987** - the brainstorming on curriculum - the first version of the new curriculum with differentiation into branches was developed out of 21 separate curriculum-projects and results of the previous Conference..

The end of **August 1987** - the joint meeting of Russian school headmasters and intelligentsia, about 120 participants, VÕT.

Work-groups worked almost without summer vacation in order to establish the new basis of Estonian general education and curriculum. The reform of the education in physics started and developed later during several years. Nearly 50% of the physics-teachers participated actively in this process.

**September 1987** - All-Union (USSR) search-game for finding new directions and basis for general education in the Soviet Union, Põltsamaa, 10 days, 110 participants (15 people among them in the Estonian team), organised by Moscow psychologists (J.Gromõko and others, the supporters and co-workers of the future Minister of Education in Russia - Dneprov)) in co-operation with Estonian Ministry of Education.



At the same time an unconventional process for modernising Estonian physics education took place, which in its first round included 25 physics teachers from Russian schools (June 1987). In the second round (August 1987 Tartu), in order to try out the new methods the regular continuing courses were made use of by more than 150 physics teachers from South-Estonia and the scientists of Tartu State University. From these two regular continuing courses which were organised as thinking bees, developed the modernisation process of physics teaching in Estonian education, where the primary force was a school teacher and his orders to scientists. Further activities included a series of thinking bees, writing textbooks at home, testing the text at school, scientific research on the suitability of the text, etc. In August 1987, more than 150 course participants, physics teachers from South-Estonia, delegated about 50 teachers, scientists, specialists in teaching methods to work out a new concept of school physics and corresponding study aids. From this group of people The Estonian School Physics Society was formed, which on the one hand organised the work in establishing the new school physics (textbooks, conceptual basis for experimental aids, the basis for school physics concept, organising scientific-methodical expertise for compiled materials, giving collective evaluation, experimenting the materials at school, organising continuing courses, etc.), but on the other hand gave social resistance to the group of specialists who had dealt with school physics in a traditional way. (NB! - Characteristic undertone - both in the Soviet Union and Estonia there was in every subject, in every thinkable field, a small, compact group of people who practically had a monopoly over this field - one of the rules of the structure the Soviet education system.) The essential source of the disagreements was, in the activities of the School Physics Society, in developing and shaping a humanistic, student-centered school physics concept and practice until the compiling of new textbooks as the collective work of active teachers. The new approach did not correspond to the previous positivistic-Marxist, solely subject-centered approach (paradigm). The second source of disagreements was the risk of losing the monopoly over the compiling of study aids, workbooks, etc. and the translating of at that time compulsory Moscow textbooks. As a third problem, I see the so-called "syndrome of hierarchic competence" (I apologise - self-created term) - every person who stands on a higher position in the official or scientific hierarchy is cleverer and more competent than those who stand lower.

Thereby - the new movement of teachers was an invasion from a classroom into "higher" spheres in order to brake the existing evaluation system, and therefore met strong resistance by different subject, scientific, expert and other commissions.

Three or four years ago it was impossible to formulate those disagreements. The information above is given retrospectively by the author today in 1993 and is meanwhile largely influenced by the practical acquaintance with humanistic pedagogy in Scandinavia and England.

We should add that the working activity of School Physics Society through organisational methods ceased temporarily. Today there are already signs that its operations are re-establishing at a new higher level - as an expert ("self-appointed" again) of the new school standard and curricula. The scientific preparation of many teachers belonging to the society enables them to work as experts on new school standards and curricula. They may take full responsibility for this work as they have past experience in forming, implementing and testing study materials using established scientific methods (for example, application of Bloom taxonomy both in compiling study aids and analysing the results of working with them reached in one way or another about one third of the Estonian teachers in physics).



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In that way a new approach was established, both to form the objectives of the subject taught in school as a collective activity, and to guarantee the teaching of the subject by the controlled and tested study materials which meet children's interests and are understandable, but also raise the teachers motivation, pedagogical and scientific competence to the newer level.

The same processes were going on in forming the new content of several other subjects, but as a physicist, I know best the activities of physicists, and as it was by all means the most extensive scale, it enabled to characterise one aspect of the modernisation of education in Estonia.

So we can speak about the qualitative break in teachers continuing education - a group-work method replaced the so far prevailing auditory method, a teacher became the subject of the purposefulness of his main activity and its essential organisation - he left the role of a passive obeyer (see also p.3.2.1).

**1987/88** - the preparation and compiling of subjects, textbooks, programmes, curricula, etc. by different teams and authors, with simultaneous establishment of the conceptual basis for the modernisation of education. Ever more becomes evident the cautious attitude towards the started modernisation process by academical, communist party and other sister-establishments of the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Higher Education).

**January 1988** - Brainstorming at the Ministry of Education, academician H.Liimets turns towards the Supreme Council to obtain support for the modernisation of schooling.

**March 1988** - Brainstorming at the Ministry of Education together with headmasters - for trying out different theoretical-practical viewpoints in education.

**Spring 1988** - Seminar-conference at TPedI (Tallinn Pedagogical Institute) about the modernisation of schooling. The "educational opposition" from Russia participated.

**May 1988** - meeting of more than 100 headmasters (at that time Estonia had slightly over 200 secondary schools) from the schools who desired to switch to the differentiated or branch education from the 1988/89 school year, i.e. completely different curriculum from the Soviet Union.

**Spring 1988** - ECP CC and governments resolution on uniting the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education and Vocational Education Committee into Education Committee, Chairman Väino Rajangu who had not played an active role in the modernisation process until now.

**Summer 1988** - as a setoff to the Education Committee, the Education Society emerged as a pressure group to force newfounded Committee to continue the modernisation process.

**Autumn/winter 1988** - the foundation of the Estonian Education Platform i.e. formulation of the concept of education. It included the second round of the analyses of the "painpoints" in the educational system in Estonia, research of the newest materials on educational philosophy and practice in Western countries, reports of the Club of Rome.

**Autumn 1988** - competition of educational reform programmes, 102 entries arrived. There were projects for reorganisation as small schools, different subjects so the systems of vocational and professional education, teacher training, etc.

**November 1988** - Teachers Conference - approval of the Education Platform, competition results.

**1988/89** - the foundation of the Chair of School Reform at VÕT in order to guarantee the theoretical basis for modernisation process - attempt to unite the active school reformers and to give them possibilities for action.



**May 1989** - Estonian Culture and Education Forum, 4500 delegates, many documents supporting democracy and essential development were accepted, the election of the Educational Council - the democratic nongovernmental organization.

**Summer/autumn 1989** - VÕT is reorganised into EHA - reorganisation attempt in continuing education and pedagogy.

**Late autumn 1989** - Estonian Education Committee is reorganised into the Ministry of Education.

**January 1990** - the new Minister tries to achieve dialogue or compromise between different educational developmental groups (viewpoints) - search-game at Kääriku.

**1987-1990** - the series "On the Way to the New School" I - IV was issued, unfortunately in Russian. So the main information (on scientific level) about the processes in education did not influence Estonian educators really.

**October 1992** - Estonian Ministry of Education is reorganised into the Ministry of Culture and Education.

**1989 - 1993** - widening of the educational practice in Estonia - alternative schools (Waldorf-, Freinet-, Christian-schools), private schools, etc.

**1993/94** - school-development project "School of its own individuality" ("Omanäoline Kool") for 93 schools, movement "Freedom in Education" for individual teachers and schools, etc.

**1994** - The Curriculum in 6 books is worked out and will undergo the public discussion in 1994/95.

(More full list and analyses of activities can be find in "Democratisation and humanisation of the education in Estonia 1987 - 1991" by Ene-Silvia Sarv).

## 2. Essential problems

Against the background of the whole Soviet Union Estonian education has always had a face of its own. As Lithuanians in architecture, Estonians could keep to a certain extent to their own line in education. The best example for this is the existence of many original textbooks (not only Estonian language and literature but also, for example, Mathematics - which is the only precedent of its kind in the whole Soviet Union). Schools used original work-books and other study aids compiled by Estonian authors, large-scale differentiation of education (specialised classes, experimental classes, art and language biased schools, etc.) took place. Also the phases of the continuing education system differed from the All-Union system and the existence of the Institute of Voluntary Pedagogical Research which included approximately 100 teachers (and gave to Estonia a number of researchers - practicing teachers, Doctors and Masters) was unique.

The first task in 1987: the establishment of an indigenous *Estonian national school as "a school experiment" in the education system of the Soviet Union*, obtaining permission and recognition from the Ministry of Education of the Soviet Union for the experiment, establishing the ideas and basis of the national school and explaining them to the educational public.

Nobody predicted the possibility of creating a totally independent school and content of education, or even less, the collapse of the Soviet Union in the near future. In order to protect oneself against the expected accusations, the term "experiment" was used. This tactic was quite usual in the Soviet Union and was used by individual schools (so to say "author schools", experimental schools", etc.) in all republics. To apply and gain this kind of experimental status for the whole Republic was unprecedented and needed great persistence in communication with the Minister of Education of the Soviet Union and his assistants. Minister Elsa Gretschkina was able to persuade the Moscow officials in the necessity and timeliness of the Estonian experiment and in connection with it supported the democratic wing in the Russian education movement (the leaders of which govern Russian education at the moment).



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It was not possible to find a common language with Estonian own (communist) party- and education bosses and in Spring 1988 it was decided in ECP CC and Governmental circles to disperse the Ministry of Education and form a new "unit" - the Education Committee (as it was just done in Moscow as the part of perestroika ).

Hence the leaders of Estonian education were no longer people with pedagogical education and the knowledge of practical school-life, but specialists from other fields, especially economics. Vice Ministers and the department heads, workers from previous administrations were still preserved. (The continual reforms still lasting have affected the workers of the former central administration as they are either dismissed and reinstated or forever dismissed almost annually without knowing the reasons causing constant stress and an essential lack of motivation.)

Several consultative institutions were summoned, in order to work out competent and impartial (?) education policy, to divide finances and to do project expertise. The real initiators of the modernisation movement - *educational oppositions* in the present meaning, were not represented or formed a noticeable minority in these consultative institutions. The result was a situation of constant confrontation on the organisational, administrative level where seeking for compromise did not bear particular (practical) fruit.

The educational offices and scientists in Estonia differentiated into various conceptual directions. Speaking for and recognising the necessity of ones own national education, the different groups of scientists and teachers still could not preserve long term concord. Rein Loik, Minister of Education of the re-established Ministry of Education (1990-91) also did not succeed in forming a united front in education.

Retrospectively it seems that there were several reasons for such a deep "incompatibility". Some of them were more subjective, some were related to education policy or simply political and others essential. The essential disagreements are those which are still particularly acute, although, according to the undersigned, many of the participants have not realised it.

It seems that namely in education a collision has occurred and still persists which under no circumstances can be changed into a dialogue - a collision between the *positivistic* idea of education and training, and *humanistic* idea of education and training bearing in mind child- and teacher-centered reforms pedagogy. The first, positivistic idea was more connected with the Marxian human conception and although this term was soon outdated (since 1989?) the positivistic approach remained and was of cardinal importance for one group of pedagogy scientists in compiling curriculum and subject programmes (conditionally the PTUI-TPedI-EHA branch). For one part of scientists the positivist paradigm was soon nonsatisfying as the widening of knowledge took place. The new curriculum bears in it the (post)*modernist* paradigm by the words of the group-leader V. Ruus). The second, humanistic idea of education was more the result of several teachers brainstormings, the integration of Western humanism and the tradition of everyday practice into the teachers activities, the analysis of educational situation and the qualitative modelling of possible ways how education could develop. As a result of this activity the "Education Platform" (in English : "Main Principles for the reorganization of the education in Estonia", 1989) was formed.

The suitability of the humanistic idea of education into Estonian educational thinking has been affirmed during the last couple of years by following the preferences of teachers alone. The pedagogical systems of Waldorf, Montessori, Freinet, pedagogy of activeness and Estonian schoolmasters J.Käis and P.Põlts have been used very extensively in a country as small as Estonia during the short period since their "first discovery or rediscovery". Their use is exemplified "clearly" (already 7 Waldorf-schools for this autumn) but especially in integration with traditional pedagogy in ordinary state-schools. The ideas of humanistic pedagogy turned out to be so familiar and self-evident that already the first short course was sufficient for more active teachers to achieve good and original results.

### 3. Sub problems.

#### 3.1. Curriculum.

The first curriculum variants provided for the legalisation and legitimisation of the situation whereby in Estonia in reality most schools already had either a humanitarian or science branch, specialised classes and all other things which elsewhere in the Soviet Union were a reality for only a negligible number of schools. The aim, clearly expressed at the first brainstorming, to decrease the students load and to differentiate the education, so as to give young people the opportunity to be engaged in the subjects according to their abilities and inclinations, was expressed in the first curriculum's projects which came into existence as a result of fierce disputes and great enthusiastic work. The differentiation of school-instruction at the secondary level into four branches with a class load of

31-33 hours per week and a tariff load of 56 hours per week was well acceptable by headmasters, teachers and others. It seemed also to be financially feasible. The general, humanities, scientific and vocational (teaching mostly practical skills like sewing, car driving, etc.) branches got their realisable form in May 1988, when the meeting of the headmasters of the Republic decided (on a voluntary basis) to start the next, 1988/89 school-year with teaching in branches (branch education). The right to decide whether to use branch education was given almost entirely to the schools as one of the last decisions of the Ministry of Education before it folded. In retrospective, it seems that greatly thanks to this decision the modernisation process of education continued in Estonia also in the following years. At the time when science and power could not find the best model for co-operation and development and occasionally the personal or administrative relations ruled over the interests of education, dozens of schools started with branch education - the voluntary and optional subjects became a reality.

##### 3.1.1. Subject programmes.

The new curriculum aroused momentarily the question of subjects. In some cases the teachers of voluntary and optional subjects, who mostly were enthusiasts in their field, used to non-standard activities, found themselves in less difficult situations than the teachers of traditional subjects whose hours of instructions were suddenly changed, the class in which their subject was taught shifted up or down, etc. The available All-Union subject programmes generally did not correspond to the changed direction in educational content, in terms of nationalism, sociality, democracy, humanitarianism and humanity.

Thus the next activities were directed towards developing new programmes and textbooks or formulating their conceptual basis, parallel to the continuing revision of the curriculum. One important idea was to include in this task teachers from schools, as we had the tradition of ÜPUI and the creative teachers with original thoughts were well known. This process was started, but after some time (a year) it seemed to dissipate into an avalanche of reorganisation.



### 3.1.2. Subject conceptions.

The road to the modernisation of education in Estonia might also be called the road of collective thought and conceptions. "Conception" was a popular word at that time - the development of the whole Estonia was projected into different conceptions which often were the results of one or two clever mens experiences and knowledge but usually the fruit of some organisation-technical activity (brainstorming, etc.) of a bigger group. The same situation prevailed in education, where the first brainstorming produced a vast amount of material, which gave the basis for the first conceptual approach, both towards education as a whole and the content of different school levels and subjects. The conception of every subject went through its own process of development which should be interesting and also necessary to document.

Especially during the subject conceptualisation, the path taken greatly affected the final result. In general the slogan of democracy was popular at the time, so the possibility to resist totalitarian centralisation in the sphere of subject teaching was one reason why school-teachers were massively persuaded to take part in formulating the subject purpose and compiling of programmes at least on the level of evaluation-discussion-experimentation. As most of the specialists in methodology and scientists leading these activities were lacking this type of experience, the results were often not as high as expected. If a new result was achieved through the contribution of teachers, the opposition of the current leaders in the subject became apparent. The reason for this was partly their desire to preserve their customary position, partly the inconvenience and unfamiliarity of the co-ordination process of teachers activities and their additional training. Only a few conceptions-programmes-textbooks succeeded in developing into usable form relying on contributions from school teachers. What kind of role they are playing in the process of evaluation of the curriculum and subject programmes at the moment is unknown to the author.

### 3.2. Continuing education (In-service teacher training)

The peculiarity of the teachers continuing education in Estonia in comparison with the Soviet Union or maybe also the arrangements of continuing education in other countries, was its systematisation and flexibility. Systematisation: Once every five years a teacher should go through a 4-week "pedagogical refreshment" which was always oriented towards the teachers current needs (considering that teachers experience rose and the knowledge of theory become dimmer): the programmes of psychology, pedagogy, the subject, experience based courses were compiled for every stage partly by scientists. For subject and methodology courses' contributions were made by subject methodology specialists and representatives of the appropriate University Chair. Flexibility: All bigger changes in programmes, the issuing of new textbooks and workbooks, the massive receipt of new experimental aids at schools (lasers for physics for example), etc. involved additional short courses for teachers. Additionally there was a quite exact orientation and wide grasp as well as close communication with the Inspector from the Ministry of Education, the specialist in methodology of the corresponding subject from the Continuing Institute and teachers of the subjects active group where one permanent representative from each county belonged, along with further active teachers. Those subject active groups organised Subject Days which united all teachers of the same particular subject and were responsible for hosting other events concerning that subject. As Estonia is a small country the two-three hundred teachers of the same subject for example knew each other and the officials who had held the same position for a long period knew lots of teachers.

At the beginning of the modernisation of schooling this system had evolved and reached "adulthood" - the phase system of courses included teachers with over 25 years of active experience, i.e. the first sixth phase course, the so-called course of pedagogical experience took place. The modernisation process brought some excitement into this system - people started discussing together the important questions for Estonian education on the whole: the new possible regulation of certification and payment for headmaster courses, the new extent and content of the subject at the subject courses, etc.

#### 3.2.1. Participation effect.



The beginning of the modernisation of schooling with brainstorming and other forms of group work gave new qualitative possibilities for continuing education. Essentially in many subjects and other groups a specific form of self-improvement took place. The teacher participated in understanding the previous experience, its analyses and evaluation on the basis of different criteria and models, the realisation and formulating of the needs of education, the raising-formulating of the new education goals and projecting the ways and means of their realisation which involved further experimentation and evaluation. Being at the same time in the role of projecting and implementing the important activities of education, the teachers activity got its motivation as self-improvement changed into a creative study process instead of the former passive "recipient state". The participation in projecting activity demanded from the teacher knowledge and abilities which had yet to be obtained (both theoretical, pedagogical and psychological, also subject and others, but also the planning, implementing and analysing of a correct experiment - for example during the evaluation of a new textbook or work instruction, etc.). This is the participation effect - gaining continuously new quality through the setting of important goals, projecting their fulfilment, implementing and evaluation of results and making corrections.

### 3.3. Physicists (teachers in physics, scientists interested in school physics).

(see also above.) The different visions and activity models of the people directly or indirectly connected with teaching physics could be the illustrative material of the whole modernisation process of education. On the one hand about half of the teachers, many physics students and a great scientific potentiality was included into the dynamic modernisation activity over several years along with its active, scientific, moral, social and financial side, on the other hand the practice of suppression, neutralisation and denial of this activity, yet dialogue was continually terminated despite all efforts to keep it in progress.

People from different levels have been motivated to collaborate on subject conception and - programmes as well as study-aids. Experiments in such motivation, until now, have been carried out in some regions of the United States to guarantee the revolutionary change in education, oriented towards the year 2000. During its six years of operation the School Physics Society has experimented many models and methods of activity, integrated the individuals intellectual potentiality with collective knowledge and determination, integrated different visions of specialists of different fields regarding children, their needs and abilities; about a teacher, his needs, abilities and creative potentiality; about the subject of physics, its scientific, general, cultural and national significance. On the basis of this activity the conception and programme of teaching physics has been formed, text-books, reading-books, new lab work and aids, etc. have been collectively compiled. The views of many teachers and scientists, also functionaries have been changed and issues for which physicists were severely criticised for some years ago are spoken about and acted upon self-evidently.

Now the School Physics Society has started its next round, giving expert evaluations to the prospective elementary school standard. First meetings on this topic have already shown that the humanistic ideas have become familiar and teachers are ready to find co-operation, but at the same time they stick to their principles formed as a result of collective activity and have received their justification in school-life.



### 3.4. Education Society.

The Education Society was formed, on the one hand, from the necessity to integrate the activity of teachers, educators, psychologists of different fields and progressive educational bureaucracy into the modernisation of schooling and to establish a centre for the school modernisation movement also in Tartu - the university town. On the other hand, the reason for founding the Education Society was to pressure the recently formed Education Committee onto the road of school modernisation and for monitoring its path. This task remained as its main purpose during its most active period. With the help of press, TV and Estonian Radio (among the journalists there were lots of people interested in the situation of education, who at the same time were very critically minded) the new Education Committee was pressured into a public discussion about the goals and plans of the Committees activity, which to some extent promoted the continuation of the modernisation movement and the extension of several operations in progress. However, the further result of this over exaggerated activity occurred in the beginning of the modernisation, and the gradual elimination of more active participants from the education scene followed throughout the endless formation of new structures.

The initiative group of the Education Society essentially consisted of the same people as the initiative group of the School Physics Society, but also included personalities from outside the education circle, among them representatives of religious circles. The proposal to found the Education Society came from physicists, the participants of the Chemistry Teachers Days joined it (January 1988, TRÜ). Today many societies and associations uniting people from different spheres of education have been formed. The Education Society did not become a stronghold for uniting all educational forces and today the organisation is dormant. Its founders - activists are absorbed here and there in other forms of collective activity (also in Parliament, but not in the field of general education).

### 3.5. Education Council.

A considerably small group of people from the Education Society, the School Physics Society, founders of the Education Platform, the leaders of non formal education reform (from VÕT and PTUI) and people from formative political movements were able to prepare and organise a venture which included about four thousand delegates from all over Estonia (schools, counties). Many resolutions and declarations on different current questions of general and education policy were prepared for the Forum:

DECLARATION of Estonian Education and Culture Forum

DECLARATION on education policy about the Russian speaking population in Estonian SSR

INQUIRY of Estonian Education and Culture Forum to the Kohtla-Järve party and executive committee

RESOLUTION on military service

REFERENCE to the SU CP CC full assembly(plenum) on questions of national policy

RESOLUTION on immigration

and others

At the Education and Culture Forum the Estonian Education Council was elected from two hundred candidates by direct votes using secret ballots.

From the Councils approximately 70 members, a board of directors was elected whose duty was the management, co-ordination and fulfilment of the Councils undertakings during the period between its full assemblies. Mr. Peeter Kreizberg was elected Chairman of the Education Council.



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As the body of the Education Council was big and with different interests, it in itself was not a very strong organisation. Often the interests of a particular person or school interfered over decisions on general education policy. However it gave the basis to some of the new organisations and activity programmes, and cast its own hue into the formation of education policy. Formally the work of the Education Council has not been stopped and one can argue about the validity of its legal powers. But the Board of the Education Council, in spite of the fact that most of its members have been away in connection with studies abroad, is still a capable authority and comes together once in a while to discuss current education policy and the situation of education and culture. Reflections of these discussions by members of the Board are revealed in press articles and presentations. Neither the Education Council nor its Board has presented any common statements during the last years.

#### 4. Conception of education. Education Platform.

What is meant by the above-mentioned terms, was accomplished as a result of previous activities in the modernisation of education accompanied with a concentration on the situation of education in Estonia and the whole world. So we can consider the whole modernisation period of education as a general preparative for the Education Platform. The real intensive forming and formulating of the written Platform took place by a small group of scientists and teachers in autumn 1988.

The first, analytical part of the Education Platform "*Educational Conditions in our Republic*" evaluated the educational situation in Estonia, emphasised the existing problems of that time, brought out pedagogical and instructional "borderlands" in education and real educational obstructions, etc. The next parts of the Education Platform are "*The Conception of Modernisation of Education*" and "*The Provisions for the Modernisation of Education*". The *democratisation, humanisation and evaluation of education* are the key-words of the paper.

The authors and people connected with forming the Platform hoped to gain a strong social resonance, essential discussion and the acceptance of the conceptual ideas of the modernisation of education among people involved with education. In 1989 the Teachers Conference took place which approved the Education Platform as the basis for the further modernisation of education. However the desired effect on existing education was not achieved. One of the reasons could be one of the virtues of the Education Platform - clear structure, its thesis form, laconic formulation. In this shape it is well usable for a reader who is thinking in the same context and has quite high scientific competence. The fast paced life of that period did not allow for extensive revision and popularisation. The second reason is undoubtedly a phenomenon, now referred to as post-sovietism with its different objective and subjective expressions that become strikingly evident especially in educational spheres (not recognising others, seeking the hidden enemy, hidden purpose and attempt to conserve secretly the traditional Soviet educational paradigm, etc.). At the same time, one of the reasons why this relatively silent circle established itself was the essential misunderstanding of the humanistic ideas of education which are massively included in the Education Platform. It was popular to speak about the humanisation and democratisation of education. What was the real meaning of these words and what kinds of processes were really behind them were not realised.



## **5. Education in Russian.**

In preparing reforms' people tried to find support, arguments and consequence with the Republic of Estonia especially at the end of the 80s, although also apparent in current reform. The education system and legislation of Estonia between the two World Wars have been considered to be as one of the most democratic ones in Europe at that time. Today one aspect of that legislation is important - already the presence of twenty people who desired education in a special language, generally their mother tongue, in a town or village obligated the local authorities to find a teacher for that language and guarantee the children the elementary education in it. Even if the legislation was not fully adhered to, schools in Russian, German, Jewish, Polish, Finnish, Latvian and Swedish existed in Estonia in the 30s. There were also Grammar schools. In light of this historical perspective it was natural that by guaranteeing ones national identity through education a cultured and loyal Estonian citizen would be the outcome. This idea was supported by papers on national psychology and the like published in the 1980s. In these works the prevailing common line is as follows: family - general education in mother tongue - existence of national culture - good knowledge in base national language, history, culture - cultural and national identity of every single person - the culture of base nationality - identity of a citizen - humanistic values.

One standpoint on the modernisation of education was that every child should ultimately be guaranteed whenever possible an education in its mother tongue and the formation of a national identity. It means education in the mother tongue at least at the elementary level and if feasible also on the secondary level. At the same time, achieving integration into Estonian culture should be provided by the school and those graduating secondary school should be capable of acquiring a higher education in Estonian. It means that Estonia should be a safe home for every single permanent resident also in the cultural meaning.

The Russian education and school leaders and most of the teachers in Estonia were, in spite of their very variegated social and educational personnel, ready to work according to the curricula and programmes used in Estonian schools and the textbooks translated from the Estonian language. The last point of view caused discussions several times, as the translated textbook bears the cultural insignia of the original language. The direction was clearly towards cultural autonomy. Today State and education policy differ from at that time naturally accepted directions (see also the Education Platform).

## **6. Comparison "The Idea and Activity in 89-90 and now in 93".**

Making this kind of comparison requires the study and analyses of today's educational situation as the changes in the leadership of education both on the State and local level have been cardinal. Sporadically their influence is demolishing, sporadically it enables the formation of a new quality. The real progress in education requires both the level of financial support received during the "Soviet time" and a new situation analysis. This is partly done in the "Democratisation and ..." mentioned above and from philosophical side - in P. Kreitzberg's "Legitimation of educational aims" (Lund, 1993)



## 7. Perspective outlook.

(Philosophical-lyrical retrospective on September 6-7, 1993.)

In 1987, a great emotional elevation occurred which had a synergical effect - thanks to the active participation of hundreds of people which permitted the integration and use of the Estonian "educational intellectual potentiality" in its relative variety in comparison to today.

/Today such co-operation has ceased - on the one hand, many reformers of that time have found different activities, often outside the field of education, on the other hand the lack of the uniting and organisational power, that many people endlessly are proving and arguing for their position and ideas due to the constantly changing superiors and restructured administrations, or have simply withdrawn into their daily work, having been convinced of the unprofitableness their efforts and experiences offer. For many people the games of politics and of knowledge from abroad seem to be bruising their personal or national dignity. The vivid uniting personality is missing in today's educational science, as the role played in the 80s by the academician Heino Liimets and in educational bureaucracy by Elsa Gretschkina despite her contradictions.

The situation could be compared by a fallow rested field which after the first slight cultivation gives a good crop for a couple of years even without fertilisation.

In the beginning the general analyses of the situation and the formulation of the most general directions of progress were important. This was the general view where mostly a common language was found, a common tonality attested. Surely even in the first analyses and conceptions there were hidden understandings, subconscious different approaches. If today we speak openly about the post socialism, positivism, then at that time in the first conceptional presentations and writings of education the Marxist conception of a man was still considered and the centrality of man was understood foremost as education by differentiation of subjects taking into consideration the different abilities of a child. Among teachers and education scientists another direction appeared - aimed towards the humanisation of education. The signs of this can be found both in the materials of brainstorming and for example in the objectives of school physics formulated by physicists, also in activities of the followers of J.Käis, etc.

This is as if we saw a big ramose tree from a distance, which class cannot be decided according to its top. When moving closer we will see that the thick top is held by two close stems. As both of them have their own rules and their own power for growing branches, these branches of different stems will unavoidably rub each other sooner or later. This tree with two stems is exciting and also practical in a small garden, but the gardener must be very talented to design and keep those two tops in balance, productive and beautiful.

The fact that in the beginning of the modernisation of education two directions - post socialist, post Marxist, positivistic on the one hand and humanistic, reformistic on the other hand figured together at the same time and often in the same working groups, in the same documents are in retrospect clearly seen. The existence of this deep internal and unrealised disagreement is likely one of the main reasons why the modernisation of education unravelled into internal confrontations and conflicts, and why the creation of a united conception bearing united ideals was unsuccessful.

Even the best aspirations revealed by every new leader of education petered out - dialogue cannot be started if the participants have not realised their differences and come to terms with their Tallinn Baccalaureate School her side.



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How nice would it be to grow both apples and pears on the same tree in a small garden - but this does not succeed. You graft a pear branch in an apple tree stem, it might even shoot forth the top of its leaves from its internal forces but it will not start growing. So both trees should be planted and taken care of. Both have to be guaranteed sufficient food for roots and sunlight for their tops.

Having another kind of education system and looking back over a couple of years, it seems that those two directions are clearly departed - positivistic and humanistic. In addition, also the post soviet education (and its science) has found possibilities for a cosy existence. Now the question arises whether the leaders of education and the representatives of both directions (positivistic and humanistic) themselves understand the multi-sided situation, whether the leaders are clever and moral enough to enable to find space for the growth of both directions, competent and objective enough for realising the disagreements and problems and for starting dialogue, strong internally in order to neutralise the post soviet blows both in educational science (pedagogy, psychology, etc.), practise and management. Last but not least, great self-conquest and freedom from complexes in order to recognise the wisdom budded from practical history and blood ties of its own educational people - teachers, educators, to listen, use and increase it.

There is another very simple way how to get rid of all disagreements and problems at least outwardly - if I do not manage with my garden, I will call "a skilled gardener" and let him pound about - then only the question rises - is this still my garden if beloved flowers are in the other places and my grandfathers tree is without half of its branches or is completely uprooted. The garden can also be sold.

Maybe it is still better to be the gardener of our garden ourselves - study from the gardeners in the South and North but to cultivate our garden with our hands and spirit.

#### **Some explanations to the readers outside education circle.**

Estonians believe themselves to be a nation who loves education throughout centuries. There have always been people both in the countryside and towns who have tried to get knowledge from the literate and those who even have taught their children to read in secret. The foundation of peasants schools in villages and the first teachers seminar centuries ago during the serfdom is the external proof of this statement. The deeper proof for me is the fact that literacy did not die out even when the village schools of the mother tongue were forbidden for a long period and knowledge and literacy was transmitted only at homes mostly by the distaff side. Also the Russian school of the tsarist time could not totally force the mother tongue education into a corner.

Up to the re-independence of Estonia, the education system of Estonia was a part of the education system of the Soviet Union, characterised by strong centralisation, pyramidal management hierarchy. As a rule, in each field the dictator was some office or organisation in Moscow, foremost the All-Union Ministry of Education and All-union Academy of Pedagogy. The Ministry ordered from the Academy (ideologically recognised or met the sympathy of the leaders), its departments, laboratories, institutes the suggestions, instructions, programmes, etc. and after the processing and approval of the offices of the Ministry, it established them as all-union programme documents throughout the Soviet Union.



Some explanations of abbreviations and terms.

VÕT - Vabariiklik Õpetajate Täiendusinstituut - The Republican Teachers Continuing Institute - The Institutes activity can be characterised as applied arts. It was leading the working teachers self-improvement and had a kind of scientific potentiality. In addition to the teachers regular continuing education - 4-week courses once per five years that were organised by specialists in methodology and scientists of VÕT - the continuous work with the teachers and headmasters of different school types, subjects, etc., the distribution of operational information to the local (towns, counties) education officers about the new directions in pedagogy - psychology but foremost in the education policy of the Soviet Union and the Republic were amongst its duties. For example introducing the new text-books, new subject programmes, additional schooling to the teachers without pedagogical preparations or teachers who taught other subjects than their profession, etc. As Estonia is a relatively small country then the connections between many workers of VÕT and their subordinate counties, schools, teachers were often very close and direct.

VÕT was directly subordinate to the Ministry of Education of the Estonian SSR, usually to the Minister or one Vice-minister. Several voluntary (integrative) groups existed which included representatives from different levels of the hierarchy, for example Subject Commissions, etc. Liquidated in 1989.

PTUI - Pedagoogika Teadusliku Uurimise Instituut - The Institute of Scientific Research of Pedagogy - the most important accomplisher and director of pedagogy and subject methodology in the ESSR. Liquidated.

In addition to PTUI pedagogy was also centralised into the Tartu State University (the chair of pedagogy, chairs of psychology, etc.) and Tallinn Pedagogical Institute - teachers were prepared in both institutions.

"Nõukogude Õpetaja" ("Soviet teacher") - now "Õpetajate Leht" ("Teachers news") - the weekly newspaper of education workers.

The Teachers Congress of Estonian SSR, The Conference of Estonian Education Workers - the forums of teachers and education workers, usually once per five years where representatives were delegated to make common decisions on education (during the Soviet time - for "approval" of ideological directions).

ÜPUI - Ühiskondlik Pedagoogika Uurimise Instituut - The Institute of Voluntary Pedagogical Research - at VÕT - during thirty years it united several hundred active teachers from Estonia who acquired (free of charge) the basic rules of scientific research and were besides the practical schoolwork engaged into scientific research in such fields as the history of Estonian school, didactics, subject methodology, psychology, etc. In peril of liquidation at the moment.

Regular continuing courses - compulsory, free of charge, theoretical-practical courses, lasting three to four weeks per teacher, once every five year, organised by VÕT.

Thinking bees - Form of organising collective thinking with the help of changing group and groups sessions, this is utilisable for various objectives (from analyses of situation to the activity of projecting).

EHA - Eesti Hariduse Arenduskeskus - the Development Centre of Estonian Education - the centre dealing with the reorganisation of the continuing education and education, established in place of VÕT in 1989. Liquidated in 1993.