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EUGENE MATUSOV

Interview with Igor Solomadin

Eugene Matusov (EM): Some of my colleagues in the West cannot believe that “simple teachers” can be respected scholars. The fact that you are such an unusual phenomenon is one reason it is so important to describe your work in the School of the Dialogue of Cultures (SDC) pedagogical community.

Igor Solomadin (IS): We were just lucky. We interacted with famous Soviet philosophers, psychologists, and educators: Bibler, Davydov, Repkin, Ilyenkov, Mamardashvili, Elkonin—the list goes on. These are the most outstanding scholars in our field. And we had an interesting status at the time we started our work—that of “teacher-experimenter.”

Kharkov’s School no. 4 was considered experimental, it was where the program for Developmental Instruction using the system developed by D.B. Elkonin, V.V. Davydov, and V.V. Repkin was being worked out. Within the school there was a laboratory to study the problems of educational psychology for young schoolchildren that was headed by Feliks Grigor’evich Bodansky, who himself was a former teacher of mathematics and history. Bodansky defended his dissertation in pedagogical psychology and, together with Repkin, a follower of A.N. Le-

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Translated by Nora Seligman Favorov.

ontiev, organized this laboratory based at our school in affiliation with Kharkov Pedagogical Institute (at first the laboratory was located at School no. 17, then, when it was closed, moved to High School no. 4). So at the same time we were considered teachers at the school and researchers at the pedagogical institute. The entire experimental program was headed by professor and doctor of psychological sciences Davydov, who had by then been appointed director of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, Institute of General and Pedagogical Psychology in Moscow. This was the primary institute in the Soviet Union working on pedagogical psychology. As teacher-experimenters, we had to design and conduct our own lessons in collaboration with scholars, who even sat at the back of the classroom to observe our lessons—and later we ourselves sat at the back of the classroom as observers and mentors and began to nurture the next generation of teachers. We then wrote reports to the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences and presented papers at academic councils. This was an attempt to construct a new pedagogical psychology and the “school of the future.” Thanks to Davydov’s close personal relationship with certain “liberals” in the Communist Party’s Central Committee, this experiment had the support of the government. True, all this work was carried out in the context of a fierce struggle with “conservatives” from that same Central Committee, which strove to close down the experiment as it did not serve their purposes. Its purpose was nicely expressed by the philosopher Evald Ilyenkov in his noted manifesto: “School Must Teach Children to Think.”

Since then, things have fundamentally changed. First of all, there is no longer a Soviet Union, and now we and our Moscow colleagues live in separate countries. Second, today Ukraine, in my opinion, has no a state policy for the development of education. (I almost wanted to add “regrettably,” but I wonder if we really need to regret the absence of the state interference in education?!)

EM: Igor, please tell us when, where, by whom, and under what circumstances the SDC was begun; what events led to its inception?

IS: Okay, let’s begin from the beginning. For me, everything began when I became acquainted with the works of L.S. Vygotsky.

I first learned about them in the 1970s. At the time, I was finishing up my undergraduate degree in history at Kharkov University and had the good fortune to hear lectures by Galina Vladimirovna Repkina in psychology courses. Two years later, by now a teacher at a school in Kharkov, I found out about an approach that was new to me—Developmental Instruction, or, as it later came to be called, the Elkonin-Davydov-Repkin system. At the time, Repkin was living and working in Kharkov and frequently lectured teachers on the development of personality and on the theory and practice of education. It was because of Repkin’s entertaining lectures that I remembered Vygotsky’s name. Soon afterward I managed to buy *Thought and Language*, which had been published in 1934, in a bookstore selling rare books, and to become better acquainted with the ideas of this remarkable scholar. As a humanitarian, I was particularly interested in the final chapter, chapter 7—“Thought

and Word”—in which Vygotsky wrote about the problem of inner speech. This chapter left me with a feeling of something unfinished, and here Vygotsky himself was different than in the preceding chapters of this marvelous book. Here he very aptly brought up the texts of Nikolai Gumilev and Osip Mandelstam—as we know, at the time of the Stalinist purges when this book was published, anyone quoting these poets was simply putting his life in jeopardy. The pages of this final chapter resonated with the voices of Lev Tolstoy, Fedor Dostoevsky, Gleb Uspensky. . . . Later I learned that specifically this project had remained unrealized by Vygotsky’s disciples and followers, but more about that a little later.

What Repkin talked about in his lectures was very different from what was happening in the school where I worked. I was gripped with a desire to change the situation. In articles about Developmental Instruction that were then coming out not only in scholarly publications but also in popular ones, there seemed to me to be a call for a revolutionary change, and not just in education, but in the whole society. (The conservatives in the Central Committee had reason to worry!) Then, at the very height of the Brezhnev era, the infamous period of “stagnation,” it seemed that by radically changing the school, education overall, it would be possible to change society. The thought was always with me that there were two parallel worlds: the world of the ordinary school routine that prepared those who would be obediently subordinate to the will of others (“functionaries” and “subordinates”) and an ideal world of people acting with awareness and a sense of responsibility—“subjects of activity,” “personalities.” Back then, I did not distinguish these concepts very clearly. The gap between these two worlds was hard to endure. I was tormented by the question: how can this be overcome? What has to be done? Fortunately, I was not alone in my quest. My university friend, the philologist Veniamin Litovsky, who knew the history of the Russian Revolution well and despised Stalinism with the ardor of youth, also felt that for change to take place in education in what was then still the Soviet Union, we had to turn to the works of psychologists and pedagogues of the 1920s and 1930s.

As I mentioned above, in Kharkov the pedagogical institute had a laboratory working on educational psychology. One of its young researchers, Sergey Kurganov, who at the same time was working as a math teacher, introduced Litovsky and me to a book by the philosopher V.S. Bibler, *Thinking as Creation: Introduction to the Logic of Mental Dialogue* [Myshlenie kak tvorchestvo. Vvedenie v logiku myslennogo dialoga], which had been published in Moscow in 1975. At the very beginning of the book, to get the readers thinking along the right lines, Bibler quotes Feuerbach, Ukhtomsky, Pasternak, Bakhtin, Kant, Vygotsky, Heisenberg, and Nikolai Kuzansky [Nicholas of Cusa]. In particular, Bibler quoted the following by Vygotsky: “Language reveals its true being only in dialogue. . . . In inner speech the word dies away and gives birth to thought.”*

This book by Bibler, which is purely philosophical and not easy to understand,

*This wording is taken from L.S. Vygotsky, *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky: Vol. 1: Thinking and Speech*, trans. N. Minick (New York: Plenum Press, 1987), p. 280.—Trans.

sparked our interest in the form of a kind of intuitive premonition—what was being talked about here was the logic and ways of thinking that were needed to lay the groundwork for a new approach to education. One chapter of this book was titled “Inner Speech ‘as Open Text’ (Relating Hegel to Vygotsky)” [Vnutrenniaia rech’ “otkrytyim tekstom” (esli sootnesti Gegelia i Vygotskogo)]. Reading and discussing Bibler’s book and an urgent desire to put into practice something that we ourselves had just come to understand (or rather, that we were only beginning to understand) led to the formation of a small, but rather active, circle that included the three of us and a young physicist who has since become a prominent scholar and doctor of physical and mathematical sciences, Valery Aleksandrovich Iampol’sky. Bibler’s book inspired us not only to look critically at traditional educational practice but also to rethink the theory and practice of an opposing approach that was new and very appealing to me—Developmental Instruction, which was then being developed both by Vygotsky’s immediate disciples (D.B. Elkonin, for example) and by the disciples of Vygotsky’s disciples and comrades in arms—Davydov and Repkin. These people had studied with such outstanding scholars as A.N. Leontiev, A.R. Luria, P.Ia. Galperin, P.Ia. Zinchenko, A.V. Zaporozhets, and others comprising the nucleus of the psychological school that is often called the Moscow-Kharkov School. These were brilliant, profound, and authoritative scholars. As I said, I saw their ideas as revolutionary. However, in the book by the philosopher Bibler we saw something that we did not see in the works of these outstanding psychologists—a focus on Vygotsky’s ideas concerning inner speech and their connections with the ideas of Hegel and Bakhtin.

I want to emphasize that Davydov made possible both our personal acquaintance and subsequent work with Bibler: at first he introduced Bibler and Sergey Kurganov, and Kurganov arranged for Litovsky and me to meet Vladimir Solomonovich (Bibler). This meeting led to new contacts that changed my life and the lives of my colleagues in many ways. In 1986—again, thanks to Sergey Kurganov—I became acquainted with a Moscow teacher of English language and literature named Vitaly Makhlin. Vitaly was a profound and fantastically energetic researcher of the legacy of M.M. Bakhtin. Now Makhlin is a doctor of philosophical sciences, a professor at Moscow Pedagogical University, and one of the world’s leading authorities on Bakhtin and his cultural context. It was Vitaly who brought me into the international world of Bakhtin studies, into the very furnace of what later would be referred to ironically as the “Bakhtin industry.”

For me, the SDC began around 1986 when Bibler made his project public. Before that we had been talking about “educational dialogue within learning activity” [i.e., they used the Developmental Instruction terminology]. Bibler was working at the time in Davydov’s institute and we held meetings there that were participated in by the psychologist Irina Berlyand and the philosopher Anatoly Akhutin—Bibler’s disciples and close comrades in arms and participants in the seminars he held in his home.

EM: What were the political, pedagogical, and social circumstances and contexts that influenced the founding of the SDC?

IS: I can only outline my own individual context, and my perspective is bound to be somewhat subjective. I can't pretend to give an exhaustive answer. I presume that my colleagues would answer this question differently.

This may appear a bit oversimplified, but for me, modern education can be boiled down to three main strategies, which I categorize based on what *type of thinking* shapes the school.

So, I identify three strategies:

- traditional instruction;
- developmental instruction; and
- dialogic instruction.

Now I will attempt to briefly describe my understanding of these strategies based on my experience, that is, the experience of what was Soviet and is now post-Soviet education in Ukraine and Russia. However, I presume that these strategies, as models of modern education, can be applied universally.

The first approach—*traditional instruction*—is aimed at the formation of knowledge, abilities, and skills. Children are taught to observe certain norms, rules, and skills. Here, the type of thinking that is formed is what Hegel called *the classification**—thinking aimed at separating out, registering, and describing the results of sensory experience. This type of thinking is called *empirical* [in Davydov's framework]. Empirical knowledge is worked out by comparing objects and ideas about them. Comparison identifies formal properties objects have in common, knowledge of which makes it possible to place objects in a particular class. Empirical knowledge is recorded in words, in terminology. This type of thinking is essential to literate agents, people whose activities involve established rules.

The second approach—*developmental instruction*—is aimed at the formation of the type of thinking that Hegel called *reason*. This thinking is oriented toward discovering the essence of objects and the inner laws of their development. The eminent Russian psychologist Davydov labeled this type of thinking *theoretical*. Davydov compared and described the features of empirical and theoretical thinking and demonstrated that theoretical thinking can be formulated even by young schoolchildren.

In order to illustrate the difference between these two types of thinking, I will give the following example. In one of the psychological experiments conducted by the Russian psychologist Diana Bogoiavlenskaia, subjects were given problems

*The Russian terms *rassudochnyi* (adj.) and *rassudok* (n.)—literally, “making judgments”—does not have an exact equivalent in English; it can be translated as “common sense,” “classification thinking,” or “surface thinking”; in the philosophical tradition described by Solomadin, it has a rather negative connotation.—Eds.

that demanded creative thinking. The problems were selected so that they could all be solved by applying the same principle, but it was not obvious and could be found only with considerable effort. However the experimenters did not demand that the subjects necessarily find the hidden common principle—they just asked them to solve the problems. The experimenter could show subjects several examples of how to solve such problems. What was special about this experiment was that subjects could take as long as they wanted to solve the problems. They could even continue to solve the problems at home and then, several days later, contact the experimenters.

Over the course of the experiment, there turned out to be three types of subjects. The first type was limited to those who had repeated the techniques shown by the experimenters, were thanked for participating, and felt that their job was done. The experimenters labeled this type of solution *reproductive*. People of the second type, with the benefit of techniques shown by the experimenters, independently found several ways of solving the problems, even though they had not been specially asked to do so—these people were just interested in finding new ways. After this, they also considered their mission complete. This type of solution was called *heuristic*. Finally, there were some who could find no peace until they had found a common principle for solving all problems of this type. They left, but then sometime later they returned and offered their own solution based on a common principle that they themselves had discovered. They were now able, using the principle they had discovered, to devise the same sort of problem. This type of solution was called *creative*.

It was an important element that the experimenters gave each group of subjects the same external motivation. But during the experiment it turned out that inner motivations were different. I believe that Developmental Instruction, as conceived and designed by Soviet psychologists, presumes learning conditions best suited to the formation of what has been labeled here as the “creative” type of thinking. This requires the psychological personality trait of reflectivity of thinking, that is, the ability to critically evaluate one’s own activity and go beyond the limits inherent in external conditions and assign oneself new goals and seek ways of achieving them. The authors of developmental instruction have based their system on Hegel’s logic of concept development and on Karl Marx’s theory of objective activity. These philosophical foundations were rethought and worked out in the writings of the eminent Soviet philosopher Ilyenkov. Davydov, Elkonin, and Repkin essentially constructed a new pedagogical psychology and educational theory. Learners’ appropriation of content-generalizing ways (principles) became the goal of instruction in this educational system.

Finally, the third educational approach, which I will call a *dialogic* approach, is aimed at devising a learning system that permits children’s “selfness” to be manifested and retained, their uniqueness and unrepeatability, their unsubstitutable positions in the world. This strategy is founded on the ideas of the remarkable

Russian thinkers Bakhtin and Ukhtomsky and the philosophical and culturological ideas of such poets as Boris Pasternak, Osip Mandelstam, Nikolai Gumilev, Marina Tsvetaeva, Velemir Khlebnikov, Anna Akhmatova. . . . It is no coincidence that these Russian poets happen to share oeuvres, thinking, and life stories that personify the idea of a higher value—the uniqueness of the human personality. I would say, as Bakhtin would express it, that the idea-person is embodied in the conditions of totalitarian state power and in the apparent absolute impossibility of expressing one’s own personal, responsible, vision of the world. I wonder if the value of Russian twentieth-century culture consists in its ability to show the rest of the world that individual, personal creation is indeed possible under conditions of its total impossibility.

EM: What was the initial goal of the SDC? How has it changed, and why?

IS: The initial goal of the SDC project is described in its “Program Foundations,” which are being published in this journal.* This goal still applies. It is another matter that actual conditions in schools have influenced how the SDC principles are being put into practice. In my view this is associated with the fact that, in order to be realized, the project required a special school, organized in a very particular way. There were precedents for such experimental schools in the Soviet Union. For example, Davydov managed to create a special school no. 91 in Moscow where the idea of DI [Developmental Instruction] was worked out. In our school no. 4 in Kharkov, not all classes were using the DI system. As far as SDC experimental schools are concerned, attempts to open such a school in Moscow were not successful. The most comprehensive version was achieved in Krasnoyarsk, where, on the initiative of Georgy Petrovich Shchedrovitsky, Kurganov was invited to work at the school being used as a model experimental school under the auspices of Krasnoyarsk University (Isaak Frumin, director). It was Kurganov, in essence, who carried out a pedagogical feat—he put the SDC into practice in grades one through ten (1987–97), and he was in charge of a class himself, taught several subjects (mathematics and Russian literature), designed programs, and conducted research. Every year, during winter and summer breaks, we got together in Moscow and discussed the work Kurganov was doing in Krasnoyarsk. Irina Berlyand traveled to attend Kurganov’s classes several times and was able to analyze his experience in situ first hand. Furthermore, at times this work generated heated polemics with representatives of DI and the methodologists of G.P. Shchedrovitsky’s school—Petr Shchedrovitsky and Yury Gromyko and their Krasnoyarsk colleagues. It is interesting that, although Bibler and G.P. Shchedrovitsky were not like-minded, it was Shchedrovitsky who took an active part in organizing practical experimental work of the SDC project at this time. I think that was because at the time, the

*See *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, vol. 47, no. 1 (January–February 2009), pp. 34–60.

twilight of the Soviet Union, the Soviet intelligentsia had high hopes that it would be possible and necessary to actively change the social and intellectual situation, starting with problems in education.

After Kurganov left for Krasnoyarsk, I conducted an ongoing seminar for young teachers who wanted to master the SDC conception. We met in the city's Palace of Students and organized an extracurricular humanities center that children from a number of Kharkov schools attended. This is how our new pedagogical practice gradually started.

But then came the collapse of the Soviet Union, and, as strange as it may sound, at first we did not even notice. But gradually changes made themselves known. New types of schools started to appear—private lyceums, gymnasiums. In addition to the standard public school programs, we now had the option of designing new “author programs.”* This phenomenon was called “the school component.”

In the early 1990s I was expecting a new governmental education policy to emerge. After all, so much effort had been expended on developing foundational ideas dating back to the second half of the 1980s: seminars, organizational-activity simulating games, temporary academic collectives, progressive administrative experiments by such prominent scholars as Aleksandr Asmolov, Eduard Dneprov, the Eureka pedagogical movement. . . . We also actively participated in many of these things. But, it seems, politicians had other things on their minds. The intensive redistribution of property, privatization, and the like got under way. This is what led to the emergence of private schools.

In 1992, the new private Ochag** Gymnasium was founded in Kharkov by new-wave pedagogues Evgeny Medresh and Vadim Levin (a remarkable poet and children's literature scholar). At first, there was an attempt to enable people in the arts who already had their own ideas to work in this gymnasium and also young teachers who wanted to learn to work on a humanistic footing. There was no common ideology beyond a humane attitude toward children and the desire to develop their creative abilities. Teachers who already knew about the SDC came to this new nonstate school (one of the first in Ukraine). There were trips back and forth to Moscow, to Bibler's seminars. It should be said that these were truly outstanding seminars—Culturological Studies that brought together teachers from the entire former Soviet Union. Beside Bibler, outstanding scholars such as S.S. Averintsev, A.Ia. Gurevich, L.M. Batkin, S.S. Neretina, A.V. Akhutin, Yuri Shichalin, and the film director Yuri Norshtein appeared there (I am sorry I cannot name them all). In terms of content, these gatherings were truly unique.

Among those attending the Culturological Studies and volunteering at the extra-

*This seems similar to charter schools in the United States, although U.S. charter schools remain public.—Eds.

**The Russian word *ochag* translates literally as “hearth.” It is used figuratively to denote a source and center of life, a breeding ground, and a unifying force.—Trans.

curricular humanities center were Kharkov pedagogues who had come to the Ochag Gymnasium—Vladimir Osetinsky, Elena Donskaia, Nataliya Khristenko, Nataliya Perskaya. . . . At Ochag, these teachers organized a creative humanities education laboratory that was headed by Osetinsky. Together we discussed theoretical and practical problems and designed curricula based on SDC ideas. Officially, I was working somewhere else—at the Polytechnic University—but it was at Ochag where the new SDC began to be put into practice.

In 1995 I received an individual Fulbright research grant in “Humanities Thinking and Its Potential as an Education Medium” and I set out for the United States, where I worked in the archives of an outstanding scholar of “dialogic thought”—Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy—at the Dartmouth College. This topic was suggested by Caryl Emerson, a Bakhtinian philologist scholar and professor of Slavic languages and literatures at Princeton University. We had often met in Moscow at Bakhtin seminars and conferences. Caryl familiarized me with U.S. perceptions and interpretations of Bakhtin.

When I returned home, I made the decision to work full-time at Ochag. During the summer of 1996, Sergey Kurganov (who was in Kharkov over his summer break) and I wrote a proposal titled, “Person of Culture: Innovations in Humanities Education.” This proposal was funded by the Soros Foundation (the Ukrainian branch of their Renaissance Foundation). My Ochag colleagues offered me the opportunity to head the dialogic humanities education laboratory. We started to realize this project, and worked on it for almost ten years, creating and perfecting an integrated humanities curriculum. The results of this project are described in part in articles in this journal (Solomadin, Kurganov, Osetinsky). What we were doing was not exactly what Bibler had envisioned, but without his inspirational ideas, our work would simply not have been possible. In other words, working with the ideas of Bibler’s SDC project, we succeeded in building a realistic program of integrated humanities education that met the approval of experts from the Soros Foundation, the gymnasium’s administration, and the parents of our pupils.

EM: Who opposes the SDC and why? With whom is the SDC engaged in debate, and why? Who are the allies of the SDC, and why?

IS: A very strong and productive opponent is DI. In the late 1980s and early 1990s there was a pedagogical movement called Eureka. It came up with a marvelous idea for dialogue between pedagogical cultures. Teachers who came to Eureka to take courses were able to “go through” DI, SDC, Waldorf pedagogy, A. Tubel’sky’s school of student self-definition. This living experiment was compared and analyzed. Educators were able to select their own “development trajectory.”

Now we are learning things we did not know before, for example, the pedagogy of Paulo Freire. Fortunately, it turns out that we are not the only ones using the dialogue approach in education. When I was in the United States I learned of a very

interesting experiment by the teacher David Millstone, who for several years had been carrying out the Odyssey Project he designed in a primary school in Norwich, Vermont (David H. Millstone, *An Elementary Odyssey. Teaching Ancient Civilization Through Story* [Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995]). Quite recently I became familiar with works by authors in the United Kingdom and the United States about the use of dialogue in education. A brief list would include John Shotter, Department of Communication at the University of New Hampshire; Rupert Wegerif, Centre for Language and Communications, Faculty of Education and Language Studies, Open University, London; and Nicholas C. Burbules, Department of Educational Policy Studies, College of Education, University of Illinois. These are just a few of the authors with whose works I have recently become acquainted. All of them apply Vygotsky's ideas and relate them to the issue of dialogue and Bakhtin's ideas, although they do not always identify what they are doing as the cultural-historical approach.

I think that the SDC's allies are those educators oriented toward developing the unique and unrepeatable personality of the child, developing the ability to "work with complexity." This is almost an exact quote from a book I read recently, by Stanford University professor Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, that unravels the modern condition and future of university education in an age where the development of new communications technology raises questions about the very need to have direct communication between teachers and students and talks about "risky thinking," about individual "encounters with complexity," about the need to address "unresolved problems" (Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004], pp. 130–31). Gumbrecht bases his thinking on the ideas of Wilhelm von Humboldt (1810) about the development of the university. Here, I find direct ties with what the SDC is doing. Unfortunately, a disconnect still exists between the school and the university, a disconnect between scholarship and practical pedagogy. The modern school (not only in Eastern Europe) is in many ways still identified with primitive scholasticism, based on the assumption that real life begins "somewhere out there" and "later" [i.e., outside of the school, when school is finished]. The SDC represents a different way of looking at it, that children's lives should be full and complete from the very start of their school life "here and now." And this idea about a full and complete life incorporates not only play and sport but also creative thinking and activity in a variety of life spheres.

EM: What milestones have there been in the development of the SDC? What have been the greatest successes and failures? When was the peak of the SDC and why (or is it still ahead)? Why do you and Sergey Kurganov consider the SDC to be a phenomenon of perestroika?

IS: I am not sure I want to venture a history of the SDC, but I will attempt to identify certain periods with the qualification that my perspective might not match

those of my colleagues. Maybe your questions and my attempts to respond will serve as a kind of catalyst for us in making sense of our experiences.

For me, the “prehistory” of the SDC was associated with conducting a new type of lessons—“dialogue lessons.” In the late 1970s, when Sergey Kurganov was serving as a rank-and-file Soviet soldier in the “occupying” army on the territory of Hungary, he wrote us letters with his theoretical thoughts that Veniamin Litovsky and I spent a long time discussing. We were then working as teachers in absolutely ordinary, huge Soviet schools in newly built neighborhoods. There were about forty-five children in each class. How could dialogue lessons be managed under such conditions? But we were young and, perhaps, naive, so we found ways—discussion circles, theatrical studios, or we just got together with our pupils in someone’s home.

I would call this period “dialogue as a form of learning.” In organizing and conceiving our experiment, we relied primarily on terminology rooted in Elkonin, Davydov, and Repkin’s Developmental Instruction.

Around 1982–83 substantive and frequent meetings with Bibler started. Vladimir Solomonovich brought his views into our discussion about dialogue lessons and invited us to participate in the seminar he held in his home, which included some top culturologists and philosophers. By then, Bibler had already written some of the things about SDC that would be published in 1986.

Between 1982–83 and 1987 was a time when the practice of dialogue lessons was reexamined and a new paradigm was adopted—Bibler’s philosophical logic of culture and the SDC project based on it. Kurganov’s book *The Child and the Adult in Learning Dialogue* [Rebenok i vzroslyi v uchebnom dialoge]—which was published in Moscow in 1989 with a huge print run of 100,000—was an outcome of this experience.

During the period from 1987 to 1996–97, Sergey Kurganov realized his project in Krasnoyarsk and described it in a series of publications, and we acquired the “Krasnoyarsk experience,” which became quite well known. This is the period when the book *The School of the Dialogue of Cultures: Ideas, Experience, Prospects* [Shkola dialoga kul’tur: Idei. Opyt. Problemy], which Bibler edited, was written and prepared for publication. It included our writings and the writings of our Moscow colleagues. It is worth noting that this book was published by a private publisher with the support of the young pedagogue-turned-entrepreneur, D.V. Dubikovsky from the Siberian city of Kemerovo. It was he who organized the entire series The Philosopher’s, Psychologist’s, and Pedagogue’s Library, which published the SDC program, the psychological premises of the SDC, and other works.

In Kharkov during these years we were training teachers and laying the experimental groundwork to put the ideas of the SDC into practice. Rather lengthy negotiations were taking place with the Soviet educational authorities, the Eureka movement was engaged in intense activity, and there was a steady flow of coverage in the press and on television in Moscow and Kharkov. Perhaps this

was the stormiest and most complicated period. It was exactly then that the Ochag Gymnasium opened (in the 1992–93 academic year). What made this period so complicated was that the Soviet Union was no more, just as many familiar things were no more, and now we had to learn to live under new conditions. For example, now we had the problem of changing jobs—switching from a public school to a private one. For people in the West, it is probably hard to imagine the worries this entailed for someone who grew up in the Soviet Union. But this was a time when old barriers were coming down. For me personally, this meant the opportunity for a first-hand acquaintance with the West—in 1994 I crossed the border of the former Soviet Union for the first time and found myself in Italy at a conference devoted to Russian philosophy, where substantial attention was devoted to Bakhtin. In 1995, a very imposing international conference dedicated to the 100th anniversary of Bakhtin’s birth, was held. I was entrusted with the psychology-pedagogy section, which was also very nontraditional—after all, Bakhtin’s legacy had then been almost entirely “privatized” by philologists. In early 1996 I made it all the way to the United States, where, toward the end of my tenure there, I left quaint New England for New York to attend the AERA [American Educational Research Association] annual meeting, where I met Eugene Matusov at a session devoted to Vygotsky. I was stunned by the intensity of interest in the legacy of this Russian scholar. Eugene introduced me to colleagues from different countries—Japan, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands—who were also participating in the AERA. After the presentations, we spent a long time in little restaurants in Greenwich Village talking about Vygotsky and Bakhtin. These encounters and the friendly conversations about professional interests were incredibly energizing: I wanted to hurry home and get to work. As one Central Committee activist put it in the twilight of the Soviet Union: “It would be damn good to get some work done around here!” This, of course, sounds a bit affected now and is hard to remembering without smiling.

I think that 1987 to 1996–97 was the period of the practical introduction of the SDC in education, in a sense, the “expansion” of the SDC into the life of the general education school. Back then, I did not really understand that the “romantic” period was over and life was becoming crueler and more pragmatic.

From 1996–97 to 2007 we had good working years in the Ochag gymnasium. In 1997–98, we were happy to have Sergey Kurganov return to Kharkov and a rather sound and interesting situation took shape: Sergey took first grade and the colleagues, mentioned above, and I worked with the middle and older grades. We got together about once a week to plan and discuss our lessons and culturological, philosophical, and psychological challenges. In that time, Kurganov managed to “produce” three wonderful classes. One of them left the confines of Ochag in 2007, and the second—current ninth-graders and fifth-graders—are still learning. As for me personally, in 1998 my second daughter, Tanya, was born. At age five she became Kurganov’s pupil, and, consequently, one of the “heroines” of his remarkable pedagogical prose. Now Tanya is in the fifth grade, so I can observe the “fruits of

enlightenment” not only in the laboratory, but in my own home. On that subject, I will note that it is specifically in the genre of “pedagogical prose”—at which Sergey is such a master—that the SDC experience is perhaps most vividly and interestingly described. The books that he and I have written together are eagerly published by our great friend, the Russian-Ukrainian journalist Andrei Rusakov, who has done so much to spread the SDC idea.

Unfortunately, during that period we suffered a great loss—in June 2000, Vladimir Solomonovich Bibler passed away. After the funeral we gathered for a commemorative evening in the Moscow Culturological Lyceum. A video recording was played of the philosopher Bibler analyzing pupils’ compositions, arguing, explaining something in great detail. . . . Later an audio cassette was played with Vladimir Solomonovich reciting his poetry. It was the first time I had heard Bibler read his verse.

One outcome of our work at Ochag was the book *The Learning Process in the School of the Dialogue of Cultures* [Uchebnyi protsess v shkole dialoga kul'tur], published in Moscow in 2004 as part of the series School Director Library Journal. The director of our gymnasium, Evgeny Medresh, helped publish this collective work, for which he wrote the foreword and several chapters.

A new period began for me in 2007–8. I will try to explain what was new about it.

First of all, a rather extensive practical and theoretical body of experience had been acquired that needed to be made sense of in a painstaking, unhurried manner.

Second, this “making sense,” in my view, needed to take place within the context of the development of the ideas and practice of dialogic education throughout the world, something we have little knowledge of at this point. And so, we ourselves need to make a detailed study of what is being done in areas close to us and impart our own experience “Urbi et Orbi.”*

Third, for me personally, as an SDC educator and researcher and the subject teacher, of a course that I devised myself—History of World Culture [see this issue of the journal] it is important to understand what I can do in this new situation—post–Orange Revolution in Ukraine. To be honest, I do not have any of the sorts of illusions I harbored during perestroika. I nevertheless feel optimistic in the sense that Ukraine is forever leaving the close embrace of the empire (an embrace that was still felt during the sixteen years since independence) and will begin to develop as a European state. I hope that humanistic principles will take root in our daily life. In any event, the practice of recent years convinces me of this. This year I began a new project. In essence, it consists in bringing my pupils into direct contact with the creators of modern culture—both Russian and Ukrainian. To my delight and surprise it turns out that language and cultural barriers are ever diminishing. With great interest, our pupils interact with young (but already rather well-known)

*Literally “to the City [of Rome] and to the World,” in Latin.—Eds.

Ukrainian authors, with Moscow's postmodernist artists, with writers of a new generation of Russian literature in Ukraine, with scholars in the humanities. The children themselves are writing (verse, prose, plays) in Russian and in Ukrainian. Many of them go to Russian and Ukrainian theater, participate in theater and poetry festivals, attend discussions in philosophy clubs, go to art films. . . . Of course, these are just superficial symptoms, and perhaps I am again getting carried away with my dreams. But I so want . . . Well, let me quote the words of the young Bakhtin: "The three areas of human culture—science, art, and life—become united in the personality, which joins them to its own unity. . . . Art and life are not one, but they must become united in me, in the unity of my responsibility." Perhaps that is why this whole SDC adventure has been undertaken.

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