Secondary education is one key area in which academic disciplines build their identity and legitimacy in the public realm. The public image of a science is, of course, constructed by a variety of means and on different platforms, including the generalist media and the lively industry of scientific popularization. However, the school occupies a unique role in representations of science because of its greater degree of formal continuity with the academic environment. The successful institutionalization and maintenance of any discipline depends on it taking root, in some form at least, in the system of public instruction. Because education both fosters and depends on disciplinary reproduction, the concrete shape that school subjects take is of great consequence to the long-term development of related sciences.

In cases where a science is only just emerging, and where its public identity is still rather uncertain and controversial—as was the case with psychology at the turn of the twentieth century—the organization of secondary school teaching in that subject becomes a major area of contestation, an arena where the dominant, reproducible image of the discipline is fought over, especially, but not exclusively, by those interested in claiming it as their area of professional expertise.\(^1\) The introduction of psychology into Russian secondary education coincided with the rise in psychology's popularity among the broader Russian public in the mid- to late-1900s. However, the general public tended to (con)fuse “psychology” with fashionable trends of this era, such as spiritualism, a fascination with the afterlife, decadent literature and pornography. See V. Rosinskii, “Psikhologiiia v Rossii.” *Vestnik znaniia* no. 4 (1908): 562–66. no. 5 (1908): 676–683. On frustrations that experts were encountering when attempting to popularize psychology among the masses see, for example, V. Rakhmanov, “Lektsii po psikhologii dlia rabochikh.” *Svobodnoe vospitanie* no. 11 (1909–10): 65–74.
peculiarity of the way disciplinary identity is embodied in a school subject lies in the fact that this identity is meant to be both broadly “public” (acceptable as part of “general education”) and narrowly “official” (faithful to the “academic” understanding of the discipline). Because of this, a school subject is never merely a simplified reflection of the world of the corresponding science. Instead, the relationship between the two is invariably fraught with tension and ambiguity.2

Histories of Russian psychology have neglected to address this issue in any great depth.3 This is to some extent surprising, because the sphere of education played a vital role in the development of psychology in Russia. At the turn of the twentieth century, psychology lacked the status of an independent academic discipline at Russian universities. It was taught only as a component of philosophy and had the reputation of the latter’s “handmaiden.” Its scientific credentials within philosophy departments were, moreover, under constant attack from physiologists, neurologists and psychiatrists, who sought to redefine the discipline from a biological point of view, and at times even denied psychology the right to legitimate existence.

In fact it was only in the sphere of education that psychology was able to portray itself as a respectable science in its own right, especially in relation to pedagogy, whose own academic legitimacy, as a lowly practical professional discipline, was even more problematic than that of psychology. Yet the eminent status of psychology in the educational realm (as the “scientific foundation” of pedagogy) had to be continuously maintained, which was how teachers became the most important “interested” public to whom psychologists of different persuasions promoted the idealized visions of their discipline.4 This

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2For similar tensions between scholarly and pedagogical agendas in a different area—that of literary study—see Andy Byford, “Between Literary Education and Academic Learning: The Study of Literature at Secondary School in Late Imperial Russia (1860s–1900s).” *History of Education* 33, no. 6 (2004): 637–660. For analogous dilemmas in the area of law and civic education, although in the area of broader popularization and with a more pronounced political resonance, see Michel Tissier, “Le droit pour le peuple: Vulgariser le droit en Russie au tournant du XXe siècle.” *Bulletin de l’Institut Pierre Renouvin* 18 (2004): 83–103. Jurisprudence (zakonovedenie) was introduced into the secondary curriculum at more or less the same time as psychology and also provoked much debate and controversy. See, for example, N. Chizhov, “O prepodavanii zakonovedeniia v srednikh uchebnykh zavedeniakh ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniia.” *Zurnal ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniia* (hereafter ZhMNP) no. 10, Sovremennaya letopis’ (1906): 59–75.


4The idea of psychology’s relevance to education was used as a major argument for the strengthening of its position at university. See speech by Professor M. M. Troitskii at the opening of the Moscow Psychological Society in 1885. M. M. Troitskii, “Sovremennoe uchenie o zadachakh i metodakh psikhologii.” *Voprosy psikhologii* (hereafter
implied not just the promotion of psychology as the key component of teacher training, but (and no less importantly) the introduction of psychology into the school curriculum. Indeed, the success or failure of establishing psychology as a school subject was in many ways the measure of its legitimacy both in the higher academic realm and in the wider public sphere.5

Although historians of Russian psychology occasionally mention the bitter squabbles over high school psychology at major conferences in the 1900s–1910s, they usually present these debates schematically and merely as a side issue, failing to engage with all the difficulties surrounding the introduction of psychology into secondary education.6 The present article aims to fill this gap by examining in some detail both the theory and the practice of studying psychology in Russian secondary schools during the reign of the last two tsars (1881–1917). The focus will be on the complex interactions of teachers, educational theorists, university professors and others who, from a range of divergent perspectives, sought to conceptualize psychology simultaneously as a school subject and as a science.

There were three main types of secondary schools where psychology was taught in this period—the ecclesiastical seminaries (dukhovnye seminarii), the girls’ high schools (zhenskie gimnazii) and the male (Classical) high schools (muzhskie gimnazii). Ecclesiastical seminaries had the longest tradition of teaching psychology, but their course will not be examined independently in what follows. The reason is that turn-of-the-century debates about psychology as a school subject in relation to psychology as a science tended either to ignore psychology taught in ecclesiastical institutions or simply to dismiss it as outdated. Although in the 1850s–1860s it was, indeed, the theologians who dominated psychology in Russia, from the 1870s onwards academic

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psychologists based at philosophy departments were keen to dissociate themselves from the old theological and metaphysical baggage, largely because they needed to negotiate their claim over psychology with the natural scientists and the doctors, whose favorite means of discrediting the philosopher-psychologists was pejoratively to label them “theologians.” This meant that, for strategic purposes, even when psychology taught and studied at ecclesiastical academies and seminaries emulated the study of psychology at universities and secular schools, the modes of teaching psychology in these institutions were never considered seriously as relevant to the scientific legitimation of the discipline.

Consequently, in this article the evolution of psychology as a school subject will be examined in the context of the two secular institutions. In female high schools psychology was taught as part of a course in pedagogy from the 1870s. In male high schools psychology was not introduced until 1905, and here it was officially conceived as preparation for the future study of philosophy. While in the 1880s–1890s most debates about the identity of psychology at secondary school revolved around the girls’ schools, in the 1900s–1910s the discussion shifted overwhelmingly to the boys’ schools.

**PSYCHOLOGY IN GIRLS’ SCHOOLS**

The female high schools had seven compulsory grades and a facultative eighth grade called the “pedagogy class” (pedagogicheskii klass), designed to prepare female high school graduates for teaching in primary schools and, sometimes, the lower division of the female high schools themselves. Some form of training in pedagogy had been introduced

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8In what follows, discussion will focus only on psychology, although most debates about the female “pedagogy class” also concerned the identity of pedagogy as a science and the organization of female teacher training more generally. For more detail on these courses see: M. Rodevich (ed.), *Sbornik deistvuushchikh postanovlenii i raspobrazhenii po zhenskim gimnaziam i progimnaziam Ministerstva narodnogo prosveshchenia* (St Petersburg, 1884). K. El’netskii, “Znachenie pedagogicheskogo obrazovaniia dlia zhenshchin i organizatsii zaniatii v pedagogicheskom klasse pri Omskoi zhenskoi gimnazi.” *Sem’ia i sbkola* no. 8–9, Otdel II (1881): 113–139; S. Brailovskii, “Zametka ob organizatsii zaniatii v pedagogicheskom (VIII-m) klasse zhenskikh gimnazii.” *Russkaiia sbkola* (hereafter RS) no. 1 (1899): 145–163; L. S., “K voprosu o pedagogicheskikh klassakh srednikh zhenskikh uchebnikh zavedeni.” *VV* no. 9 (1903): 43–52; K. El’netskii,
into girls’ schools already in 1859, although women were allowed to teach in primary education only from 1871.9

Some other educational institutions for women that were starting to emerge at this same time, such as Higher Women’s Courses, also prepared their students for a career in teaching, while providing instruction at a higher educational level.10 However, ministerial authorities relied mostly on the high school “pedagogy class,” as it was able to train a much larger number of lower-level staff, deemed sufficiently qualified to teach specifically in primary education, where the vast majority of female teachers worked.11

Expectations of the educational administration from the “pedagogy class” were relatively low. The idea was to familiarize students with appropriate teaching terminology, to prepare them to read pedagogical literature, and to raise their interest in teaching.12 The government provided comparatively little guidance about how this pedagogy course should be taught, which meant that there was considerable diversity in how individual teachers, schools or educational districts organized and conceptualized it, and plenty of debate in the pedagogical press about how to improve current practice.13

The “pedagogy class” was generally very popular among girls. Most of the subjects taught in it were still general-educational, but

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9For more on women’s teacher professionalization at this time and the role of psychology and pedagogy in the wider context of female education see Christine Ruane, *Gender, Class, and the Professionalization of Russian City Teachers, 1860–1914* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994), especially 62–86.

10On women and higher education see also Christine Johanson, *Women’s Struggle for Higher Education in Russia, 1855–1900* (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1987).


13Some standardization at the level of the educational district did, however, take place around 1900. See *Uchebnyi plan i programmy uchebnykh predmetov dlia VIII dopolnitelnogo klassa zhenskikh gimnazii Moskovskogo uchebnoho okruga* (Moscow, 1899). Similar plans were carried out in some other districts (e.g. Kazan’).
centerpiece of the course was the two hours a week devoted specifically to pedagogy and devised as a form of professional training. This final, facilitative year also “felt” different from the usual high school drill, insofar as the students were encouraged to write independent papers and to discuss issues in class more freely.\textsuperscript{14}

Psychology played a major part in the course because it was understood to be the “basic science” underpinning pedagogy. Pedagogy was, in fact, conceived as a form of “applied psychology”—a discipline that used psychological insights to enhance children’s mental abilities and shape their moral character.\textsuperscript{15} In the pedagogy class, psychology was taught as a deeply embedded part of pedagogy, and was often difficult to differentiate from the latter, although textbooks varied considerably in the degree to which they explicitly referred to psychology as a science. While some were peppered with technical psychological terms, others barely mentioned the discipline, even when using ideas from it.\textsuperscript{16}

Most commonly, pedagogy was divided into two main parts. One was physical education, (\textit{fizicheskoe vospitanie}) which did not just mean sports, but the overall nurturing of the body, including, especially, a concern with hygiene (although some educators thought this ought to be the domain of school doctors rather than teachers).\textsuperscript{17} The other part of pedagogy was the “education of the soul” (\textit{dushevnoe vospitanie}), and this was the proper dominion of teachers, where the knowledge of psychology was key.\textsuperscript{18} This part of pedagogy was also further subdivided into the education of the intellect, the emotions and the will—the three main subsections of psychology, as it was conceptualized at this time.\textsuperscript{19}

The focus on psychology in the teaching of pedagogy to girls was further boosted by (male) pedagogy teachers emphasizing the “innate” female gift for intuitively understanding the workings of the soul. Given

\textsuperscript{14}Blonskii, “K metodike prepodavaniia pedagogiki,” 3.
\textsuperscript{15}S. Zenchenko, “I podniatie polozheniia prepodavatelia srednei shkoly i spetsial’naia ego podgotovka. (Otvet professoru R. Vipperu).” \textit{VV} no. 8 (1898): 83–103, 93. For a relativization of the conception of pedagogy as “applied psychology” from the perspective of university professors see G. Chelpanov, “Chto nuzhno znat’ pedagogu iz psikhologii? (Po povodu rezoliutsii s’ezd po eksperimental’noi psikhologii).” \textit{Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii (hereafter VFP)} 106 (1911): 38–69, 42–43.
\textsuperscript{16}Brailovskii, “Pedagogika, kak predmet obucheniiia v zhenskikh gimnaziiakh,” 259.
\textsuperscript{17}G. Rokov, “O pedagogicheskoi professii i ee predstaviteliakh.” \textit{VV} no. 1 (1897): 79–118, 94. For more on Russian school doctors in this era see Andy Byford, “Professional Cross-Dressing: Doctors in Education in Late Imperial Russia (1881–1917).” \textit{The Russian Review} 63, no. 4 (2006): 586–616.
\textsuperscript{18}El’nitskii, “Prepodavanie obshchei pedagogiki v zhenskoi gimnazi,” 85.
\textsuperscript{19}Brailovskii, “Pedagogika, kak predmet obucheniiia v zhenskikh gimnaziiakh,” 259.
their motherly instincts, girls were portrayed as especially good, naturally endowed, child psychologists. This was part of the gender stereotyping not only of (child) psychology, but of the “pedagogy class” in general. Although this class was envisaged primarily as preparation for professional work in primary schools, it was also at times legitimized as potentially useful for training future mothers, whose “natural” role was to bring up and educate children. This was important because female teachers at first usually taught only for a few years before getting married and becoming mothers. Yet in practice, despite calls from many quarters for the government to improve “preparation for motherhood,” the amount of training in infant and pre-school care was mostly absent from the eighth grade “pedagogy class.” Although some aspects of pre-school childcare were sometimes taught in the seventh grade, the Ministry of Education was, in fact, scathed by the press for turning the graduates of the “pedagogy class” into “sexless professionals” (bezpolye professionalki), neglecting to make the most of their feminine, i.e. motherly and caring side.

The Ministry of Education seemed genuinely reluctant to rely simply on “female intuition” or “motherly instincts” in enhancing either the educational or the psychological expertise of its trainees. Instead, it was more interested in developing training in child psychology as part of a rather more “bureaucratic” conception of the education process. For example, paragraph 9a of the ministerial teaching plan suggested that each student enrolled in the “pedagogy class” should take charge of three to four younger girls from the lower division of the same high school and keep a “pedagogical diary” on them. This diary would then be discussed with the pedagogy teacher and the school’s director in a special “pedagogical commission.” The outcome report would then be passed on to the central administration of the respective educational district.

However, the point of this was not just for trainee teachers to learn about pastoral mentorship or to be initiated into a common form of

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22See Rouane, Gender, Class and the Professionalization of Russian City Teachers, 28.

23Golovachev, “K voprosu o prepodavanii pedagogiki,” 69. On this see also Rouane, Gender, Class and the Professionalization of Russian City Teachers, 31–32.

bureaucratic reporting in education. The “pedagogy class” student was here also supposed to acquire skills in “the study of the personal qualities of each of her students and a certain ability to take these characteristics into account in the process of upbringing and education.”25 The outcome of such observations was meant to be a psychologically informed “profile” (khrakteristika) of each young girl that the student was put in charge of.

There were, of course, other, more theoretical assignments through which the students of the “pedagogy class” were to develop their knowledge of psychology. Most commonly, pedagogy teachers gave their female students essay questions on general psychological topics. For example, the girls would be asked to discuss children’s mental development, the formation of “character,” the workings of memory in children, the role of imagination, the nature of children’s feelings and sensations, and so forth.26

University professors in psychology (based at philosophy departments) were sometimes invited to sit in exams in which the future graduates of the “pedagogy class” answered questions in psychology.27 These professors usually complained that psychology taught in female high schools was scholastic and outdated, failing to reflect adequately the principles and concerns of modern academic psychology. For this reason, they were unhappy with the pervasive and uncritical identification of pedagogy with psychology that took place in the “pedagogy class.” They argued that although psychology was, indeed, a desirable part of teacher training, pedagogy teachers should not turn it into the key component of pedagogy itself.28 The professors’ worry was motivated by fears of the profanation of psychology as a science in secondary education, where they had very little direct input and where they were not even writing or editing the set textbooks.

The textbooks used in the “pedagogy class” were, in fact, usually penned by non-specialists; teachers who, as a rule, came from another discipline, such as Russian language and literature, but who had built some experience in teaching pedagogy in girls’ schools. These teachers vigorously defended the way psychology was taught in the female “pedagogy class.” They argued that university professors were not sufficiently well informed about what went on in secondary education. They claimed that while psychology could not (“of course”) be studied

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25Ibid., 100–101.
27Brailovskii, “Pedagogika, kak predmet obucheniiia v zhenskikh gymnaziakh,” 257.
28Ibid., 266. The professor cited here was N. N. Lange, who taught in Odessa.
in high school truly “as a science,” most teachers of the “pedagogy class” were by no means as backward as the professors were implying, but were perfectly capable of communicating at least some of the cutting edge aspects of modern psychology to their female students.29

There was, however, one brand of academic psychologists who were especially interested in supporting the idea of psychology as a central part of a pedagogy course. These were the psychologists who were excluded from the university philosophy departments and who instead lectured in newly emergent teacher-training establishments. The prime example of such a psychologist is Aleksandr Nechaev.30 Nechaev began as an untenured assistant professor (privat-dotsent) at the philosophy department of St Petersburg University in the late 1890s. However, when his master’s thesis in educational psychology was rejected because it emphasized controversial “experimental,” or rather mental testing, techniques, he ended up teaching psychology at the Pedagogical Museum of the Department of Military Education (in courses for teachers who worked in schools run by the military). Here, Nechaev also set up Russia’s first laboratory in educational psychology in 1901.

To boost his income, Nechaev at this time (1898–99) also taught the “pedagogy class” in a couple of female high schools in St Petersburg. Seeing himself as a scientific psychologist rather than a secondary school teacher, Nechaev was, just like the university professors, very critical of the random and amateurish way in which psychology was studied in the “pedagogy class.” However, because he actually taught in female high schools, he was, in contrast to the university professors, not satisfied with just dismissing high school psychology as “inferior” and “auxiliary,” but made much more of an effort to control and improve on how it was imparted at this level.31

Like the professors, Nechaev insisted on a certain separation of psychology from pedagogy. He argued, for instance, that the two could not be arbitrarily mixed as was the case in practice, where pedagogical theory worked merely as an accompaniment to what was effectively a course in psychology, or vice versa. In Nechaev’s view, separate sections in “psychology” and “logic” needed to be taught before a section in what

29Ibid., 267–68.
he called the “history of pedagogy.”\footnote{Ibid., 146.} This model actually emulated the organization of the teaching of philosophy at university (Nechaev’s former “home” from which he had been banished), the difference being only that the latter culminated in the “history of philosophy” rather than the “history of pedagogy.”

However, what was more important for Nechaev was to negotiate the exact status that psychology itself had as a subject at the secondary school level. The difficulty Nachaev faced here was that, while he defined himself as a scientist, the institutional realm where he was operating (as instructor of future female teachers, who, moreover, were being trained while still in high school) was the lower level of secondary education. For this reason, Nechaev needed to prevent high school psychology from automatically acquiring the inferior status of a mere “school subject” (uchebnyi predmet) that was studied “dogmatically,” as he put it. Instead, he argued that high school psychology should still be taught in serious, “critical,” “scientific” fashion.\footnote{Ibid., 148.}

Nechaev insisted that “the correct organization of the teaching of psychology in female high schools must without fail be scientific.”\footnote{Ibid., 149 (italics in the original).} He conceded that this stance might seem strange, because “[w]e’re used to thinking that the sciences [were] the privileged domain of higher-educational establishments only.”\footnote{Ibid.} Yet he himself sought to transcend this “prejudice” and expand the legitimate existence of psychology “as a science” beyond the university walls. He claimed that the split between “science proper,” on the one hand, and the “school subject” (based on that science), on the other, did not, in fact, apply to psychology as it did to other subjects (such as geography or history, for example). Psychology, he argued, was the kind of discipline that could only be communicated “by rigorously scientific means (i.e. by following the entire path through which psychic phenomena [were] investigated).”\footnote{Ibid.}

Teaching psychology “dogmatically,” or merely as a so-called “school subject” could, in his words, be little more than “sorry entertainment” (pechal’naia zabava).\footnote{Ibid.} Here Nechaev’s view again in some respect coincided with that of the university professors. Significantly, though, Nechaev drew from this a radically different conclusion. While the professors thought that this was good enough reason to play down the study of psychology in the “pedagogy class,” Nechaev, on the contrary, believed that the teaching of psychology, even
at this relatively low level, had to be reformed into a serious, “scientific” subject. In his opinion, the way to make school psychology “scientific” was not to base the course on getting students to learn a greater number of scientific facts and assimilate a more sophisticated scientific terminology, but to introduce them to the principal methods of scientific enquiry in psychology.\textsuperscript{38} In other words, it was the methods of investigation that made psychology a science, and these methods were the only way in which one could properly access psychological facts. Psychology simply could not be studied “in the true sense of the word” without faithfully adhering to a scientific methodology.

What Nechaev did in the end was fuse the scientific method of psychological enquiry with the educational method of studying psychology. Nechaev’s approach was to make his students investigate psychic life themselves, but only in order to demonstrate to them gradually how imperfect their “lay” understanding of psychology was. In Nechaev’s scheme, the teacher’s role at that point was to initiate the students to the only appropriate “rigorously scientific” ways of studying psychic life, including, Nechaev insisted controversially, introducing them to psychological experimentation and mental testing.

Nechaev described how he taught his own “pedagogy class.”\textsuperscript{39} Although he began his course with an introductory lecture on the history of psychology and on the current definition of its object and methods, he did not think that setting the girls theoretical essays (an otherwise standard assignment) was a particularly good way of embarking on the study of psychology. He also did not believe that the existing way in which the observation of younger girls and the compilation of their “profiles” were organized was particularly effective. Nechaev especially criticized the lack of clear methodological guidelines here. Students either got lost in their analyses or they ended up writing superficial, impressionistic sketches in a naïve way, with a grossly inaccurate use of psychological terminology.

Nechaev believed that the writing of these “profiles” had to be structured much more rigorously. Drawing up a full “profile” was, in fact, supposed to come only at the end of a series of exercises that involved a range of only partial observations and psychological analyses. The teacher’s role in this was at all times to follow and guide the students’ step-by-step progress. What Nechaev did was to give his students specific assignments telling them exactly what they should observe in the younger children, when and how, and then asking them to note it all down in a special day-by-day diary. He then monitored what they wrote

\textsuperscript{38}Ibid., 150–51.
\textsuperscript{39}Ibid., 152–163.
and helped them formulate and interpret their data more accurately and rigorously.

Nechaev also hoped to lead his students eventually to realize the limitations of pure observation and to see that in order to arrive at certain psychological facts they needed to learn about experimental methods. He admitted that, given the working conditions in secondary schools, it was impossible to perform proper experiments, but he argued that some simple tests could be introduced and used for purposes of illustration. He provided examples of a few such experiments that he himself used. For instance, he showed his students how to perform tests on the variable strength of different types of memory or on different forms of mental associations. He then asked the students to insert the quantitative results obtained in such tests into special tables and then graphically display and interpret the data. Only then were the students ready, according to Nechaev, systematically to assemble the “profiles” of the younger girls, which would thereby be supported by the qualitative, observational data from their diaries, as well as the quantitative, experimental data from their tables.

Put forward in 1899, Nechaev’s program was clearly far too ambitious for most teachers of the “pedagogy class,” who where hardly specialists in psychology like he was. A number of commentators, especially those based at universities, were in fact afraid that neither the teachers nor the students were properly prepared for this kind approach, and that the resulting “profiles” would not amount to a “scientifically-based” psychological analysis, as Nechaev had planned, but would still read like “pedagogical belles-lettres in the worst sense of the word.” These critics pleaded with teachers of the “pedagogy class” to resist passing on to their female students the latest “fads” in psychology, which they themselves had barely digested. Despite such warnings, Nechaev’s approach, while remaining controversial, was able to gain enthusiastic support in at least some female high schools during the 1900s–1910s.

Still this support remained limited overall, because the majority of the teachers in the “pedagogy class” were not as innovative as Nechaev desired. Many were actually older people, called upon to teach the subject primarily on account of their long and extensive experience in education. They had little time for cutting edge intricacies of psychological methodology and their primary approach was simply to chat to their students about interesting educational situations or

41Ibid., 3.
42Compare S. Preobrazhenskii, Kratkoes rukovodstvo dlia prakticheskikh zaniatii po pedagogike (Samara, 1904) and Pavlova, Prakticheskoe rukovodstvo k izucheniiu licnosti rebenka.
psychological cases from their own professional past. Indeed, the teaching method used in this course continued to vary greatly, depending considerably on the individual teaching it. While some teachers simply followed one of the recommended textbooks, expecting their students to regurgitate what was in them, chapter by chapter, the more creative ones hoped, like Nechaev, to engage the girls more actively in “doing psychology.” Nevertheless, few of these teachers insisted on the rigors of the “scientific method” and usually simply wrote out on the board a few general questions in psychology, which the students were expected to answer collectively in class. Providing only minimal guidance, and relying especially on “female intuition” in the matters of the soul, they encouraged what they saw as democratic dialogue, free expression and, above all, psychological self-analysis (although the girls usually gave answers in a disciplined manner, one by one, standing up).

The female “pedagogy class” continued to operate until the end of the tsarist era. However, when psychology was introduced into male high schools in 1905, debates about psychology as a secondary school subject shifted predominantly to the latter context. Much of what was said about the teaching of psychology in boys’ schools was also meant to apply to girls’ schools, even though the subject that showcased psychology was not the same. As already suggested, while in girls’ schools psychology was the key part of “pedagogy,” in boys’ schools it was a vital component of their introduction to “philosophy.” In fact, even though the disciplinary connection between pedagogy and psychology remained strong, some argued during the 1910s that female high schools should become more like male ones and have psychology, together with logic, taught as a philosophical rather than a pedagogical subject. This, of course, had very little to do with defining psychology itself (either as a school subject or as a scientific discipline), but was more the expression of the desire in some quarters to bring the high school education of girls in line with that of the boys (the latter being emblematized by elitist “philosophy” and the former by the lowly, practical professional “pedagogy”).

PSYCHOLOGY IN BOYS’ SCHOOLS

In September 1905, a new subject—“philosophical propedeutics” (filosfskaia propedevtika)—was introduced into the curriculum of the

44El’ nitskii, “Prepodavanie obshchei pedagogiki v zhenskoi gimnazii,” 86–87.
Classical (gimnaziia); the elite male high school that prepared its students for university.46 The first public call for the introduction of philosophical subjects, including psychology, into the high school curriculum was voiced toward the end of the nineteenth century by the well-known litterateur P. D. Boborykin. Inspired by ideas picked up in his travels around Europe, Boborykin imagined the course as a generalist rather than a specialist subject, a course that was meant to shape the students’ worldview, rather than initiate them into some distinct academic discipline.47

University professors in philosophy departments also warmed up to the idea and campaigned for it in the early 1900s, at the time when major restructurings of the secondary school curriculum were discussed in ministerial spheres.48 The professors believed that the introduction of psychology into male high school education would raise the level of knowledge in the discipline among incoming university students. This would mean that professors in psychology would no longer have to give grossly simplified introductory lectures to freshmen, as had been the case throughout the 1890s. They hoped that this would enable philosophy departments to give their treatment of psychology a much more advanced and specialist direction. They were convinced that this would in turn secure psychology as the jurisdiction of university philosophy departments, and would prevent the discipline’s usurpation by neurologists and psychiatrists, or those, like Nechaev, who were creating a strong base for psychology in teacher-training establishments.

The Russian adoption of “philosophical propedeutics” was based largely on the Austrian model, although the French and German paradigms of high school philosophy and psychology were discussed as well.49 The subject was composed of two “foundational” disciplines of philosophy, as conceptualized at this time: psychology, which was taught

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48 On the radical reforms of secondary education, the discussion of which started in the late 1890s, see Nicholas Hans, History of Russian Educational Policy (1701–1917) (London: P. S. King & Son, 1931), 176–182.

49 See G. I. Chelpanov, “O postanovke prepodavanii filosofskoi propedevtiki v srednei shkole” and “O prepodavanii filosofskoi propedevtiki v Germanii,” in Sbornik statei. Psikhologiia i sbkola, (Moscow, 1912), 33–44 and 44–56, respectively. The papers were originally delivered in 1904 in Kiev, where Chelpanov was based at that time. The teaching of psychology at secondary school was controversial in these countries as well, especially Germany. The scope of this article does not, however, allow for a more extensive comparative analysis of the situation in different European countries.
in the seventh grade, and logic, which was taught in the final, eighth grade. Two hours per week were devoted to each. What made the introduction of this subject possible was the reduction in the number of hours devoted to Classical languages, which had dominated the curriculum. Logic had, in fact, already been part of the curriculum (though previously only one hour per week had been devoted to it), but psychology was considered to be an entirely new subject.

The complete novelty of the enterprise posed some very serious problems, though. Probably the most significant one was that those put in charge of teaching psychology had practically no specialist training in the discipline. The Ministry of Education appeared to show little ambition for this subject and its assumption was that psychology was something that all graduates of the humanities (historical–philological) faculty would have studied as part of their university degree, and would therefore be able to teach in high school to the required standard. Most humanities students did indeed do some psychology, but this was usually limited to one or two introductory series of lectures and some seminar work within philosophy.

The Ministry in fact imposed the requirement that only those who had a degree obtained from the historical–philological faculty of a Russian university could teach psychology in male high schools. This was slightly unusual because there was no such requirement for most other subjects (for instance, Russian language and literature could, if necessary, be taught by a graduate of the faculty of law). Apparently, even a true specialist in psychology with published academic works was not allowed to teach this subject at high school if he happened to have a degree from a different faculty (say, medicine). The reason for this was that, officially, high school psychology was conceptualized as part of “philosophical propedeutics,” and philosophy was taught only at the historical–philological faculties.

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50This apparently created problems in Warsaw, where a number of psychology teachers were removed from their posts because they did not have humanities degrees, while at the same time they could not be accepted as teachers of Russian language and literature on the grounds of their nationality. See R., “O prave prepodavat’ psikhologiiu.” RS no. 11 (1910): 71. This scandal was probably less about psychology and more part of the general bullying of Polish teachers by the Russian authorities, with some officials arguing that it would be much better to invite Russians to teach psychology in Polish cities in lieu of the Poles.

51Insistence on this may have had to do with the worry (of both philosophy professors and government conservatives who feared pernicious “materialist” ideologies) that some physiologists, neurologists and psychiatrists, who claimed psychology to be a biological science, would be able to co-opt the discipline at secondary-school level. However, as we have already seen in the case of the girls’ schools, it was not so much the natural scientists and the medics who were the real threat here, but people like Nechaev, who was himself a post-graduate in philosophy, yet ended up developing a competing (in his terms “experimental”) paradigm of psychology in teacher-training establishments.
Yet it was possible for a non-humanities faculty graduate to pass a state exam in, say, teaching Russian language and literature, and this would, oddly enough, automatically qualify him to teach psychology. Most frequently, in fact, teachers of psychology were teachers of other subjects, especially Russian language and literature, because some aspects of what was taught within “psychology” and “logic” had traditionally been part of the course in poetic theory and rhetoric (teoriia slovesnosti).\(^{52}\)

Partly for this reason, the teaching of the new course in psychology very often entailed the use of illustrative examples from literature. For instance, textbook examples of psychological “illusions” that distorted “perception” would refer students to the delusions of Don Quixote; or to Tati\’ana’s erroneous impression of Onegin’s character in Aleksandr Pushkin’s classic novel in verse Eugene Onegin, or else to the mistaken assumptions of the town dwellers about the impostor Khlestiakov in Nikolai Gogol’s satirical play, The Inspector General. Another example would be the use of Mikhail Lermontov’s poem “Feeling bored, feeling sad” (“I skuchno, i grustno”) as an illustration of the complexity of “psychic turmoil” (dushe\’vnye perezhivaniia).\(^{53}\) Literature as a source of psychological insight was deemed particularly suitable for school study, but it was regularly pointed out that some highly respected psychiatrists and psychologists (such as, I. A. Sikorskii and P. F. Kapterev, respectively) also regularly drew on literary examples in their books and lectures.\(^{54}\) Apart from teachers in Russian language and literature, those who had taught in the girls’ high school “pedagogy class” were also considered especially suitable for teaching the new psychology course in male high schools. However, they too most often started off as teachers of another subject, again usually literature.

Eventually, a number of teachers ended up specializing in psychology, logic, and pedagogy, and they taught these subjects simultaneously in both female and male high schools. These were often, in fact, untenured assistant professors specializing in philosophy and psychology, but without sufficient work at university. However, the question of specialist training in all three subjects, and psychology in particular, remained a constant problem. From the outset, when psychology was first introduced into the curriculum in 1905, the

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\(^{52}\)See Byford, “Between Literary Education and Academic Learning,” 648–651.


\(^{54}\)F. O’denburg, “Mysli o postanovke prepodavaniia psikhologii v srednei shkole.” RS no. 10 (1906): 140–160. O’denburg was one of the chief promoters of the use of literature in secondary-school psychology. For a more wide-ranging study of the Russian psychiatrists’ interest in literature see Irina Sirokina, Diagnosing Literary Genius: A Cultural History of Psychiatry in Russia, 1880–1930 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).
newly appointed staff immediately complained of not being properly prepared for the job and of not having adequate support in this respect from the Ministry of Education.\textsuperscript{55} The Ministry gave approximate guidelines and recommended certain published literature, but provided no actual training and sponsored no specially tailored textbooks or teaching manuals and materials.

As a result, a number of teachers resorted to attending training courses, lectures, and conferences organized by other institutions, such as, for example, the Pedology Section at the Pedagogical Museum of the Department of Military Education, which was formed in 1904, and where Nechaev and his colleagues set up courses in psychology and other “child study” subjects relevant to teachers (e.g. school hygiene, the education of children with mental problems, the demonstration of psychological laboratory apparatuses, the analysis of children’s personality etc.).\textsuperscript{56} Such courses attracted teachers from the provinces as well as from St Petersburg. Some smaller towns, like Samara, invited reputable speakers specializing in psychology (often those from the Pedagogical Museum) to lecture in locally organized teacher-training courses.\textsuperscript{57} In 1907, a group of teachers from Tiflis (today Tbilisi, Georgia) formed a commission that campaigned for the founding of a psychology laboratory at the administration of their educational district, where teachers from this area would be able to learn more about psychology. In the report for 1908–09, this commission also published sample lesson plans for the new high school course in psychology.\textsuperscript{58}

Yet most of these efforts were one-off initiatives, confined to their local area, without proper nation-wide resonance or authority. Later on, some attempts were made to provide more systematic training for future high school psychology tutors. For example, in 1910, the philosophy professor, Georgii Chelpanov argued that universities should create a “philosophy track” (like the ones that already existed in Russian, history, the Classics and Romano-Germanic languages), specifically to prepare future teachers in “philosophical propedeutics,” but nothing came of this idea.\textsuperscript{59} In 1908, Nechaev and his colleagues transformed their Pedology Courses into the more ambitious Pedagogical Academy, which included a course in teaching methods specifically for high

\textsuperscript{55} A. K., “K voprosu o prepodavanii psikhologii,” 173–75.
\textsuperscript{58} I. Solov’ev, “Kritika i bibliografiia.” \textit{VV} no. 9 (1910): 1–12.
school “psychology, logic and pedagogy.” However, this was never recognized as a necessary requirement for teachers of these subjects, while the overall number of graduates from the Pedagogical Academy was at all times exceedingly small.

A particular problem in 1905–06 was the initial absence of authoritative textbooks. Teachers were at first asked to refer to often poorly translated foreign psychological treatises. Works by the English psychologist James Sully or the French philosopher Georges Fonsegrive were among those especially recommended. However, teachers thought that these were too hard for adolescents and called for something with suitable native examples that would be familiar and accessible to students. Existing Russian works in psychology were generally overly specialized, often somewhat outdated, and usually overlong. For example, P. F. Kapterev’s *Pedagogical Psychology* was 600 pages long and contained extensive material on physiology and pedagogy that was not considered relevant to the male high school course. The only proper secondary school textbooks in the subject were those designed for ecclesiastical seminaries, but these books followed a different program, were not written by experts, and bore a discernible influence of theology in the discussion of some topics.

However, as was common practice whenever a new school subject was introduced, a flood of different textbooks was rushed out of print during 1906–07. The first manuals to come out were short and eclectic compilations produced by non-specialists, adhering closely to the ministerial “approximate” program, but with only very basic information in them, relying on the teachers to provide suitable illustrations, examples and further explanations. A major problem
for everyone involved was that there was no legitimate “tradition” to follow. The experiences in teaching psychology developed at the ecclesiastical seminaries or the female “pedagogy class” were not deemed adequate models to follow (and perhaps improve upon) because psychology there was seen as too intimately intertwined with practical-professional (as opposed to general-educational) theology and pedagogy respectively. Even more problematic was the fact that there seemed to be a huge variety of possible conceptualizations of the course on offer, with a range of very different, and potentially contradictory, educational aims. These included: helping students to forge a philosophically and psychologically informed worldview; stimulating students to carry out concrete psychological analyses of their surroundings; developing the students’ personal self-understanding; teaching them practical psychological methodology; making them assimilate psychology’s scientific terminology; preparing them for the university course in philosophy, and so forth.

There was just as much variety in the proposed teaching methods. Debates revolved especially around the following: whether one should introduce students only to general issues of psychological theory or lead them toward the independent discovery of psychological phenomena through observation and experimentation; whether one should start with the study of the individual personality as a whole or, alternatively, with the most elementary psychic processes; whether one should place stress on analyzing the psychology of literary characters, on class experiments, or on acquiring a good theoretical grounding in psychological concepts; which parts of psychology to give priority to—the intellect, the emotions or the will.65 All these issues were raised in heated discussions, especially during the first conference in pedagogical psychology in 1906, although no definitive conclusions were reached, and debates raged on throughout the next decade.66

A further problem was that authoritative, academic works in psychology, whether foreign or Russian, showed considerable discrepancy, depending on whether the author came from a

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65 On a report about related discussions in France at approximately this same time see E. D., “Novye dannye k voprosu o prepodavanii filosofii v srednikh uchebnykh zavedeniiakh Frantsii.” RS no. 4, Otdel eksperimental’noi pedagogiki (1909): 122–130.

66 This was Russia’s first conference in psychology more generally, although the vast majority of the audience was comprised of teachers. For more background on this and subsequent conferences see M. V. Sokolov, “Voprosy psikhologicheskoi teorii na russkikh s’ezdakh po pedagogicheskoi psikhologii.” VP no. 2 (1956): 8–22 and M. V. Sokolov, “Kritika metoda testov na russkikh s’ezdakh po eksperimental’noi pedogigke (1910–1916).” VP no. 6 (1956): 16–28; K. T., “K voprosu o prepodavanii filosofskoi propedeutiki.” RS no. 7–8 (1907): 226–236.
philosophical or medical background as well as on whether he was a representative of the “experimental” movement or of the more traditional kind of empirical psychology that emphasized “introspection” (samonabliudenie) and theoretical generalization. Because of this, some commentators argued that high school psychology should not even bother trying to be a rigorous academic subject, but should instead be geared toward the students’ overall, general-educational, intellectual and moral development (razvitie), and should include wide ranging discussions on ethical topics, literature, society, individual identity, and so forth, from a broadly psychological perspective, and following the motto “know others and thyself.”

In other words, according to this model, psychology as a school subject was to be internalized, so that its study was no longer the assimilation of a body of knowledge, but the development of the students’ own psychology. The teacher was to act not as someone merely digesting and reporting facts established at the higher, academic level, but as a guide in the development of the boys’ own psychological self-understanding. In a certain sense, he was to become as much the boys’ psychologist as their psychology teacher. The latter conceptualization of the course was, in fact, particularly influential, partly because the academic foundations of psychology were such an object of conflict and uncertainty, and partly because teachers of psychology were not exactly specialists. The model entailed that the shape of the course was to be determined not so much by academics, who usually insisted on scientific rigor and exhaustiveness, but by teachers—the “psychologist-pedagogues,” as some called who were supposedly more aware of the psychological as well as the educational needs of their students.

This meant that the ultimate goal of the high school course in psychology became less a preparation of students for the future academic study of philosophy and psychology at university, and much more the development of an all-round personality (lichnost) by means of a psychologically informed analysis of oneself and one’s environment. This was also tied to the fact that high school students in the final grades (usually aged 17–19) apparently showed a strong interest in “weighty” questions, as well as in their own psychological identities, so the course was conceived as a way of “guiding” (or indeed “disciplining”) such youthful philosophizing and self-observation.

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68 Ibid., 150.
At the same time, the relative openness and undefined nature of the new course turned secondary school psychology into a major arena where different camps of academic psychologists competed over determining what made the legitimate scientific foundations of the discipline. The strategic importance of the high school course in this struggle cannot be underestimated. Because male high schools provided direct access to university, they inevitably shaped the attitudes of students toward the subsequent, properly academic study of psychology, which is why university professors were very keen to determine exactly how this subject should be taught at secondary school level.

A particularly prominent spokesman of mainstream academic psychology on this matter was Georgii Chelpanov of Moscow University, who had himself had the opportunity to teach psychology in high schools in Kiev for a year or so, when he was only an untenured and poorly paid assistant professor. His main adversary in the debate was Aleksandr Nechaev, who, as already demonstrated, had managed to build a solid base for his own, “experimental,” paradigm of psychology in teacher-training establishments, making him particularly well positioned to influence the teaching profession on this matter.

Both factions saw in the introduction of psychology into the male high school curriculum a major opportunity to legitimize their own conceptions of psychology and they both immediately came up with their own rival textbooks. Authors of textbooks were generally well-advised to adhere to the ministerial program and recommendations in order to ensure ministerial sanction as well as adequate sales. While doing so, both Chelpanov and Nechaev at the same time did their best to advance their own quite different approaches to psychology.

Chelpanov in his textbook insisted that introspection was the basis of psychology, while maintaining that experimentation was simply one possible way of obtaining psychological data, and a limited one at that, reliable, for the time being at least, only in the area of psychophysiology, which was of little relevance to high school students. According to Chelpanov, the only way of accessing thoughts or feelings was through a form of “internal experience” (vnutrenii opyt) that contrasted the “external experience” (vneshnii opyt) on which the physical sciences


relied in obtaining their empirical material. While admitting a link between psychological and physiological processes, Chelpanov was keen to draw a clear line between psychology and the natural sciences, not just in order to ward off claims over psychology made by the psychiatrists and the physiologists, but also to counter the insistence of Nechaevite “experimenters” on the importance of making psychology methodologically “natural-scientific” by basing it strictly on “experiments.” Chelpanov also included in his textbook a number of topics specifically from the classical philosophical repertoire, such as the critique of the “naïve realism” of positivist materialism (a clear dig at the natural scientists), and a discussion of the problem of the “perception of space,” which was his own specialty (although these latter topics were in practice often dropped by teachers as too abstruse and not of great interest to high school students).71

Chelpanov insisted on the importance of controlling the students’ appropriation of psychology. He warned young people interested in psychology not to start reading the “big works” in the discipline straight away and without any system. Here he also addressed himself indirectly to teachers as supposed enforcers of this control. Chelpanov insisted that high school students first needed to become acquainted with the “foundations” of psychology by going methodically, chapter by chapter, through his textbook. He emphasized that students should not be allowed to pass to the next chapter before first thoroughly mastering the previous one. Each chapter was followed by a list of questions and teachers had to make sure that all students gave a complete answer to all the questions. These questions were intended to stimulate the students’ “independent study.” What Chelpanov meant by this was that through a form of “introspection” each student needed “to orient himself in the understanding of his own psychic life,” while systematically using the scientific terminology provided in the textbook.72 Only after completing this course should students be allowed independently to read other works in psychology (and Chelpanov recommended further reading at the end of the book).

Nechaev conceptualized his own textbook with a similar aim in mind, in line with the broad ministerial recommendations: “to awaken in students the striving for psychological analysis and to develop in them the skills of self-understanding.”73 He too included summaries and

72Chelpanov, Uchebnik psikhologii, viii.
73A. Nechaev, Uchebnik psikhologii dlia gimnazii (St Petersburg, 1906), 3. Nechaev’s course was based on what he had taught at two private St Petersburg high schools, one male and one female, during the academic year 1905–06. This book also saw several
Assignments devised to aid students in methodically revising each section of his textbook. Like Chelpanov, he warned his young readers not to move straight on to reading proper treatises in psychology, but provided a reading list for those who, only after studying his textbook, wished to find out more.

The most obvious difference between the two textbooks was probably in their form. While Chelpanov’s book was a more typical textbook, with some lengthier theoretical elaborations and definitions, Nechaev’s book was essentially a series of quick examples that teachers could use almost as a script in organizing class discussions. Nechaev also directed teachers to his manual Psychology for Educators, which contained some more elaborate explanations of psychological phenomena. Moreover, while Nechaev, similar to Chelpanov, discussed the distinctive properties of psychology as an autonomous science, he specifically emphasized the link between psychic and bodily phenomena, and above all highlighted the importance of experimentation in psychology, as well as the key role of psychological labs and the mathematical processing of data. He also included descriptions of the principal psychological apparatuses.

It is nevertheless important to bear in mind that the strategy that Nechaev and Chelpanov adopted in trying to influence the high school course was not directly to replicate their struggle in the scientific arena by insisting on the methodological priority of the “experiment” or “introspection,” respectively. Because secondary schools were themselves not sites of scientific production but were meant merely to impart established academic knowledge, this was no place for settling scores about the foundations of the discipline, at least not in an open way. Instead, Nechaev and Chelpanov turned “experimentation” and “introspection,” respectively, into particularly effective pedagogical devices.

As aforementioned, Chelpanov argued that “introspection” (samonabliudenie—literally “self-observation”) was a particularly good way for students to tackle psychological issues “independently” and thereby reach a good level of “self-understanding.” Nechaev, by contrast, argued that what was most important in the organization of high school psychology was “to endow psychological problems with
For Nechaev the best way to achieve this was to organize “class psychological experiments,” something that would ensure the highest levels of “visual clarity” (nagljadnost). These “class experiments” were, of course, meant to be merely “illustrative” rather than properly “scientific” (something Nechaev and his colleagues had to stress in order to ward off Chelpanov’s persistent criticism that school experimentation was turning psychology into a pseudo-science because teachers were not qualified enough to carry them out properly).

In order to facilitate this mode of psychological study in secondary education, Nechaev’s laboratory, based at the Pedagogical Museum, designed a special kit or “collection of instruments” (kollektsiia priborov) that contained relatively inexpensive, specially adapted psychological apparatuses and sets of mental test cards that schools could purchase to support their teaching of psychology. In his manual Nechaev specifically referred the readers (i.e., teachers) to this kit and invited schools to purchase them and create their own specialized “psychology cabinets” (psikhologicheskie kabinety). A few years later Nechaev produced another teachers’ manual, with instructions on how to organize class experiments, assignments and other activities. In 1908, the kit cost 150 rubles, and it was possible to buy individual items for much less. For what it offered, this was remarkably inexpensive, although serious compromises had to be made, because all the apparatuses needed to be redesigned to function without electricity, which meant that they were unable to perform precise measurements with any degree of scientific reliability.

The use of experiments in class was probably the most controversial issue and was especially bitterly fought over by the Chelpanovites and the Nechaevites throughout the late 1900s–1910s, starting with the 1906 conference in pedagogical psychology. A particular problem was that supporters of Nechaev promoted these kits not just as supports in the teaching of psychology to high school students, but also as mini school laboratories that teachers could use to enhance their own knowledge of psychology and thereby their own teacher training. Moreover, the promotion of the kits also involved an, at the very least

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77A. Nechaev, Kak prepodavat’ psikhologiiu? Metodicheskie ukazaniia dlia uchitelei srednikh uchebnykh zavedenii (St Petersburg, 1911).
implicit, encouragement of teachers to perform small-scale research studies in educational psychology and collect experimental data on their students, even if these studies were never fully accepted as having proper scientific value.\(^7^9\)

This was vigorously opposed by Chelpanov, who insisted that teachers could not legitimately perform experiments, educational or otherwise, because they had not received proper training in experimental techniques.\(^8^0\) While academics specializing in psychology by and large spent a vital part of their post-graduate training in psychological laboratories at German universities, the most that high school teachers could rely on (because there were hardly any laboratories at Russian philosophy departments) was a crash course in Nechaev's St Petersburg laboratory, or, more often, simply the instructions provided in Nechaev's manuals and other literature, which Chelpanov deemed grossly inadequate. Consequently, at the end of the 1906 conference it was resolved that Nechaev's experimental kits should be approved only in principle as desirable, but by no means obligatory teaching equipment, with the additional caveat that they may in fact be premature at such an early stage in the development of high school psychology.\(^8^1\)

The extremely public clash between Chelpanov and Nechaev at the 1906 conference contributed a great deal to turning these two figures into the “big beasts” of Russian psychology in the teachers’ eyes. As a consequence, the manuals of Chelpanov and Nechaev became the main recommended literature and saw a large number of new editions in the years to follow. Although some teachers might have preferred one or the other textbook depending on whom they sided with in the debate, Chelpanov’s book, given its more traditional framework and because of his professorship at university, ultimately became the more standard textbook.\(^8^2\)

Nechaev was, in turn, certainly able to influence a great many teachers, and he sold his kit to a number of schools, but ultimately his influence on the organization of this course remained limited, partly because of resistance from the academic and administrative mainstream,

\(^7^9\)For an example of such (ab)use see A. Feoktistov, “Ob odarennosti.” EEP 2 (1909): 1–15.

\(^8^0\)G. I. Chelpanov, “Nuzhny li psikhologicheskie laboratorii dla samostoia-

\(^8^1\)P. P. Megorskii, Perveyi Vserossiiskii s’ezd po pedagogicheskoi psikhologii (Petrozavodsk, 1906), 9.

and because schools hardly ever purchased Nechaev’s kits from their own budgets, but expected enthusiast teachers to pay for them out of their own pockets. In order to make experimental study a real option in school psychology, Nechaev had made his “collection of instruments” genuinely affordable and relatively simple to use. Nevertheless, in day-to-day teaching his ambitions were always dependent on the support of individual devotees, which was something difficult to measure or control. Although a considerable number of teachers were attracted to his ideas and genuinely wished they could do more experiments, they did not necessarily act on this desire and, if they did, the deployment of “experimentation” in class was usually quite random.

The practice of “class experiments” was new not only to teachers, but their students as well. “Experimentation” in the male high schools was, as a rule, done on the students themselves, with the teacher acting as an experimenter–demonstrator while the students were both the experimented upon and the audience that was meant to learn from this. In some cases, the students could perform tests on themselves or on one another. In such a scenario, the teacher sometimes got confused as to whether he was using the mental tests merely as demonstrations in experimental psychology or as ways of investigating his students’ minds. The students were in turn uncertain whether they were in the process of being taught psychology or whether they were somehow being evaluated by the teacher. Many students were said to have initially been very shy about doing the mental tests, fearing that they would be marked on their performance, although when they eventually found out that these psychological tests involved no marks, and that they did not even need to submit their names with the test sheets, they became more relaxed.

Once Chelpanov’s and Nechaev’s textbooks had established themselves in the late 1900s, hardly anyone attempted to compete with them, and the most that others published were supporting materials, such as anthologies of excerpts from classics of psychology,

83In 1910, around 33 schools had purchased the kits, although they were by no means all male high schools. See Grin, “Eksperimental’noe issledovanie pedagogicheskikh problem v Rossii,” 3–5. For quibbles about which schools were actually using these kits and for what purpose, see Chelpanov, “Nuzhny li psikhologicheskie laboratorii?” 813.

84T. Petrov, “K voprosu ob izuchenii psikhologii v srednei shkole.” VV no. 8 (1914): 124–144. Petrov taught at a female ecclesiastical school with the program specified by the Holy Synod rather than the Ministry of Education, but by this time they too used Chelpanov’s and Nechaev’s textbooks.

85Ibid., 126.
designed as school “readers” (khrestomati). Interestingly, though, despite clear differences between the two main textbooks and the fact that their authors were publicly known as archenemies, teachers using their manuals often perceived them as simply complementary. The prevailing view was that Chelpanov was stronger on theory, while Nechaev provided a more interesting organization of class work. Moreover, toward the mid-1910s, there was a certain leveling in the conceptualization of high school psychology, with the Chelpanovites deciding that they too should incorporate psychological experimentation into the course by publishing their own collection of illustrative experiments that teachers were prompted to use in class. This change of heart had all to do with the fact that Chelpanov had by then incorporated experimentation into regular university study, having founded the Moscow Institute of Psychology, which had a very advanced laboratory and a strong program of experimental research. This move implied an attempt by university-based academics and their graduate students to retake some of the ground that the Nechaevites had previously monopolized, which is why the latter responded immediately, by criticizing the manual compiled by Chelpanov’s followers as badly organized, with poorly explained experiments, many of which were apparently unusable in high school.

Despite the academic authority of figures like Chelpanov and Nechaev, not all teachers thought that adhering to either textbooks or experiments was a good thing anyway, and they resisted following either of the two scholars’ programs and suggestions. The relative vagueness of the ministerial directives meant that teachers were generally free to interpret the program as they wished. While being unable or unwilling to purchase experimental kits, some were still keen to overcome the traditional teaching method, which involved devoting half the lesson to the “explication” (ob iasnenie) of a new section in the textbook and the other half to “interrogation” (sprash ivanie) based on the chapter covered

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86See esp. I. Gorodenskii, Psikhologicheskaia khrestomatiia. Posobie pri izuchenii psikologii v srednikh uchebnkh zavedeniakh i dlia samoobrazovaniia (Tiflis, 1909). This was a huge publication of one thousand pages in four volumes. It contained extracts from Russian works on psychology and, especially, existing translations of foreign psychologists.


90See review of the above book by Kornilov, Rybnikov and Smirnov in RS no. 5–8, Otdel eksperimental’noi pedagogiki (1917): 105–108, signed I. M.
the week before.91 Pointing out that existing textbooks were still too hard for some, these teachers argued that, with a subject like psychology, students would only end up learning incomprehensible sentences off by heart, usually getting them completely wrong.

Consequently, many teachers found it better to organize relatively open class discussions during which students would analyze either their own psychological experiences or those of literary characters. The students were nonetheless meant to have the impression that they were not just talking about psychology in a random and amateur way, but were seriously, i.e., “scientifically,” analyzing the most intimate aspects of their inner lives. According to some teachers, students apparently found this method initially rather daunting and difficult, because it required much more independence and initiative than they were used to. There were always those students who protested and demanded that the teacher explain things more. However, in the end, the majority apparently got round to enjoying and making the most of the (relatively) free class discussions. Teachers who favored this method were glad about their students’ enthusiasm, even though they noted that many abused the fact that they were not asked to study the set textbook in detail and, as a result, barely ever opened it.

Some students even started openly criticizing their textbooks, preferring instead to leaf through psychological periodicals and monographs, thereby directly contravening Chelpanov’s and Nechaev’s ambitions to control closely young people’s initiation into the discipline. This was especially the case with students who sported a radically materialist outlook and who liked to emphasize the physiological bases of psychology, having picked up the idea from articles in some of the specialist press, such as Questions of Psychology, Criminal Anthropology and Hypnosis, edited by the psychiatrist V. M. Bekhterev. Also, some of the topics that students were particularly interested in were, in fact, of a more general philosophical nature (e.g. the problem of “free will”) rather than psychological in an empirical sense.

Yet all this lack of systematization placed psychology as a school subject in a very precarious position. In fact, everyone concerned constantly felt that it was in the curriculum only “on a trial basis.” From as early as 1906–07, rumors circulated that the subject might be axed at any time.92 Particularly significant was that, throughout the 1910s, teachers remained untrained for and hence undisciplined in the

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way they approached the subject, which was why the above rather random “literary discussion” approach was so popular.

All this resulted in the image of psychology as an “inexact” science full of unresolved (and seemingly irresolvable) contradictions.93 With time the fundamental uncertainty about how “philosophical propedeutics” should be set up only increased. While people like Chelpanov argued that the course should also include elements from the history of philosophy, and not just psychology and logic, others wondered why psychology was being taught as part of “philosophical propedeutics” in the first place, pointing out that psychology had become an autonomous science and should be taught as a separate subject altogether.94 Fearing the worst, the Moscow Psychological Society—the longest standing learned body devoted to the discipline, based at Moscow University since 1885, and where Chelpanov was particularly influential in the late 1900s and 1910s—carried out a survey among teachers of psychology in 1909, hoping to use the feedback to lobby the Ministry of Education to strengthen support for the subject.95 In 1910, P. P. Blonskii (Chelpanov’s former student, later prominent educational reformist under the Bolsheviks) reported on this survey in the society’s organ Questions of Philosophy and Psychology.96

Academics as well as teachers complained that psychology was unjustly treated as a second rate school subject. The status of psychology was compared with such minor, facultative subjects as drawing, calligraphy, and law. This was put forward as the clearest explanation why the teaching of psychology was so variable.97 Both teachers and academics wanted everyone, from ministerial officials to high school students, to start taking psychology more seriously.98 They pointed out that thanks to the introduction of “philosophical propedeutics” the study of psychology and philosophy at university had vastly improved, with professors no longer needing to waste time on elementary matters. Some even went as far as to say that “philosophical propedeutics” could and should replace the Classics as the most important high school subject in the final grades, because it encouraged rigorous abstract thinking and was of use to all future professions. The more conservative

93Chelpanov, “Mesto li psikhologii v srednei shkole?,” 131.
94Solov’ev, “Kritika i bibliografiia,” 7. A. Selikhанovich, Filosofskaia propedevtika v srednei sbole. (Mysli i vpechatleniia uchitelia) (Kiev, 1913). Selikhанovich was a privat-dotsent at Kiev University, although he simultaneously taught psychology in schools.
96P. P. Blonskii, Rezultaty ankety po voprosu o postanovke prepodavaniia psikhologii v srednei sbole (Moscow, 1910).
97See Feoktistov, “Psikhologicheskii khlam”, 163.
98Miloradovich, “Psikhologiya v srednei shkole,” 1–3.
teachers (or perhaps simply those who believed this argument would endear psychology to the authorities) suggested that the course made students more critical toward fashionable, yet pernicious, “materialist” ideologies (although this was clearly not the case with all students). The survey concluded that the course was perfectly accessible to high school finalists, that students showed great interest in the subject, and finally, that the study of psychology was able to influence the development of their overall moral character and self-understanding. In some schools the course apparently prompted the creation of “philosophy circles,” while many students were encouraged to move on to further reading, and some even contributed philosophical papers to school magazines.99

To assess matters for itself, the Ministry of Education sent the professor of philosophy Ia. F. Oze and the professor of psychiatry V. F. Chizh—both based at Iur’ev University (now Tartu, Estonia)—to the Riga Educational District to examine how psychology was taught in its schools.100 The overall assessment of the two professors was that the teachers were generally happy with the program, although they wanted to see some parts of the course expanded. They especially called for enhancing the sections on “will” and “emotions,” which had still not been sufficiently developed by academic psychologists, yet which were, in the teachers’ opinion, particularly relevant to high school students, given the role both of these played in adolescent psychology. In fact, the important section on emotions was the one taught mostly through literary examples. This was acknowledged as the most suitable method until the “science of emotions” was developed properly.

Some teachers were criticized, however, for including in their discussions extraneous elements that were not part of the official program, such as sections on hypnotism or on the psychology of animals. Most importantly, though, Chizh said that he was very worried that students did not have a clear idea about the exact place of psychology in the system of sciences, something that reflected quandaries about psychology’s identity at the higher, academic level. Thus, the report of the two professors, which mixed positive elements with some very serious concerns, hardly made things any clearer for the educational authorities.

Despite continuous calls for possible improvements, the advent of the First World War made it very difficult to change anything for the better. Consequently, high school psychology did not improve in either

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100K voprosu postanovki predpovesti filosofskoi propedevtiki v srednej shkole (Otchety po revizii gimnazii Rizskogo Uchebnogo Okruga) (Iur’ev, 1911). See also Chelpanov, “Mesto li psikhologii v srednej shkole?,” 131 and Miloradovich, “Psikhologija v srednej shkole,” 1–12.
status or format, although it just about managed to survive in the curriculum until the end of the tsarist era. There was still no agreement on the best method for teaching the subject and this left it open to teachers either to adhere rigidly to a textbook (mainly Chelpanov’s) or to improvise their own individual approaches, risking being accused of literary amateurism, experimentalist pseudo-scientism, or random eclecticism.

Chelpanov’s textbook, while remaining the most authoritative, was increasingly criticized as too theoretical and not conducive to interesting and relevant student self-analysis. Many specifically questioned Chelpanov’s approach of proceeding from the most elementary psychic processes toward the personality as a whole—the order governed by the logic of psychology as a systematic science. They wanted instead the course to be presented the other way around, which, in their view, would make more sense pedagogically, given that, for students, the most familiar and the most interesting was precisely the integral personality. As far as Nechaev’s program was concerned, although he had many supporters within the teaching profession, he was ultimately unable to persuade the majority that carrying out proper psychological experiments in class could be done effectively, so that both teachers and students knew exactly what they were doing. In 1916, faced with such a bleak picture, the Ministry of Education made the decision to scrap the subject from the curriculum, despite continuing protests from everyone involved.

CONCLUSION

Controversies surrounding psychology as a school subject played a major role in the development of psychology as a science in late Imperial Russia. Both the female “pedagogy class” and the male “philosophical propedeutics” were key battlegrounds where Russian psychologists negotiated issues central to the identity of their emergent discipline. Russian academic psychology was at this time institutionally weak and its legitimacy depended greatly on creating a stable and coherent disciplinary foundation at secondary educational level. However, stability and coherence was certainly not what the high school course in psychology brought to the discipline—quite the contrary.

The introduction of psychology into the curriculum of boys’ high schools in 1905 was initially warmly welcomed as important and useful in many different ways. There is no doubt that the event generated a lot of excitement and gave the discipline much desired publicity. However,

101 On what follows see Afanas’ev, “Vopros o psikhologii v srednei shkole,” 30–42.
school psychology remained problematic for practically the entire
duration of its relatively brief existence in the high school curriculum. The introduction of the subject was a poorly planned, messy affair,
which failed to take into account the complexity of what was at stake and
the multiplicity of conflicting agendas of all the different participants.

The “general educational” demands of secondary education and
the low level (or nonexistence) of specialist training for psychology
tutors opened the course to very loose and varied interpretations that, on
the whole, favored the light, “literary discussion” approach to the
subject. This ran counter to the aspirations of academic psychologists
who hoped that the subject would be vital to improving the study of
psychology at the higher, academic level, and who therefore made
considerable efforts to render the teaching of psychology in schools
more disciplined and rigorously “scientific.” Yet the experts themselves
were split on what psychology should be “as a science,” and,
consequently, most high school tutors, who hoped to be seen as
official (albeit low-level) representatives of academic psychology in
the educational realm, were often at a loss about what the legitimate
form of their subject actually was. While some slavishly followed
authoritative textbooks, others dabbled amateurishly in psychological
experiments, or else, dissatisfied with what was officially on offer,
improvised their own eclectic approaches.

In the process of shaping school psychology, the teachers of this
subject never played the role of mere instruments of academic experts.
They never acted simply as a relatively passive audience that supported
or opposed this or that competing agenda imposed on them by the
scientists. Although it was usual for teachers to accept their institutional
inferiority in relation to academic specialists, to defer to the latter’s
authority, and, above all, to seek guidance from them, they at the same
time readily assumed an active stance in shaping “school psychology”
itself, often seeking to assume the role of “psychologists” themselves,
thereby indirectly prompting academic psychology to engage more in
the needs of the school environment, the education process, and the high
school students as subjects/objects of psychological education.

The problem of instituting psychology as a high school subject was
always far more complicated than a simple polarization of “experts” and
“teachers.” The psychologists who were the most interested in
influencing the field had themselves, in their early careers, taught the
subject in high school. Also, they never positioned themselves as entirely
outside the realm of education, but acted consistently as “educators of
educators.” What is more, they usually conceptualized this relation as
that of “masters and disciples,” hoping to engage psychology teachers
and, by extension, the high school students, in systematically preparing
for, and in some cases actually doing, psychology as a science.
The ultimate failure of high school psychology in late Imperial Russia cannot be reduced either to the comparative youth of the discipline or to its being ridden by internal strife at the highest academic level. The problems were never simply about psychology as a science, but concerned the complex interrelations of different professional environments, namely those of academics and teachers, who were caught up in an ambiguous and contested “division of labor” in the development of psychology, simultaneously, and often confusingly, both as a science and as an educational subject.