Pedology as Occupation in the Early Soviet Union

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Pedology as Occupation

Pedology – in Russian *pedologiia* (педология), the so-called 'science of the child' – was a multidisciplinary field focused on forging a scientific approach to the management of child biopsychosocial development. Pedology experienced remarkable institutional expansion in the Soviet Union during the 1920s in the context of the Bolsheviks' efforts to build a new, universal and progressive, system of education, healthcare and child welfare (Fradkin, 1991; Balashov, 2012; Byford, 2020). By the end of the New Economic Policy era (NEP, 1921-28), pedology was enshrined as a 'Soviet science' at the service of the state in all policy domains relevant to the nurture of future generations of Soviet citizens. However, not long after, at the start of the 1930s, as Stalin began to impose ever-greater political control over both the Party and the state, pedology became, together with the rest of the Soviet scientific field, a target of stringent political disciplining. Then, a bit further down the line, in 1936, it was – somewhat suddenly and not entirely expectedly – denounced by the Party's Central Committee in stark terms as, in fact, an 'anti-Soviet pseudoscience', and its entire institutional infrastructure was dismantled for good (Ewing, 2001; Kurek, 2004).

One of the key challenges faced by those researching early-Soviet pedology is how to answer the most basic of questions: what precisely was 'pedology'? One way of conceptualizing it is as a *signifier for a framework of mobilizations of a particular body of scientific and professional work*. What this lens allows us to see is, firstly, that, in Russia, 'pedology' served as a prominent signifier for a framework of relevant mobilizations in one quite specific historical period – principally from the early 1920s until 1936, but not thereafter. It is true that the term 'pedology' had been in use already in pre-revolutionary Russia and that it was even then deployed in mobilizations of Russia's bourgeoning child study movement (Byford, 2008b: 64, 74-75; Byford, 2020: 100-101). However, at this time, during the 1900s-1910s, 'pedology' featured as merely one of several partially overlapping signifiers circulating in the field (to include 'pedagogical psychology' and 'experimental pedagogy', for example) and it was by no means the most successful in mobilizational terms; it became increasingly conspicuous only during the early 1920s, and by the end of that decade, truly dominant (Byford, 2020: 151-154, 185-211).

The second important consequence of conceptualizing 'pedology' as a signifier for a framework of mobilization is that it helps us see that this term refers, in fact, to a number of different mobilizations taking place at the same time. One very specific mobilization that one can follow across the 1920s took place around 'pedology' as a signifier for what was supposed to become a new scientific discipline (Byford, 2020: 185-200). During the first half of the 1920s, pedology in the Soviet Union expanded mostly as a loose umbrella framework that successfully drew researchers to it precisely because they did not need to concern themselves too much about whether pedology was a discipline in its own right, what exactly its epistemological structure might be, and how precisely their own work fitted in it. However, in the second half of the 1920s, as the Soviet state started to harness this field more systematically into its operations, especially in order to boost its ambitious, yet flagging, educational reforms, there was a notable shift towards transforming pedology from an inherently plural enterprise into a singular science with a more cohesive epistemology, better integrated institutional organization, and more explicit political direction (Piskoppel' & Shchedrovitskii, 1991; Shvartsman & Kuznetsova, 1994; Etkind, 1997: 259-85; Piskoppel', 2006; Balashov, 2012).

This is not, however, the mobilization that I shall be focusing on in the discussion that follows. What I will analyse instead is the mobilization that took place – still under the banner of 'pedology' – around a particular

occupational role and related body of occupational work. More precisely, what I am interested in here is the constitution, in the early Soviet era, of 'the pedologist' (*pedolog*), as someone carrying out 'pedological work' (*pedologicheskaia rabota*), eventually in the context of the so-called 'pedology service' (*pedologicheskaia sluzhba*) (Baranov, 1991; Tseniuga, 2010; Byford, 2020: 218-244). What I have in mind is not simply the 'applied' dimension of the wider project of pedology to be differentiated from some 'pure' science of the child. In Western European developments of pedology before the First World War, there had, indeed, been explicit attempts to distinguish between a general science of child development that would be termed 'pedo-*logy*' and a practical-professional branch of this science that some dubbed 'pedo-*technics*' (Hofstetter & Schneuwly, 2013). I am not looking to replicate this division here. Rather, what I am differentiating are distinct *mobilizations*, which took place under the same banner and were, of course, intertwined, but which are nonetheless important to distinguish. At the same time, I am not interested in charting the history of a given occupation – that of 'the pedologist' – merely in its own right. What 'the pedologist' was, how and why it emerged as an occupation, what in the end happened to it and why, is crucial to the story that I am going to tell. However, the true aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the critical and distinctive, yet so far neglected, role that specifically occupational, as opposed to scientific, mobilization, played in the history of Soviet pedology.

The Proto-Pedologists (1900s-10s)

The roots of pedology as an occupation are to be found before the revolution. The idea of a 'science of the child' had arisen in Russia well before the Bolsheviks took power. A vibrant movement devoted to the study of child development, involving psychologists, doctors, educators and parents, had mobilized quite effectively in the Russian empire over the last couple of decades of autocratic rule, though mostly through professional and civic initiative and with only partial and often ambivalent state support (Nikol'skaia, 1995; Byford, 2020: 41-146). There is no space here to describe the history of Russia's pre-revolutionary child study in any detail, but what is essential to highlight, for the purposes of the argument that follows, is that, during the 1900s-1910s, some of the liveliest debates in this field revolved around the question of what occupations should embody and enact the new expertise that was being generated with the rise of scientific research into child biopsychosocial development, especially within the education system (Byford, 2006; Byford, 2008a; Byford, 2008b). And yet, the crucial characteristic of the late tsarist period was that, in the end, no brand-new occupational role was created. In other words, there was no successful constitution of a 'pedologist', as happened a bit later, in the early Soviet era. However, what we do see is the forging of roles that one can describe as 'proto-pedological' insofar as these served as foundations on which the occupation of the Soviet pedologist was subsequently built.

One of these 'proto-pedologists' from the late tsarist era was the school doctor. This was a recognized medical role in late imperial Russia, increasingly regulated by the state, but poorly remunerated and far from prestigious within the wider medical profession. For this reason, there were some concerted activist efforts during the last couple of decades of the empire to turn this role into something more than just a doctor servicing schools (Byford, 2006). However, this campaign never amounted to transforming the school doctor into something other than a doctor first and foremost. This was mostly because no new role, however expert, could compete with the status of a medical professional. Indeed, it was essential to school-doctor activists to maintain the prestige of medical qualifications as those defining of the school-doctor role, even while looking to boost it with additional functions and expertise. The result was the strategy of simply adding extra specialist training (in school hygiene, child psychiatry, psychometrics, anthropometrics, and physical education) to the school doctor's existing general medical qualifications, while simultaneously promoting the superiority of science-based medical expertise over and above the practice-based expertise of schoolteachers. This, however, meant that the new and enhanced concept of the school doctor never went

beyond that of a 'doctor in education', yet it at the same time explicitly and self-consciously entailed a form of jurisdictional trespassing, which was by and large resisted by teachers.

The second 'proto-pedologist' under construction in the late tsarist period was what one might call 'the enhanced pedagogue'. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, the professionalization of educators in Russia included a concerted campaign to boost the status of pedagogy as an academic discipline underpinning teaching as occupational practice (Byford, 2008b). This involved not just looking to improve pedagogy's standing in purely institutional terms, but also to fundamentally transform higher pedagogical training by placing at its centre a systematic initiation into the psychology and physiology of child development (Byford, 2020: 46-52, 83-105). However, this campaign to make pedagogy more 'scientific' introduced some uncertainty about what kinds of new occupational tasks, alongside traditional ones associated with teaching itself, teachers were entitled to perform. For example, a big question mark was placed over whether ordinary teachers should be carrying out psychological investigations on their pupils, using some of the latest psychological methods, such as mental tests, even if they did this for purely practical-pedagogical purposes (Sokolov, 1956; Byford, 2008a). This issue became highly controversial during the 1900s-1910s: while the application of experimental psychology to problems of education was promoted widely and successfully among Russian teachers throughout the 1900s, by the 1910s most academic psychologists became wary of ordinary teachers dabbling independently and amateurishly in the specialist methods of psychological research, notably psychometrics. They consequently argued that even though teacher training should continue to include a scientifically grounded introduction to such methods, as professionals, teachers had to limit their work and responsibilities to education itself (Byford, 2008b; Byford, 2014).

At the same time, however, the leaders of Russia's child study movement of this era, not least those coming from psychology, were keen to endow a smaller body of already experienced educators with more advanced, properly scientific, expertise, which would allow these individuals to claim a new type of authority and to carry out a set of functions that ordinary teachers would be neither qualified nor able to perform – from systematically studying schoolchildren with the help of the latest techniques of experimental psychology to offering scientifically informed guidance on how to rationally manage the education process (Byford, 2008b). Such a figure came very close to what would have been called a 'pedologist' later on. However, the institutions that provided this type of training in the tsarist era – namely, the St Petersburg-based Pedagogical Academy and Psycho-Neurological Institute – were both very new, 'alternative', non-state establishments, without powers to constitute new occupational roles in the empire's education system. In fact, the qualifications that these institutions were awarding were not recognized by the tsarist state as offering anything more than a simple boost to their holders' existing regular teaching qualifications. Moreover, the priority of those who ran this innovative training was less the creation of a new kind of practitioner within the education system and more the generation of a cohort of young researchers equipped to study child development, socialization and education using the latest scientific methods. The consequence of this was that those who went through this training ended up in limbo between the fields of education and science, for there was no role that matched their newly acquired expertise either within the education system or in the established university structure.

Pedology's Niche (1920s)

After the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks embarked on building a radically new state education system that would cater equitably for the entirety of the child population of the former empire (Holmes, 1991). One of the key characteristics of this new system was the dissociation of education as such, or, more precisely, of teaching as occupational work, from the practice of measuring children's development (Mikhailychev, Karpova, & Leonova, 2005a; Mikhailychev, Karpova, & Leonova, 2005b). Traditionally, the development of

children in the context of schooling would have been measured through various forms of evaluation and assessment carried out by the teachers themselves as part of their regular educational tasks. However, partly out of the spirit of progressive reformism and partly out of sheer necessity (given that large percentages of children for whom the new system was being built had not previously had access to systematic schooling and were starting from a very low educational base), the Bolsheviks abolished school marks and exams as meaningless and counterproductive, discriminatory and repressive.

However, this did not entail the abolition of either the notion of 'development' or, indeed, of the need to measure it – quite the contrary (Byford, 2020: 224-229). Firstly, the notion of 'development' (*razvitie*) was explicitly expanded and its meaning now stretched well beyond the accumulation of knowledge (*obrazovanie*), the acquisition of skills (*obuchenie*), and the formation of character (*vospitanie*). 'Development' was expected to comprehensively cover all aspects of a person's being – physical, to include both bodily growth and general health; psychological, to include the development of both functional cognition and a balanced personality; and social, to include moral, civic and even ideological development. Secondly, the Bolsheviks, as builders of what was supposed to become the most advanced of modern societies (and who were, in fact, trying to construct it at breakneck speed, amidst a constant threat of counterrevolution, and in competition with adversaries on the global stage), could hardly afford to neglect the systematic monitoring of the developmental progress of future generations.

It was precisely in this niche associated with overseeing and measuring all-round development in the child population at large that pedology arose as a body of occupational work. The precise position of this niche was ambiguous, however. On the one hand, it was envisaged as an inherent part of the new education system, insofar as it was expected to replace a pre-existing functional component (the traditional school assessments, exams and reports). At the same time, this niche greatly exceeded the education system as such. Indeed, what pedological work measured and monitored was children's comprehensive biopsychosocial development. This included regular medical checks, anthropometric assessments, psychometric evaluations, the testing of general literacy and numeracy, the monitoring of the 'health' of the wider social environment in which the child was being raised, including family, school and neighbourhood, plus following up on the child's moral and political formation. As a result, this niche was not an easy one to demarcate and define, either institutionally or professionally (Byford, 2020: 151-154). In the early 1920s, given that the new education system was still in the process of being forged in piecemeal and largely experimental fashion, pedology's occupational niche arose in a rather disorganized way across multiple services and distinct institutional networks managed by different commissariats, especially those of healthcare (Narkomzdrav) and education (Narkompros). The consequence of this was that the niche was professionally heterogeneous and the attribute 'pedological' could be attributed to the work of professionals with different qualifications, the most obvious distinction being drawn between the so-called 'doctor-pedologist' (*vrach-pedolog*) and the 'pedologist-pedagogue' (*pedolog-pedagog*).

Furthermore, while this niche cohered around the education system, pedological work was initially positioned largely outside the schools themselves, in hubs removed from the day-to-day pedagogical work of teachers. The most significant part of the early pedological servicing of schools, especially in the peripheries, was done through so-called 'prophylactic clinics' (*profilakticheskie ambulatorii*) run by Narkomzdrav (Byford, 2016a: 78-86). These were units staffed by doctors who monitored the health and psychophysical development of the local schoolchild population. In larger cities, the pedological servicing of schools was run from research labs affiliated to regional educational administrations, where psychologists with psychometric expertise played a significant role. These centres oversaw mass testing in schools and operated assessment clinics, offering consultations to parents, schools and kindergartens (Byford, 2020: 230-238).

However, it would be wrong to conceptualize pedological work as situated completely outside the school gates. Indeed, systematic larger-scale monitoring had to be done in the schools and kindergartens themselves, which meant that significant parts of pedological work was delegated to regular educators who were not trained pedologists. For example, a key practice of staff looking after children in kindergartens became the keeping of detailed diaries on children's behaviour based on programmes of observation designed by leading academic authorities in the field (Kirschenbaum, 2001: 114). In schools, the administering of mass tests was again, out of necessity, regularly entrusted to ordinary teachers (Kadnevskii, 2004). In both cases, though, the reliability of the data collected in this way was under question, not least since in these early years the training of educators working in Soviet kindergartens and schools was hardly standardized.

It is also important to note that, as a domain of occupational work, pedology grew in the Soviet 1920s in parallel and largely intertwined with another, similarly new, occupation – defectology – which likewise crystallized across and in-between the professional territories of education and medicine (Zamskii, 1995; Byford, 2017; Byford, 2018). Pedology and defectology overlapped especially in their diagnostic responsibilities – namely, the task of identifying deviations from 'normal' development. The key distinction between the two was that pedology serviced the regular school and focused on facilitating 'normal' development, whereas defectology's territory were 'pathologies' of development, to be 'corrected' in special institutions of care and education. Defectology had surged in importance in the early 1920s in the context of the Bolshevik government's efforts to deal with the traumatic effects of war, famine and mass displacement on the child population in the immediate aftermath of the revolution (Byford, 2016b; Byford, 2020: 154-164). By contrast, the rise of pedology's niche was tied to the Bolsheviks' construction of the new progressive education system (Byford, 2020: 164-170). The relationship between pedology and defectology during the 1920s was an evolving one and depended on the relative importance of their respective occupational niches. While defectology's niche was dominant at the start of the decade, pedology's came to prevail towards its end.

Instituting the Pedologist in the Soviet Education System (1928-31)

It was mostly from the mid-1920s, at the point when Narkompros's new progressive curricula started to be implemented more widely and systematically across the school network, that one sees a greater push to professionalize the occupational role of the pedologist. At first, this was carried out mostly through manuals outlining the methodologies, protocols and tests that were to become the toolkit of pedologists working in the education, healthcare and child welfare systems. However, this did not mean that there was a clear definition of the pedologist as a Soviet occupation. In practice, the background of those deemed qualified to carry out pedological work of one type or another remained open: the job continued be done by those with medical training as well as those who received suitable qualifications at a pedagogical institute; and this work was still being overseen and regulated by different commissariats.

However, in 1928, around the time of the First All-Union Pedology Congress in Moscow (the event that formally enshrined pedology as a 'Soviet science' at the service of the state), key figures at Narkompros, both political and academic, started to argue more vocally that it was essential to establish an occupationally more coherent pedology service, which would be tasked with providing comprehensive pedological support to Narkompros's school network (Byford, 2020: 239-240). The Commissar of Enlightenment, Anatolii Lunacharskii, stressed that the function of the pedologist needed to be made distinct from that of the school doctor (Baranov, 1991: 103). In particular, he wanted to see the pedology service supporting schools become less dependent on Narkomzdrav and for there to be more specialists in pedology trained in relevant streams at the Narkompros-run pedagogical institutes. At around this same time, the prominent educational reformist, Pavel Blonskii, one of the authors of Narkompros's progressive new curricula and an active

promoter of pedology in education, described pedological work as a serious and complex examination of a 'clinical' kind, yet which monitored and fostered not 'health' but 'development' (Byford, 2020: 238). Thus, while using medical paradigms to model pedological work, Blonskii explicitly distinguished the two domains in terms of their respective functions and goals.

A further push to constitute the school pedologist as a specialist occupational role in the education system came from the lobby campaigning for the expansion of mass testing in Soviet schools. One of the leaders of this lobby was, again, Blonskii (Kadnevskii, 2004; Leopoldoff, 2014; Byford, 2020: 230-238). The First All-Union Pedology Congress had, in fact, revealed significant divisions among Soviet psychologists over the mass use of psychometrics in schools, and one of the key arguments against the practice was that tests were all too often being entrusted to untrained and unreliable run-of-the-mill teachers. Blonskii, who was originally very encouraging of the involvement of teachers in testing as a way of promoting this practice in education more generally, resolved at this point that the future of psychometrics in the Soviet education system depended on preparing qualified specialists who would, crucially, be permanently based in schools. This did not preclude such figures coming from the ranks of teachers, so long as they were appropriately trained and employed specifically as pedologists with a distinct set of occupational tasks, to include, notably, psychometrics (Byford, 2020: 237-238).

However, although the Soviet government issued directives designed to stimulate the creation of a more systematic pedology service for its school network already from 1928, Narkompros was slow to implement them, failing to pour sufficient resources into the initiative. A report produced in 1931 highlighted that Narkomzdrav still seemed to be overseeing the lion's share of ground-level pedological work in the country, while the service run by Narkompros remained haphazard and understaffed (Byford, 2020: 240). Another reason for this was that the priority of pedology's academic leadership at this particular juncture was the mobilization of pedology as a science rather than an occupation. Indeed, 1928-30, the years that followed the First All-Union Pedology Congress, were a crucial period during which this otherwise fragmented and multidisciplinary field worked hard to form a more cohesively organized scientific enterprise. This did not mean that the leaders of pedology ignored the practical role that the state expected pedology to play in the education system. Far from it – they hoped to make pedology as science pervade Soviet education from top to bottom. However, they tended to conceptualize pedological work carried out locally as an inherent part of a *scientific* hierarchy: pedology units servicing schools were understood as 'ground-level cells' (*nizovye iacheiki*) that fed empirical data up the chain to pedology's scientific centre (the major research institutes based in Moscow) where general theories and recommendations would be formulated on the basis of systematic analysis and then passed back down the chain for implementation in the localities (Byford, 2020: 204-206).

However, this drive to build pedology as a scientific enterprise suddenly ground to a halt in 1931 (Byford, 2020: 211-217). At this critical juncture, the entirety of the Soviet scientific field was subjected to systematic politico-ideological scrutiny and intimidation by the rapidly Stalinizing Party structures (Krementsov, 1997). Party-political disciplining was designed to bring to heel and enforce Party-loyalty on all those in academic leadership positions who had assumed prominent positions in the nexus that during the 1920s formed between the Soviet state and the scientific field. The purpose of the exercise was to comprehensively subordinate those key domains of scientific activity that had during the 1920s been turned into a de facto extension of the Soviet state to the political will and authority of the Party, in which Stalin in turn sought to achieve full control. This meant that the entirety of pedology's scientific leadership, irrespective of the school of thought or methodological framework to which the researcher belonged, was at this point accused of one type of 'deviation' from the Party line or another (Umrikhin, 1991). Crucially, the impact that such political disciplining had on pedology as a field which had only just started to organize into a more cohesive scientific

enterprise, was to effectively halt its mobilization as a science (Fradkin, 1991: 36-52). Any further development of conceptual frameworks, research methodologies, and larger-scale projects under the banner of 'pedology' came to an end as all leading figures in the field became extremely wary of overstepping the mark in some way. It was in this context, however, that pedology as routine, ground-level occupational work came to the fore. Indeed, the day-to-day pedological servicing of schools became *the* form in which pedology as such survived the politico-ideological grinder that the Party had put the enterprise through during 1931-32. In other words, it was principally as an occupation, rather than science, that pedology continued to mobilize, organize, and professionalize from 1931 onwards.

The Pedology Service (1930s)

The year 1931 was also the point when Narkompros was forced by the Party to perform a comprehensive U-turn in its long-standing progressive educational policy (Holmes, 1991: 137-46; Holmes, 1999; Ewing, 2001). The Party decree of 25 August 1931 'On the Primary and Secondary School' denounced all earlier progressivism in Soviet education as leftist deviationism that had failed to meet the demands of accelerated 'socialist construction' which had been initiated at the end of NEP. To counter this, the Party ordered a comprehensive reinstatement of previously rejected traditional educational methods, not least a much greater emphasis on the enforcement of classroom discipline and an expectation that all children must absorb standard programmes in key school subjects at the required level. This drastic turnaround prompted a swift disassociation of the enterprise of pedology from Narkompros's earlier ideology of educational experimentalism, but also an urgent reaffirmation that pedology was still there as an important tool supporting Narkompros in the realization of its objectives in the now thoroughly revised policy context (Byford, 2020: 219-224).

The way in which pedology was expected to do this was principally by means of a more effectively organized ground-level pedology service (Baranov, 1991; Byford, 2020: 238-244). Between 1931 and 1933 Narkompros issued a set of directives reasserting its ambition to appoint a pedologist for each school, while simultaneously improving the way in which the service was administratively run. The service was overseen by the Narkompros-affiliated Central Interdepartmental Pedology Commission, but the key hubs coordinating the work on the ground were regional pedology labs affiliated to local educational administrations. These were expected to be equipped with a full range of essential apparatuses, tests and other resources, and staffed not only with pedologists, but also a defectologist, a specialist in psychometrics, and medical personnel, including, ideally a neuropsychiatrist (Etkind, 1997: 270-71). These regional centres liaised directly with schools and other children's facilities on their territories, providing instructions on how to carry out observations, tests, surveys, health checks and anthropometric assessments. They were there also to offer expert consultations to schools and parents on a needs basis, to perform larger studies on schoolchildren in their area, and to enlighten parents and educators on topics which were considered to be part of pedological expertise, such as 'difficult children' or 'school tests' (see also Stoiukhina, 2008).

At the same time, it was deemed critical for pedological work to be firmly embedded in the daily life of every school (Baranov, 1991; Tseniuga 2010). Each school was expected to set up a pedology room (*kabinet*) staffed by a resident school pedologist. The school pedologist was there to help schools deal with any issues that concerned the children themselves, with particular focus on tackling low achievement and poor discipline. The pedologist was expected to help diagnose 'problem' children, while working with the school and parents to prevent problems arising in the first place – for example, by streaming children by ability or by advising parents and teachers on what pedology as a science of child's biopsychosocial development recommended in particular situations.

The number of school pedologists increased sharply in this period, although arguments continued to be made that there were still not enough of them and that their training was not always of the desired standard. The school pedologist sat on the school's main board as well as some of its subcommittees, such as those responsible for planning lessons or developing new teaching materials. At the same time, schools formed pedology 'cells' or 'brigades' within which the school pedologist acted as the core expert, but which were made up of a handful of regular teachers, the school doctor, and someone from the administration. Such 'brigades' were seen as crucial to integrating pedology more closely with school life: they were expected to make pedological expertise more transparent to educators, while at the same time increasing the likelihood that pedological recommendations would be appropriately actioned in practice. Within the group, the pedologist provided relevant expertise, but decisions were a matter for the 'brigade' as a whole; this meant that the pedologist's recommendations could be diluted or even voted down.

Significantly, though, each school pedologist was at the same time in regular communication with the regional pedology centre. The latter might ask the school pedologist to take on certain tasks, such as gathering data for some general study or report; or conversely, the school pedologist could refer to the regional centre some especially problematic child that the school was unable to deal with on its own. Thus, even when intimately embedded in school life, the school pedologist was never simply and straightforwardly a school role, but simultaneously acted as part of a top-down service that operated autonomously from the schools themselves.

Moreover, the occupation-specific expertise of school pedologists was understood to be ultimately rooted in the authority of 'science' – specifically the science black-boxed as 'pedology' (Byford, 2020: 219-224). While all Soviet teachers were expected to gain some grounding in pedology as part of their professional training, pedology as 'science' still seemed rather remote, specialist and technical to the run-of-the-mill educator. It is not that pedology was viewed as dissociated from the interests of practicing educators or the aims of education as such, but simply that the authority of pedology as a body of expertise was experienced as separate from the educators' own professional authority. This was why it was not uncommon for schools to see recommendations coming from the pedologists as interfering or misplaced, especially if they implied criticism of the teachers or the school management. However, the separate nature of pedology's authority, black-boxed as the view of 'science', could also be very useful to schools. For example, teachers and administrators would readily invoke it in situations where a case needed to be made for an underperforming pupil to be streamed into a separate class or for a particularly troublesome child to be moved to a different school.

With the start of the second five-year plan in 1932, the priority of all branches of the Soviet state, including Narkompros, was to enhance the efficiency with which targets were met and outputs delivered. One of Narkompros's key policies in this context became streaming by ability and the referral to 'special schools' of pupils who for one reason or another slowed down the pace of regular pedagogical work and the realization of standard school programmes (Byford, 2020: 224-229). The idea of streaming had been developed and promoted already in the late 1920s (by figures such as Blonskii, for instance), but it was only in the 1930s that the measure started to be taken more seriously by Narkompros officials and school authorities as an effective tool for managing school discipline and improving overall outputs. School pedologists were placed right at the centre of this policy and its implementation became one of the core tasks of the pedology service.

Evaluations resulting in a pupil being moved to an auxiliary class or special school were complex and not solely the work of the pedologist: they also included contributions from teachers, the school doctor, and school administrators (Byford, 2020: 222-224). A certain proportion of children selected for referral was labelled 'difficult to educate' (*trudnovospituemye*); another group were those diagnosed with a mental health condition (*psikhonevrotiki*). For these two categories decisive were pedagogical and medical verdicts

respectively. However, by far the largest percentage of referrals were those labelled 'mentally backward' (*umstvenno otstalye*). What was meant by this seemingly harsh term (another translation of *otstalost'* being 'retardation') was not exactly the more serious forms of congenital learning difficulties that would fall within the remit of defectology. Rather, the term entailed a lower than average cognitive performance that prevented the child from following the standard school programme at the required level and pace. Although all diagnoses and referrals were explicitly based on a range of assessments, crucial to the diagnosis of 'mental backwardness' was an 'objective' measure of a child's 'level' of cognitive development, which was established by means of tests. There was, however, a variety of tests used as part of such diagnostics, resulting in some ambiguity about what precisely constituted 'mental backwardness'. Crucially, though, even when tests measured general intelligence or specific mental functions, the output was understood as something that mapped onto the child's ability to realize normative educational goals (Byford, 2014; Byford, 2020: 232).

However, what was really important about tests was that as instruments that produced objective outputs, they came to embody the instrumental nature not just of pedological assessment more generally, but also of the pedology service as such, including the pedologist as an occupation and pedology as a body of science-based expertise. As an occupation, pedology thereby became an instrument to which particular decisions within the system could be delegated (Byford, 2020: 223-224). Decision-making around the question of whether a child should be referred to a special school was neither automated nor automatic, nor was it all down to the pedologists. And yet, such decision-making was – of necessity, since otherwise it would be neither efficient nor replicable – enclosed in a series of black boxes, each fitted inside the other, starting with the test administered by a pedologist as autonomous expert-practitioner representing a bureaucratically-organized service and finishing with pedology as the science that had supposedly mastered the laws of child development and the techniques of its objective measurement.

One could argue that such comprehensive black-boxing of pedology as an instrument serving the education system was essential to pedology's continued existence in the Soviet Union after 1931-32 (Byford, 2020: 224). However, this black-boxing also contributed to the remarkable swiftness of pedology's downfall in 1936. Instrumentalized and black-boxed as pedology had become over the course of the 1930s, it was very difficult to defend once this instrument and its outputs came to be viewed as, in fact, highly problematic. Just as a particular process of decision-making had effectively been delegated to it, so the blame for the glitches that came out of this were pinned on that same instrument – not just the tests, but also those administering them, and, ultimately, on pedology as a body of scientific knowledge that endowed the service with legitimacy.

The Downfall of Pedology as the Demise of an Occupation (1935-36)

Even though pedological work was in full swing during the early 1930s, the service was not immune to criticism (Ewing, 2001; Byford, 2020: 244). Yet the dispersed, local and routine nature of ground-level pedological work, which featured as merely a functional component of a more general system of operations through which schools were managed by Narkompros, protected the pedology service from more systematic and sustained political scrutiny. This did not, however, last for ever. Crucial to the eventual downfall of pedology in the summer of 1936 was the suddenly much closer attention that pedological work started to receive from the very top of the Party in 1935.

Up until 1935, what pedologists did on a daily basis in schools had not been watched particularly closely by Party structures, not least since the highest echelons of the Party had not been expressing any great interest in pedology since the 1931-32 campaign to politically subordinate the field's academic leadership. However, over the course of 1935, a few politically sensitive incidents taking place in schools were brought to the

attention of the Politburo prompting the Party to start to scrutinize much more closely what Narkompros was doing to keep control over the schoolchild population (on what follows see especially Rodin, 1995, and Byford, 2020: 244-248). A number of commissions, each headed by a leading Party figure, were formed to look into the matter at different educational levels, with Leningrad Party boss, Andrei Zhdanov, becoming responsible for high schools. Although pedology itself was not the focus of enquiry, the work of these commissions led their members to become much better acquainted with the work of the pedology service as a key instrument in Narkompros's approach to managing discipline and delivering educational targets. In this context, the commissions approved, in fact, the policy of removing disruptive pupils from the regular classroom, deeming this both necessary and effective. However, there were aspects of the work of the pedology service which raised alarm bells. For example, it was argued that pedologists must ensure that referrals did not display bias against children from working class or ethnic minority backgrounds. Of particular concern was also the pedologists' routine collection of detailed personal and medical information about the children's parents and families more generally. Zhdanov saw this as something highly sensitive from a political point of view and ordered that the practice be stopped.

The findings of these commissions did not in themselves threaten the pedology service. However, the key consequence of their work was that local Party structures were now suddenly on alert and began to observe the activities of ground-level pedologists much more closely than had been the case before, considering them to be of interest to Party bosses. At the start of 1936, the section for schools of the Leningrad-area Party committee alerted Zhdanov that local pedologists did not appear to be listening to the directives that he had issued only a few months earlier. Zhdanov's attention was drawn to extensive surveys that the Leningrad Pedology Institute was at that time conducting among the families of schoolchildren in the Pskov district. Zhdanov was clearly annoyed: on 4 April 1936 he gave a speech at the meeting of the Leningrad Party bureau where he denounced pedologists for going around prying into people's private affairs, seeking out negative aspects of family life, and investigating not just the children but also their parents and grandparents, asking questions concerning class origins, while seemingly only looking for defects and anomalies in people's family histories. Zhdanov at first appeared to be targeting only the Leningrad Pedology Institute. However, by the sheer logic of campaigns designed to impose Party control across a particular domain of state operations, the errors of this Institute came to serve as merely an example of a much wider and deeper problem. The torch was suddenly shone very brightly on the pedology service more generally, as instrument that Narkompros was relying on to manage the efficiencies of the education system. Zhdanov was at the forefront of this campaign of critical scrutiny and his vocal disapproval began to attract and concentrate various previously isolated complaints and grievances about pedological work.

Among the most problematic issues to emerge was the pedologists' role in referring so many children to special schools. Zhdanov condemned the readiness with which children were being taken out of regular classes, arguing that such a policy disincentivized teachers from trying to improve pupils' performance and behaviour using their own methods and techniques. Moreover, the speed at which schools for the underachieving and the misbehaving were mushrooming had produced some unintended effects. The overall percentage of those relegated (somewhere in the region of 2%) was not huge, especially if one's understanding of underachievement was relatively fluid. However, by grouping such children into larger cohorts, and especially when they formed entire schools, these populations suddenly appeared much bigger. Moreover, managing schools populated entirely with the underperforming and the disruptive was a challenge, not least since providing such schools with additional resources and expertise, as was recommended by leading pedologists who promoted this type of triage, was not, in fact, within the state's means. The whole matter was made worse by the way in which such children were labelled. Though individual cases varied, they were invariably categorized using terms that carried stigma, not just for the children, but also their families, and ultimately the state. Zhdanov complained about the impression that the

mass nature of such referrals gave of Soviet society as supposedly experiencing 'degradation' (*degradatsiia*) and he blamed this on tests, describing them as pseudoscientific instruments that produced spurious diagnoses of 'backwardness'.

In June 1936 Zhdanov orchestrated a meeting with Leningrad teachers and pedologists billed 'The Audience of Teachers and Pedologists of Leningrad Schools with Comrade Zhdanov'. At this meeting he gave a speech titled 'On the Pedological Distortions in the Narkompros RSFSR' ('O pedologicheskikh izvrashcheniiakh v Narkomprose RSFSR') announcing that the question of the future of pedology had, thanks to his personal initiative, been placed on the agenda of the next meeting of the Politburo. Two days later, the Politburo discussed the agenda item tabled by Zhdanov and formed a commission made up of Komsomol leader A. V. Kosarev, Commissar of Education A. S. Bubnov, Commissar of Healthcare G. N. Kaminskii, and Zhdanov himself. Their task was to prepare a decree on the matter of pedology on behalf of the Party's Central Committee. This became the now infamous decree 'On the Pedological Distortions in the System of the Narkompros', issued on 4 July 1936. In it, the Party's Central Committee accused 'the so-called "pedologist"' of using pseudoscientific tests and questionnaires to justify the exclusion of large numbers of children, especially those from working class and minority backgrounds, from regular schooling, while apparently blaming poor performance and indiscipline in a deterministic way on innate pathologies and the family's social background.

Even though the decree denounced pedology wholesale as a 'reactionary pseudoscience', its core charges focused on the occupational work of ground-level pedologists. Indeed, what followed was first and foremost the rapid and comprehensive dismantlement of pedology's occupational network, starting with the mass redeployment of school pedologists to other posts available in the system (Ewing, 2001). This process began already on 7 July 1936, as Commissar Bubnov sent a telegram to all local educational administrations with the order to relieve every pedologist of their duties with immediate effect. Most pedologists were swiftly re-employed as teachers, while some were given posts in the educational administration. Those with medical degrees were turned into school doctors. By August 1936 over half the staff had been successfully allocated a new role. This is not to say that the summer was not a period of grave uncertainty for former pedologists who had every right to worry about becoming targets of more serious reprisals. In the wake of the Party decree, the press caricatured 'the pedologist' as an evil scientist sabotaging the Soviet education system. However, this was a caricature of a particular kind of occupational work, rather than of concrete individuals who held this job title. In other words, it was the role that needed to go, not the person fulfilling it. As a result, there were no mass repressions and punishments more typically included the loss of the right to claim the years spent in the post as part of one's pensionable employment.

The Party's anti-pedology decree also entailed the condemnation of and blanket ban on all the key instruments that pedologists used in their daily work, especially tests, questionnaires and family surveys. Schools were simultaneously ordered to remove from pupils' school files all biopsychosocial data that had been collected by the pedologists. However, the most important aspect of the dismantlement of pedology as an occupation was the denunciation of the policy of streaming and referrals, in which the pedology service had played such an instrumental role. This included not only putting the brakes on the practice, but reversing it, i.e. transferring children back from special schools to regular ones or, in some cases, simply re-categorizing an entire school from special to normal (Ewing, 2001).

However, it was not sufficient simply to abolish the post of pedologists, to ban the tools of their trade, and to dismantle the institutional structure of their operations. It was also essential to replace the very functions of pedological work – that of monitoring and managing all-round biopsychosocial development in the Soviet schoolchild population – by the work of another occupation. One of the key points made by the Party's decree was that the occupational work of pedologists had been in conflict with the occupational work of another

profession – namely, teachers. More specifically, the work of pedologists was now said to have been trespassing on what was supposed to be the rightful territory of professional educators, while apparently actively undermining their work as pedagogues. It was argued, for example, that the prioritization of referrals entailed a lack of trust in the teachers' pedagogical expertise; and that the privileging of tests as modes of evaluation implied a distrust of the teachers' own practices of measuring development. This was not a difficult argument to make given the return of formal school marks and standard, scholastic modes of assessment following the 1931 educational reform.

During the latter half of 1936, teachers were swiftly mobilized into the campaign of pedology's political denunciation. Throughout that school year they were expected to lambast the former pedology service from their own perspective, playing the part both of its victims and of witnesses to its harmful effects on Soviet children, parents, and education more generally. More important, however, was that the occupational role of 'the teacher' was hereby being lined up to replace that of 'the pedologist'. This was framed as the 'reinstatement' of teachers in their rightful occupational role (Ewing, 2001). Teachers were now recast as the true heroes of the future successes of Soviet education, not least by being expected to take on full professional responsibility for the task of monitoring, managing and directing the development of future Soviet generations into productive, disciplined and patriotic citizens.

Conclusion

Crucial to the emergence pedology as a domain of occupational work was the conceptualization of human ontogenetic development as something that was subject to systematic, rational management, but that exceeded the remit of every pre-existing occupation focused on the nurture of the young in a given society. The occupational niche that came to be filled by pedology was tied to the territory occupied by educators broadly defined, but depended on the assumption that the education profession itself was not equipped with the necessary scientific knowledge and expertise to properly conceptualize, measure and foster 'development' in its full, all-round, biopsychosocial sense. In tsarist Russia, two 'proto-pedological' occupational forms – the school doctor and the 'enhanced pedagogue' – arose on the margins of the core territory of upbringing and education, but these assumed only supplementary positions in the field as holders of important parts of the missing expertise, without, however, successfully forming new occupational roles as such.

In the 1920s' Soviet Union, the ambition of the new power-holders to construct a progressive education system in which an expansive biopsychosocial definition of development trumped traditional, narrowly pedagogical conceptions of it, proved highly conducive to the institutionalization of a new territory of expertise that crystallized under the banner of 'pedology'. The latter was tied to the education system, but it at the same time formed an autonomous domain that in multiple ways exceeded the management of education strictly speaking. What is more, this field, as a field of science, assumed a hierarchically superior position over and above the education profession itself, thanks to explicit support that it received from those in positions of political power. Critical to this new field becoming also a territory of occupational work was the ambition of the new Bolshevik-run state for its system of upbringing and education to be directed towards fostering development precisely in the above broad sense, and also, for this development to be systematically monitored and managed across the country's schoolchild population as a whole. The conceptualization and measurement of the development of future Soviet citizens was consequently entrusted to pedology, which was to be proactively mobilized as a domain of both scientific and occupational work placed expressly at the service of the state.

The precise positioning of pedology in relation to the education system remained complex and ambiguous, though. For most of the 1920s, pedology as occupation was a professionally heterogeneous territory and the

occupational functions and expertise of ground-level pedologists were not defined in a uniform way. Although there was a push in the latter half of the 1920s towards constructing the occupational role of the pedologist more explicitly as a function of managing child development specifically within the education system, significant parts of pedological work and expertise continued to be positioned outside the schools themselves. This was partly because large portions of such work were still being carried out by medical professionals, and partly because, in the late 1920s, the mobilization of pedology as a scientific enterprise trumped its development as an occupational role.

The year 1931 became, however, a critical turning point in the fate of pedology in the Soviet Union. On the one hand, following the Party-political disciplining of the field's highest echelons, the previously dominant development of pedology as a 'science' effectively ceased. On the other, the radical U-turn in Soviet educational policy fatally undermined pedology's occupational niche and led to pedology becoming reduced to an instrumentalized service that performed a set of pragmatic functions associated, among other things, with the policy of streaming and referrals deployed as a way of managing discipline and enhancing overall performance across the school network. This, moreover, inextricably implicated pedology as an occupation in a policy and practice that was by the mid-1930s starting to produce a series of problematic effects.

Pedological work as such was initially protected from view by its relatively routine, ground-level character. However, once it was noticed by the top of the Party it was rapidly seized upon as the element on which to pin what were perceived to be some serious administrative and political errors committed by Narkompros. Crucially, the impossibility of politically controlling such mass, highly dispersed ground-level occupational work led to the radical measure of pedology's comprehensive abolition by Party decree in the summer of 1936. Thus, despite the catchy headline of pedology's purge as a 'pseudo-*science'*, it was the erasure of pedology's *occupational* role, work and instruments that encapsulates more accurately what was ultimately at stake in this infamous episode in the history of the early-Soviet human sciences.

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