

# Theatre at Moscow Hermann Matern School: performing tradition, educational innovations, perspectives on artistic activities

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**ABSTRACT – Theatre at Moscow Hermann Matern School: performing tradition, educational innovations, perspectives on artistic activities** – The article describes the more than 45 years of history of theatrical tradition at Moscow Hermann Matern School as well as the transformation of this tradition into an educational innovation in the 1990s. An annual competition in theatrical performance called *Theatre Week for Children* has been held since the late 1970s for students from grades 1 to 11. However, since the mid-90s, some new educational forms based on this theatrical tradition have been introduced as an experiment in teaching humanities at this school. Alongside traditional educational forms, students have been encouraged to *stage* the elected material, mostly in the subjects of literature and foreign languages (German, English), but also in history.

Keywords: **Theatrical Tradition. Educational Innovation. Staging in Foreign Languages. Russian Literature. School Communities.**

**RÉSUMÉ – Théâtre à l'École Hermann Matern de Moscou: tradition, innovations pédagogiques, perspectives sur les activités artistiques** – L'article décrit les plus de 45 ans d'histoire de la tradition théâtrale à l'école Hermann Matern de Moscou ainsi que la transformation de cette tradition en une innovation éducative dans les années 1990. Un concours annuel de représentation théâtrale appelé *Semaine Du Théâtre Pour Les Enfants* a été organisé depuis la fin des années 1970 pour les élèves de la première à la onzième année. Cependant, depuis le milieu des années 90, de nouvelles formes éducatives basées sur cette tradition théâtrale ont été introduites comme une expérience d'enseignement des sciences humaines dans cette école. Parallèlement aux formes éducatives traditionnelles, les étudiants ont été encouragés à mettre en scène le matériel élu, principalement dans les matières de la littérature et des langues étrangères (allemand, anglais), mais aussi dans l'histoire.

Mots-clés: **Tradition Théâtrale. Innovation Pédagogique. Mise-en-Scène en Langues Etrangères. Littérature Russe. Communautés Scolaires.**

**RESUMO – Teatro na Escola Hermann Matern de Moscou: tradição em interpretação, inovações educacionais e perspectivas sobre atividades artísticas** – O artigo descreve os mais de 45 anos de história de tradição teatral na Escola Hermann Matern de Moscou e como esta tradição se transformou em inovação educacional na década de 1990. Um concurso anual de interpretação intitulado *Semana do Teatro para Crianças* começou a ser realizado a partir do fim da década de 1990 para estudantes do 1º ao 11º ano. Entretanto, desde meados daquela década foram introduzidas algumas modalidades educacionais novas baseadas nesta tradição teatral como vivência no ensino de Humanidades nesta escola. Juntamente com modalidades educacionais tradicionais, os estudantes foram incentivados a *encenar* o material escolhido, principalmente nas disciplinas de literatura e línguas estrangeiras (alemão e inglês), mas também de história.

Palavras-chave: **Tradição Teatral. Inovação Educacional. Encenação em Línguas Estrangeiras. Literatura Russa. Comunidades escolares.**

## Anthroposophical Roots of the School Tradition

On the subject of the introduction of school theatre at Moscow Hermann Matern School and performing educational transformations through the school theatre tradition, I suggest that the tradition as it has existed since the 1980s is reminiscent in some way of the theatrical concept used at the Waldorf School. If we consider theatrical activities at Waldorf schools in Germany we can find that class performances (Ger. *Klassenspiele*) belong to compulsory modules (at least) in grades 8 and 12<sup>1</sup>. But the difference between the theatrical concepts of Hermann Matern School and those at the Waldorf School lies, to my mind, in their origins.

The Waldorf School is guided by a special form of educational and philosophical teaching created by Rudolf Steiner based on anthroposophical principles. He emphasizes that teachers should touch upon their inner anthroposophy (understanding of human nature and culture), and, stimulated by other examples and exercises, should use their anthroposophy to produce their own creative ideas:

It becomes clear in which active way the creative teacher is involved. This happens in such a way that the teachers internally are offered and practiced the Anthroposophy (understanding of human and cultural nature), their own production is stimulated by examples and exercises, and their own reasoning is given, but no plans and no definite deductions are made (Hellmich; Teigeler, 2007, p. 216-217)<sup>2</sup>.

In methodological terms, anthroposophy is regarded as a practical science about human nature. Within its scope, it is possible to seize any other adolescent quality. It is necessary merely to complete and bring to an end anthroposophical conceptions achieved by exploring human nature. Then these conceptions automatically become educational and teaching patterns. An abstract exploration of the human deflects from that human love which should be the fundamental power of education and teaching. However, an anthroposophical conception of human nature and its exploration must necessarily increase human love, according to Steiner:

Anthroposophy unites the theoretical view of the world with the spirited, immediate perception. It does not have to apply artificially general laws to the individual phenomena of life; it remains in full life from the beginning, in which it sees in it the universal itself as life. As a result, it is also a

practical Knowledge of Man. It knows how to help when it perceives this or that quality in the adolescent human. [...] It is necessary merely to complete views that anthroposophy is about, and they naturally become art of education and art of teaching. An abstract understanding of human nature leads away from the love of humanity, which must be a fundamental force of all education and teaching. Anthroposophical intuition must increase philanthropy with every advance in human knowledge (Steiner, 1961, p. 278-279)<sup>3</sup>.

As exploration of human nature's potential is not possible without involving people in playing, Rudolf Steiner's teaching *prescribes* the inclusion of performative activities in the school curriculum; "performative" in the sense of the principle to understand human behavior, or, referring to the performative turn, to *performatize* all human practices.

At Moscow Hermann Matern School, in contrast, it was a matter of the *motivation*: a call of the heart, great interest and passion to introduce this annual theatrical tradition. Teachers maintain that it is easier to learn both native and foreign languages in the atmosphere of play, that even mathematics and sports skills increase through play<sup>4</sup>. Russian actor and theatre pedagogue Andrey Valeryevich Tolshin highlighted in his dissertation on theatre improvisation that the attention of a playing person is involuntary, so there is no need to intensify his attention artificially: "The attention of a player is involuntary, so there is no need to make an effort to keep it. The student feels joy, artistic euphoria and is in high spirits" (Tolshin, 2001, p. 76)<sup>5</sup>. Focusing on play as a form of behavior enables us to find the roots of artistic skills, according to Johan Huizinga, especially if we speak about children:

Even in early childhood the charm of play is enhanced by making a 'secret' out of it. This is for *us*, not for the 'others'. What the 'others' do 'outside' is no concern of ours at the moment. Inside the circle of the game the laws and customs of ordinary life no longer count. We are different and do things differently. This temporary abolition of the ordinary world is fully acknowledged in child-life [...] (Huizinga, 1980, p. 12)<sup>6</sup>.

So, according to Huizinga, the temporary refusal to stay in the *ordinary world* is rooted in the children's world. And if the ordinary, everyday world does exist then it is also possible to create – at least within some time brackets – an imaginative world. Touching upon this principle,

which tends to extend imaginative skills and build children's consciousness, teachers of Hermann Matern School introduced the tradition of *Theatre Week for Children*.

But in the end, both at Hermann Matern School and at the Waldorf School performatized practices within the school modules refer us to "theatre's potential community-building power" (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 51). A classic example of such potential power, of how individual life can develop further having been formed in a school theatre community, is Hermann Matern School graduate, journalist, and scriptwriter Eugenia Kovalenko<sup>7</sup>. At this point, it would be apt to quote sociologist Emile Durkheim, who said that "collective life is not born from individual life, but, it is, on the contrary, the second which is born from the first. It is on this condition alone that [...] personal individuality [...] has been able to be formed and enlarged without disintegrating society" (Durkheim, 1964, p. 279). And indeed, many individual life ways of the graduates of my school were greatly influenced by theatre community, determined by performatized educational activities and connected to a varying extent with theatre or performative practices akin to theatre. Several graduates from different years became professional theatre actors. Others from the school community attended actor training courses with the goal to develop and/or intensify oratorical, interpersonal and even management skills for positions as pedagogue, psychologist, choreographer, interpreter, historian. In order not to carry on generalizing the fruitful influence of the school theatre activities alongside professional perspectives it opens I am honoured to incorporate my personal life's example as a former active member of our theatre school community who participated in all school theatre activities from the 1<sup>st</sup> (from the year 1989) to the last (11<sup>th</sup>) grade (until the year 2000) and profited from them to a great extent. After gaining the qualification and experience as a teacher of German and English in Moscow I was invited to Berlin to conduct my PhD research on the basis of rehearsal processes at major theatres. So remaining a pedagogue in practice on the one hand, through my successfully completed doctoral studies I became a theatre historian and researcher on the other. I deem it important that having personal experience as a child and adolescent in playing theatre as educational experiment, I share in this exposition practical pedagogical

experience of Hermann Matern School through the lens of 1) my recollections as a former student, 2) theoretical and practical experience as a qualified pedagogue and theatre researcher, and 3) interviews of two of my teachers: German teacher Elena A. Kruglova and history teacher Tatyana V. Kolpenskaya.

### **The History of Theatrical Tradition at Hermann Matern School**

The theatrical tradition of Hermann Matern School can be traced back to the early 1970s when a group of senior students established the *Ensemble of Political Song* following a proposal by the director of studies. The fact that the initiative came from the administrative staff does not explain the lack of volunteers or ideas from young people at that time. On the contrary, many adolescents looked forward to founding a music or dance band or a poetry circle – a kind of poetry club –, a regular meeting of students interested in and producing poetry themselves, some of them even on competitive basis. Initiating such *interest clubs* was common practice among Soviet students which is documented in numerous feature films<sup>8</sup>. It merely stresses the fact that in the Soviet Union such proposals had to be first approved by the Central Committee because everything came from *above*. Having been introduced to the patriotic educational purpose, the initiative was perceived, however, not solely in a politically propagandistic context but as a possibility for enlarging the educational horizon<sup>9</sup>. So, emphasizing the educational character of their initiative, students started to sing patriotic songs in different foreign languages, contributing to the popularity of the latter. Although officially only the German language was taught in school then, students also felt encouraged to sing various socialist songs and songs of the labour movement in Spanish and Italian, for example *El Pueblo Unido Jamás Será Vencido* by the Chilean composer Sergio Ortega, *Hasta Siempre, Comandante* by the Cuban composer Carlos Puebla, the song of the Italian communists *Avanti Popolo (Bandiera Rossa)*, lyrics written by Carlo Tuzzi, *Bella Ciao* composed by the anti-fascist resistant movement during the Second World War, etc. This was in addition to songs of the German labour and communist movement such as *Das Einheitsfrontlied* (United Front Song) or *Solidaritätslied* (Solidarity Song) both written by Bertolt Brecht and composed by Hanns Eisler, *Der*

*Heimliche Aufmarsch* (The Secret Deployment) and *Roter Wedding* (Red Wedding) written by Erich Weinert and composed also by Hanns Eisler, *Matrosen von Kronstadt* (Sailors of Kronstadt) (German lyrics by Helmut Schinkel) and others.

Directed by teachers of literature, students also performed some scenes from plays by classical Russian authors such as Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin, Mikhail Juryevich Lermontov, Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol, etc. So some scenes from Lermontov's *Masquerade* were staged, for example, by the students of grade 9 in 1975<sup>10</sup>. Works by M. J. Lermontov belonged to grades 5 to 9 of the school curriculum. This, in its turn, explains the teacher's initiative in annually putting on stage some scenes from *Masquerade* and organizing evenings of Lermontov's poetry.

Alexander S. Pushkin's literary heritage has always been popular in terms of being staged too, so that many of Pushkin's plays like *The Squire's Daughter* or some poetry were staged and enjoyed a good reputation during the so-called *Pushkin evenings*. Even some songs and poetry by Sergey Esenin, a severely censored and often prohibited poet in Soviet times, could be heard from the stage on such evenings dedicated to the Russian literary heritage.

In 1975 the first music group was founded by senior students and was called *Megapolis*. They composed music and wrote lyrics themselves; some songs were written in German. After finishing school, the leader of the group founded a professional music group, and one of his songs about the city Karl-Marx-Stadt in the former GDR (it has since been renamed back to *Chemnitz*) became popular in the Soviet Union<sup>11</sup>.

In 1981 Jury Friedman, a new teacher of German at the school, founded a theatre circle. For his first play in 1982, *The Threepenny Opera* by Bertolt Brecht, he gathered interested students from different grades, invited another young teacher of German and even participated in the play himself. The play was performed in German, with the script having been adapted by Friedman from Brecht's original. It was an incredible breakthrough, which established what has become the oldest school tradition: the next generations of students who saw the piece wanted to surpass the success of that particular production of 1982. They continued to stage other plays, so that this unofficial competition, which has been held

every year by the students, slowly began the process of being forged into a tradition<sup>12</sup>.

In the early 1980s, the initial idea of staging works by Russian authors was also taken up by middle school students. And towards the mid-80s, it spread even to primary school so that finally an annual tradition called *Theatre Week for Children* was officially introduced. Since then the annual competition among students from grades 1 to 11 has been held during *Theatre Week*. For that reason judges were drawn to the competition. A jury consisting of teachers and some members of the Committee for Culture elected the winner and 3 runners-up. In the 1980s, it was solely Russian plays that were staged at school. The explanation for this lies, obviously, in the common participation in the event: both, 7-year-old children from primary school and teenagers aged 17-18 were placed under the same conditions. Everybody had to adhere to the time limits for rehearsing and performing. So in terms of fairness, it was decided to stage works only in Russian as young children needed more time to rehearse in a foreign language. For the same reason foreign plays were avoided because the idea was to stage plays only in the original language, Russian. That was the first stage of the development of theatrical tradition, and it was regarded as an invention for students' leisure. But, in the end, as the interview with the former Director of Studies in Foreign Languages reveals, this leisure activity was undoubtedly of great consequence for subsequent generations of students.

However, the period I would like to focus on is the 1990s when the theatrical tradition, as it was known at Hermann Matern School in the 1980s, was successfully transformed into an educational innovation due to reforms in the Russian education system.

### **Educational Innovations in the 1990s**

The 1990s were an intensive period when not only had the political situation changed in the country but also educational standards gradually experienced transformations. The school was renamed and received the four-digit number *1269* instead of the name of the German communist Hermann Matern (All educational institutions of similar type of secondary school like lyceums or high schools in Russia received four-digit numbers as

well). *Experimental educational platforms* were introduced into the education system in the 1990s<sup>13</sup>. These educational platforms could be viewed as 5-year-long periods of transition from the Soviet education system to European educational standards. The Ministry of Education suggested that every school should formulate its own educational program in line with the new standards. It is necessary to say that in the Soviet Union practically every school was regarded as a school of general education (Rus. *obscheobrazovatel'naya škola*). But there were also schools that specialized in humanities or in natural sciences (Rus. *spezškola*).

Since the 1970s School 1269 has specialized in German language<sup>14</sup> (nowadays we can even use the term *German Studies* because some special subjects such as economy, technical/literary translation, history and culture of Germany are held in German). This is why after the *turn* in the 1990s, School 1269 created a new educational program specializing in humanities. In terms of its new orientation, the school was renamed a laboratory school. So for instance, from 1992 to 1997 the school staff developed new teaching methods within the context of an individually differential approach to the student<sup>15</sup>. For this reason, scientists from the Moscow Institute of Open Education (Rus. *Moskovsky Institut Otkrytogo Obrazovaniya*) were sent to observe the process of education, to cooperate with school teachers, and to collaborate on the new school program. Due to the individually differential approach, every single student was treated specially in accordance with his/her individual interests and talents. So, for instance, students orientated towards natural sciences like mathematics, physics, chemistry or biology were able and even encouraged to attend additional classes in these subjects, to receive advanced exercises as homework, etc.

For the field of humanities, even more innovations were integrated in terms of the new educational platform. The explanation for introduction of this transformational experience lies, surprisingly, in the private sphere: our teacher of German Elena A. Kruglova admitted in an interview that she had decided to conduct such an educational experiment for her daughter who suffered from shyness and lack of self-confidence. So our teacher introduced a special module called home reading for us, grade-3 students. In 1992 it was an optional module, before later becoming compulsory. It included not only reading and translating texts but also producing scripts for staging

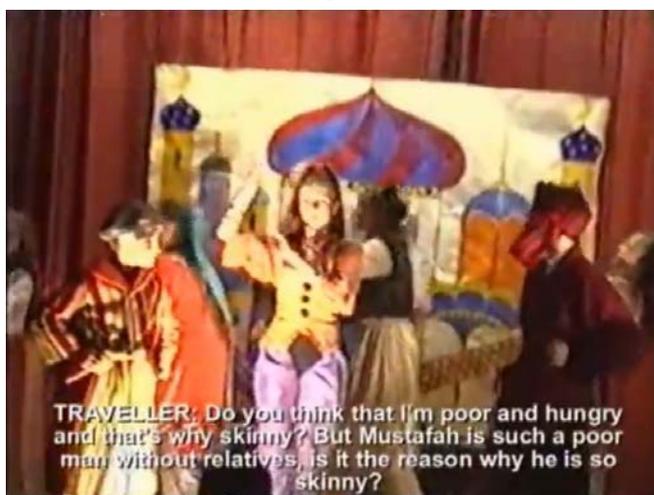
fairytale in German. Students were divided into groups, and each group worked on a special part of the initial text of the fairytale. Vocabulary was trained in class first, and then further training exercises were given as homework. At home the text was mostly translated from or into German and then checked and corrected in class. After the whole text had been checked, students were given a task in terms of producing their own script: they had to use the newly learned vocabulary in dialogue between the characters in the tale. In order to avoid repetitions, students were supposed to work on different parts of the text. The work on the fairytales *The Princess and the Pea* and *The Snow Queen* by Hans-Christian Andersen in particular was organized this way. The fairytale *The Bremen Town Musicians* by the Brothers Grimm was performed by students of grade 4 in 1993. For that performance, it was suggested to use a script from the *Anthology of Scripts for Theatre in German Language*. Otherwise, students of grade 4 would have encountered various linguistic difficulties in completing their own script as the initial text was quite advanced for them in terms of grammar and vocabulary. In addition, some German songs and two dance activities were included in the performance. Further, the participating students had command of the whole text of the script, so they were able to step in for any other participant in case of illness. It was the only class which staged that particular fairytale.

And as our teacher confirmed in the interview, she as a mother had immediately noticed a positive change in her daughter's behavior and self-appraisal: my classmate overcame her shyness and became more active in things like giving her opinion in oral communication in class. According to Elena A. Kruglova, her daughter also managed to assess correctly emotional states of some characters from school texts, felt at ease to share her suggestions during oral discussions in class and overcame her shyness in showing her personal emotional reactions both in everyday life and in class. This is good evidence to show that students were indeed transformed and pleased with such positive transformations.



Video 1 – *The Bremen Town Musicians*. Source: Module *Home Reading* in German performed by students of grade 4, March 1993<sup>16</sup>. Available at: <<https://youtu.be/28yPqCRA8KE>>.

In comparison, Wilhelm Hauff's fairytale *Nose, the Dwarf* was staged by three different generations of students. Grade-6 students created their own script, initially in Russian, before it was translated into German. It was the first performance included in the competition *Theatre Week for Children* alongside Russian-speaking plays. Earlier, it was only Russian-speaking plays that were considered by the judges.



Video 2 – Annual *Theatre Week for Children*: Dance from Arabian fairytale *Ali Baba and The Forty Thieves*. Source: Performed by students of grade 5, November 1993. Available at: <[https://youtu.be/fjfvUwTT\\_Vg](https://youtu.be/fjfvUwTT_Vg)>.

The script of the play was based on a famous radio play with the same name from the 1980-s. Phonogram and music origin from that radio play<sup>17</sup>.

Since 1992 English has been taught in School, so English-speaking writers have now been read and staged there. The first play in English was

George Bernard Shaw's *How He Lied to Her Husband* performed by students of grade 9 in 1993.



Video 3 – *How He Lied to Her Husband*. Source: Performed by students of grade 9, November 1993.  
Available at: <<https://youtu.be/PQOGuwAH3P8>>.

Staged scenes from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* from the early 2000s have also remained in teachers' memories as a very entertaining play<sup>18</sup>.

The teacher of Russian language and literature Elvira A. Arefyeva established another tradition in the 1990s in terms of staging works by Russian authors. Within the context of the subject literature, since the 1990s students of grade 10 have performed annually scenes from the plays by a famous Russian playwright of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Alexander N. Ostrovsky. His modern drama became a trademark for the leading dramatic theatre in Moscow, the Maly Theatre, also known as *The House of Ostrovsky*. In Russia Ostrovsky's drama is included in the official school curriculum in grade 10, which is why grade-10 students at our school always stage his plays. Both students, who will take part in the play and their teacher, stay behind after classes and select scenes from Ostrovsky's plays to stage. The teacher suggests the roles, gives recommendations and advice, but in the end it is the student who decides what character he/she feels like embodying. The choice of episodes varies from year to year. The list of plays remains, in general, unchanged, with a few exceptions. Scenes from *The Storm*, *Poverty is No Vice*, *Without a Dowry*, *Keep Your Own Sledge*, *It's a Family Affair – We'll Settle It Ourselves*, and *The Lucrative Vacancy* have been staged at School 1269 since the 1990s.



Video 4 – *It's a Family Affair – We'll Settle It Ourselves* performed by students of grade 10, May 1999.  
Available at: <[https://youtu.be/mXmljWfNw\\_U](https://youtu.be/mXmljWfNw_U)>.



Image 1 – *Without a Dowry*. Source: Performed by students of grade 10, May 1999. Rehearsal. With the teacher of Russian language and Literature.



Image 2 – *Without a Dowry*. Source: performed by students of grade 10, May 1999. Rehearsal.



Image 3 – *Without a Dowry*. Source: Performed by students of grade 10, May 1999. Rehearsal.



Image 4 – *It's a Family Affair – We'll Settle It Ourselves*.  
Source: Performed by students of grade 10, May 1999. Rehearsal.



Image 5 – *It's a Family Affair – We'll Settle It Ourselves*.  
Source: Performed by students of grade 10, May 1999. Rehearsal.



Image 6 – *It's a Family Affair – We'll Settle It Ourselves.*

Source: Performed by students of grade 10, May 1999. Rehearsal.



Image 7 – *It's a Family Affair – We'll Settle It Ourselves.*

Source: Performed by students of grade 10, May 1999. Rehearsal.



Image 8 – *The Storm*. Source: Performed by students of grade 10, May 1999. Rehearsal.

Another valuable annual project since the 1990s has been the Literary Lounge dedicated to the Silver Age of Russian Poetry (from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century). Within its scope, students select poetry, music, and songs from that period and perform them in the Literary Lounge. Marina Tsvetaeva, Anna Achmatova, Sergey Esenin, Nikolay Gumilyov, Alexander Block, Osip Mandelshtam, Igor Severyanin, Sinaida Gippius, Dmitry Merezhkovsky, and Vladimir Mayakovsky are some of the people whose poetry has been heard on the school's stage. The term *Silver Age* dates back to the 1890s-1920s, to the intensive intellectual period in philosophy and literature in Russia. This term neither refers to a specific chronological period, nor is it a number of literary movements. It reflects rather a special way of thinking. But this way of thinking referring to decadence was not popular in literature lessons in the 1970s in the Soviet Union<sup>19</sup>. As is well known, at that time Soviet ideology took priority. That is why common interest in poetry of the Silver Age as a national heritage was revived just a few decades later in the 1990s. So after students have chosen poems, learned them by heart, and presented them to the teacher, the latter starts to organize the order of the selected poems on stage in accordance with the individuality of every participating student. The aim is

to create logical connections and a specific social background<sup>20</sup>. Costumes are a personal decision of every participant. So clothes vary from severe long black dresses to colorful top hats and spoons in the buttonhole of the waistcoat. The latter variant is rather used to imitate a startling, provocative style, which was very popular among contemporaries of the Silver Age (artists themselves used a French word – *épatage* – for the effect they achieved with their looks).



Video 5 – *Literary Lounge, Poetry of The Silver Age*, performed by students of grade 11, March 2000. Available at: <<https://youtu.be/Wh9491VvwVU>>.

What the students and teacher decided to do in addition to recitation of poetry is the use of musical pieces from the period of the Silver Age. This produced charming effect on stage. So for instance the lyrical, phantasmagoric song by Alexander Vertinsky *Tango Magnolia* (also known as *In Banana-Lemon Singapore*) had a great impact on the audience<sup>21</sup>.

I need to mention that anniversaries of such great Russian writers as Alexander S. Pushkin, Anton P. Chekhov and Nikolay V. Gogol have also been celebrated at our school. Anniversaries of these very important authors for Russia have been always regarded as special occasions for staging their plays during *Theatre Week for Children* and in addition to the subject literature. The long list of plays staged by different generations of students include Chekhov's *The Proposal*, *The Anniversary*, Gogol's *The Night Before Christmas* and some other stories from the collection *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka*, Pushkin's *The Tale of a Golden Cockerel*, *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*, and *The Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin*.



Video 6 – *Theatre Week for Children, The Anniversary* by Anton P. Chekhov performed by female students of grade 10, November 1994. Available at: <<https://youtu.be/REtk-VEglu0>>.



Video 7 – *Theatre Week for Children, The Proposal* by Anton P. Chekhov performed by students of grade 11, November 1995. Available at: <<https://youtu.be/E-h9w9RLS0I>>.

Elena A. Kruglova, the teacher who staged *The Anniversary* and *The Proposal* by Chekhov in 1994 and 1995, talked about the trusting atmosphere that developed during the rehearsals.

I advised my pupils to think about either their neighbours or relatives or may be even about some passers-by whose behaviour patterns would prompt them to carry these behaviour patterns across their roles. For example: ‘Who do you think about when you read through Chubukov’s role text? Whom does he resemble?’, I asked my student who played the landowner Chubukov in *The Proposal*. ‘This is our typical neighbour in the country where our dacha [holiday cottage – V.V.] is situated. Definitely, it is him!’, he exclaimed without long hesitation. Over hundred years had passed since Chekhov lived and put down those lines, but we still have been recognizing

– now in our contemporaries – human traits described almost a century ago. So our discussion successfully ended in picking out qualities of the national Russian character<sup>22</sup>.

This interview gives an example of an approach to staging classical Russian literature at school. This is also the acknowledgement of the powerful influence on children’s imagination and on the feeling of their native language. This feeling could only be extracted from the classical Russian language of Pushkin, Gogol, Chekhov etc., especially when the text of the role is learned by heart for staging. Elena A. Kruglova shared that afterwards some students used some phrases from their texts in everyday life when a similar emotional situation occurred. Her students began to “feel the language”, she shared (Interview with Elena Kruglova).

These particular examples of events held in the 1990s enable a brief overview of the emerging of close communities between teacher and students, and much closer communities between students themselves. Such communities emerge both from the activities in class and from those in the rehearsal processes after classes. School communities are even more likely to emerge outside the tense atmosphere of the classroom. Communities are built spontaneously, and only by people who are united by the same idea<sup>23</sup>. In this case, we can speak about the process of building theatre communities within the other long and complex process, namely the educational process. And it is particularly the educational process in school upon which a child’s intellectual, mental and emotional development usually falls<sup>24</sup>. Particularly at the age of formation of the personality, emotions can be felt in the strongest way. And due to such intense emotions, all the activities from that life period remain in the child’s memory forever<sup>25</sup>. Theatre reformer Georg Fuchs, for example, spoke at the beginning of the last century about a “strange intoxication which overcomes us when, as part of a crowd, we feel emotionally stirred [...] [T]his is certain: there is an emotion which runs through each of us when, as part of a crowd, we find ourselves united in an overwhelming passion” (Fuchs, 1959, p. 3). From that, it is possible to say that school theatre communities, where the child experiences the brightest emotions of his life, can exert great influence both upon a student’s choice of profession, and upon his further activities.

## Revised Strategies in the 2000s

Before I come to the conclusion, let me offer an overview of activities held at School 1269 in the 2000s. An excellent example of how the challenging collaboration of school communities influenced an individual professional orientation is a graduate of School 1269, Eugenia Kovalenko. In school she was regarded as an exemplary student, and passed her final exams with distinction in 1996. She studied journalism at Moscow State Lomonosov University, and spoke four foreign languages fluently. Working as a correspondent of the program *Sobytiya* (Rus. for events) on channel TV-Centr (Moscow), Eugenia attended Zurab Tseriteli's masterclass at the Russian Academy of Painting. Even though she was still young, she was already deemed a promising journalist, and talented painter<sup>26</sup> and scriptwriter. At the age of twenty Eugenia Kovalenko tragically died in a car crash in Spain, while making a report in October 2000. Several years after finishing school, she wrote a script that was discovered by her mother, Olga Kovalenko, in 2001. In 2002 the play *The Story of the Disease of Love* (Rus. *Istoriya Bolezni Lyubvi*) was staged by the theatre director Renata Sotiriadi at the famous Taganka Theatre in Moscow.



Video 8 – Report by Elena Losinskaya and Sergey Davidiyak for the First Channel of Russia about graduate of School 1269, journalist, painter and scriptwriter Eugenia Kovalenko, 2002. Available at: <<https://youtu.be/gR4mHtDGGow>>.

The play participated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Festival Theatre for Children and Youth – 21<sup>st</sup> Century in Voronezh (Russia) in 2003, and in

the International Theatre Festival of Youth Theatres in Pforzheim (Germany) in 2007.

National Artists of Russia (Rus. *Narodny Chudozhnik Rossii*) Ilya Glasunov and Igor Obrossov created Eugenia's portraits which can be seen nowadays in Moscow Museum of Modern Art. In 2001 it was decided to establish at School 1269 a museum dedicated to Eugenia Kovalenko, and to name the museum Eternal 20 Years (Rus. *Vechnye 20 Let*). Citing the museum's official website, school museums are regarded as "a form of additional education within the educational institution"<sup>27</sup>. So today's students are able to learn about Eugenia's life and to get access to her works – works of this excellent student and also active member of the school theatre community.

Moving up towards the mid-2000s, I would like to emphasize historical-reenactment games such as *The Battle of Borodino* performed by reenactment clubs on the historical battlefield near the village of Borodino. The battle at Borodino was a pivotal point in the campaign, as it was the last offensive action fought by Napoleon in Russia. It is common knowledge that by retreating, the Russian army preserved its combat strength. And this particular maneuver eventually allowed it to force Napoleon's last troops out of the country. The actors in military uniform from the 19<sup>th</sup> century reenact the battle between the Russian and the French armies. The public one-day holiday for youth is called The Steadfast Tin Soldier. It is held on the last Sunday in May and engages the young generation into looking at living history. Young people are allowed and encouraged to wear military uniform, taste military food or ride a horse during the holiday. Participating in such reenactment events is possible either in accordance with the subject history (when the theme Great Patriotic War of 1812 is in the school curriculum), or in the subject literature when students of grade 5 have the poem *Borodino* by Mikhail J. Lermontov in the curriculum and students of grade 10 go through Leo N. Tolstoy's great novel *War and Peace*.

According to the revised educational standards, some new theatrical-educational projects were introduced at Moscow schools at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A good example is a competition between German-learning schools called initially Bavarian Motives (nowadays it has been

renamed in German Motives). It is sponsored by the Department of Education and belongs to traditional school education in the field of humanities in Moscow. This competition is held annually and includes three different categories. Categories for the year 2011, for example, were: 1) Staging, 2) Painting, 3) Research Project. And the theme of that year's competition was *Celebrities Who Glorified Bavaria*<sup>28</sup>. Students from School 1269 opted to choose Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky who composed music for the German folk tale *Swan Lake*. A teacher of German and some members from the parents committee wrote a script in German. For staging they used music composed by Tchaikovsky and some choreographic elements from the ballet *Swan Lake* (Spanish Dance, Mazurka, Russian Dance). For their research project, they chose a biography of Russian poet Fyodor Ivanovich Tyutchev. Tyutchev had been stationed on diplomatic duty in the Bavarian capital Munich for around twenty years when his first book of poetry was published in Russia (Dolgopolowa, 1999). It was also in Munich that Tyutchev met philosopher Friedrich Schelling and poet Heinrich Heine. Tyutchev is regarded as the first translator of Heine's poems into Russian (Dolgopolowa, 1999).

## Conclusion

In this exposition I attempted to depict and theorize the way pedagogues of my alma mater Moscow Hermann Matern School (renamed in the 1990s in *School 1269*) introduced and applied a specific methodological approach – an individually differential approach – to teaching humanities. Such an approach might easily be compared with the anthroposophical approach invented by Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner and which has been applied in Waldorf Schools. Performatizing educational practices lies at the core of the approach at School 1269 and corresponds in this regard with that of Waldorf pedagogical principles. As a graduate of School 1269 and participant of that educational experiment, in this paper I followed the emerging history of this phenomenon, provided insights into the process of staging material from the school curriculum (*The Bremen Town Musicians* for module Home Reading in first foreign language (German), *How He Lied to Her Husband* for module Home Reading in second foreign language (English), plays by Alexander N.

Ostrovsky and poetry of the Silver Age of Russian poetry (for module Literature) and determined theatre school communities as a crucial point for many involved graduates to monitor and design their lives, choose professional orientation and interests. The example of journalist, painter and scriptwriter Eugenia Kovalenko illustrated the way how brilliantly a professional life of an active participant of a school theatre community might unfold. The article also aims to contextualize the annual theatrical school tradition *Theatre Week for Children* in the framework of educational innovations invented and successfully implemented by some of my teachers after political turn in the 1990s when the educational system was restructured and teachers were allowed and even encouraged to think up new methodological strategies (*The Anniversary* and *The Proposal* staged by Elena A. Kruglova to commemorate Anton P. Chekhov's 135<sup>th</sup> Jubilee; Literary Lounge staged by Elvira A. Arefyeva together with the 11-grade students to pay homage to the poets of the Silver Age of Russian literature as this literary period belongs to the school curriculum).

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Compare, for example, curriculums of some Waldorf schools in Germany at: <<https://www.waldorfschule-kreuzberg.de/schule/klassenspiele/>>, at <<http://www.waldorfschule-darmstadt.de/bildungshaus/schule/>>, at <<http://www.annie-heuser-schule.de/waldorfpaedagogik/klassenspiele/>>, or at <<http://www.fws-mainz.de/schulalltag/klassenspiele/>>. Accessed on: 11 Sept. 2018.
- <sup>2</sup> Original in German: [...] [*Es*] *wird deutlich, in welcher aktiver Weise der schöpferische Lehrer hier einbezogen wird. Das geschieht so, daß den Lehrern innerlich Anthroposophisches (Menschen- und Kulturverständnis) geboten und es geübt wird, die eigene Produktion durch Beispiele und Übungen angeregt werden, auch die eigene Begründungsfähigkeit, aber keine Pläne und keine fertigen Deduktionen gegeben werden [...]* (Hellmich; Teigeler, 2007, p. 216-217).
- <sup>3</sup> Original in German: *Anthroposophie vereinigt die theoretische Weltbetrachtung mit der lebensvollen unmittelbaren Anschauung. Sie braucht nicht erst künstlich allgemeine Gesetze auf die einzelnen Erscheinungen des Lebens anzuwenden; sie bleibt vom Anfang an im vollen Leben stehen, in dem sie in demselben das allgemeine selbst als Leben schaut. Dadurch ist sie auch praktische Menschenkunde. Sie weiß sich zu helfen, wenn sie diese oder jene Eigenschaft am*

*heranwachsenden Menschen wahrnimmt. [...] Man braucht Anschauungen, zu denen Anthroposophie über den Menschen kommt, nur zu Ende zu führen, und sie werden wie von selbst zu Erziehungs- und Unterrichtskunst. Eine abstrakte Erkenntnis des Menschen führt hinweg von derjenigen Menschenliebe, die eine Grundkraft alles Erziehens und Unterrichtens sein muß. Anthroposophische Anschauung vom Menschen muß mit jedem Vorrücken in der Menschenerkenntnis die Menschenliebe steigern* (Steiner, 1961, p. 278-279).

- 4 From the interview with the former Director of Studies in Foreign Languages at School 1269, Elena A. Kruglova.
- 5 “[В]нимание играющего носит характер послепроизвольного, т.е. для его поддержания не требуется усилий, ученик испытывает подъём духа, радость, творческую эйфорию” (Tolshin, 2001, p. 76).
- 6 Original in German: *Schon kleine Kinder erhöhen den Reiz ihres Spiels dadurch, daß sie eine kleine Heimlichkeit daraus machen. Das ist etwas für uns, nicht für die anderen. Was die anderen da draußen tun, geht uns eine Zeitlang nichts an. In der Sphäre eines Spiels haben die Gesetze und Gebräuche des gewöhnlichen Lebens keine Geltung. [...] Diese zeitweilige Aufhebung der ‘gewöhnlichen Welt’ ist bereits im Kinderleben völlig ausgebildet [...]* (Huizinga, 1997, p. 21).
- 7 See the below section *Revised Strategies in the 2000s* about Eugenia’s example.
- 8 To name just some of them: *Molodaya Gvardiya* (Eng. ‘Young Guard’) from the years 1948 and 2015, *Respublika SHKID* (Eng. ‘Republic SHKID’, SHKID = Škola Imeni Dostoevskogo = school named after Fyodor M. Dostoevsky) 1966, *Bolshaya Peremena* (Eng. ‘Big School-Break’) 1973, *Rozygrysh* (Eng. ‘Practical Joke’) 1976, *Dva Kapitana* (Eng. ‘Two Captains’) 1977.
- 9 From the interview with the former Director of Studies in Foreign Languages (from 2005 to 2015) , teacher of German and graduate of this school, Elena A. Kruglova. The interview took place in August 2011 in Moscow.
- 10 Ibid. In the 1970s, the secondary school system of the Soviet Union included the prime school stage (grades 1 to 4), the middle school stage (grades 5 to 8), and the senior school stage (grades 9 to 10). Due to the reform of general and professional education in 1984, 4<sup>th</sup> grade was canceled in the prime school and 11<sup>th</sup> grade was introduced into the senior school. In 1989, however, 4<sup>th</sup> grade was reinstated in the secondary education system so that the program of

general school education has included grades 1 to 11 since then. Children usually enter the school at the age of 6–8 years and finish it aged 17–18.

- <sup>11</sup> See the official music video *Karl-Marx-Stadt* by the group *Megapolis*: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BO8MgJk3fk>>. Accessed on: 11 Sept. 2018.
- <sup>12</sup> From the interview with the former Director of Studies in Foreign Languages Elena A. Kruglova, and with teacher of History, Tatyana V. Kolpenskaya, also graduate of Hermann Matern School and participant of that theatre production.
- <sup>13</sup> From the interview with the former Director of Studies in Foreign Languages at School 1269, Elena A. Kruglova.
- <sup>14</sup> The co-founder and first director of the school Boris Grozovsky had a close connection with the Russian widow of German actor and social activist Heinrich Greif. With the help and protection of Greif's widow, Grozovsky established a partnership with a secondary school in Dresden, Greif's native city. As a homage to Greif's personality, life work and activities (after the Nazis rose to power, the communist Heinrich Greif emigrated to Switzerland and then to Moscow where he worked until 1945 as chief editor of Radio Moscow and acted in films), Boris Grozovsky decided to introduce the German language at school and specialize the school in German studies.
- <sup>15</sup> From the interview with the former Director of Studies in Foreign Languages at School 1269, Elena A. Kruglova.
- <sup>16</sup> All the videos and images used in this exposition derive from my personal archive (V. V.).
- <sup>17</sup> An episode from a typical Russian-speaking performance staged for the annual competition *Theatre Week For Children*.
- <sup>18</sup> From the interview with the former Director of Studies in Foreign Languages at School 1269, Elena A. Kruglova.
- <sup>19</sup> From the interview with the former Director of Studies in Foreign Languages at School 1269, Elena A. Kruglova.
- <sup>20</sup> For example, Marina Tsvetaeva's sorrowful poem *Just Yesterday He Looked Me In the Eyes* (Rus. *Vchera Escho v Glaza Glyadel*) about man's fleeting love is followed by Sergey Esenin's *A Letter To the Woman* (Rus. *Pis'mo k Zhenschine*). Hence, the first poem was performed by a female, and the second one – by a

male student, so that it turned into a hidden dialog and combination of interconnected fates (From personal experience as a participant during the Literary Lounge in grade 11 in 2000).

- <sup>21</sup> From personal experience as a participant during the Literary Lounge in grade 11 in 2000.
- <sup>22</sup> From the interview with Elena A. Kruglova, the class teacher between 1989 and 1996 and the former Director of Studies in Foreign Languages at School 1269.
- <sup>23</sup> For instance by the idea of demonstrating their talents of embodiment via staging. As far as I know, only those students participated in school theatre (at least in high school) who had decided for themselves that rehearsing a role character, learning role texts by heart, artistic moving on stage in accordance with their stage partners, learning both to control their own emotions and to evaluate the emotions his/her role character might feel etc. is a proper way of personal development for them which, above all, is a great fun.
- <sup>24</sup> For the sake of contextualizing, it is worth emphasizing the fact that between 6 and 10 – the years upon which primary school period usually falls – the child masters the activities he/she will apply from that moment throughout his/her life: writing, reading, thinking, counting, processing information. In the following years – between 10 and 12 – assiduity, attention, concentration, self-control is developed, the ability to learn is fixed. Needless to say that during the adolescent period, between 13 and 17, the process of growing up is connected with radical change and restructure in hormonal system which is followed by the brightest emotional feelings as well as expression of the latter. This is the life period as I remember it while being a pupil myself and while experiencing predictable similar changes in my classmates.
- <sup>25</sup> And indeed, as my personal experience shows it and the experience of earlier graduates with whom I communicate confirms it, when the graduates arrange meetings 10, 20, 35 or even 45 years after leaving school, they recollect and retell in detail what they *felt* in any particular situation during the school period. Not to mention the school theatre! For example Elena A. Kruglova once depicted a graduate's meeting 20 years after her school leaving which was devoted to the plays staged by them at school. Many graduates confessed that school theatre had been running through the whole life afterwards, and its influence had been revealing itself in different life situations.

- <sup>26</sup> For more information about Eugenia's paintings and life visit official website of Moscow Museum of Modern Art at: <[www.mmoma.ru/en/exhibitions/ petrovka/evgeniya\\_kovalenko/](http://www.mmoma.ru/en/exhibitions/petrovka/evgeniya_kovalenko/)>. Accessed on: 11 Sept. 2018.
- <sup>27</sup> On the official website of the school museum you can read “Школьный музей является одной из форм дополнительного образования в условиях образовательного учреждения [...]”. For more information about the school museums see at: <[http://dsd1269.ucoz.ru/index/shkolnye\\_muzei/0-106](http://dsd1269.ucoz.ru/index/shkolnye_muzei/0-106)>. Accessed on 11 Sept. 2018.
- <sup>28</sup> From the interview with the former Director of Studies in Foreign Languages at School 1269, Elena A. Kruglova.

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