

The Passion for Educating the “New Man”: Debates about Preschooling in Soviet Russia, 1917–1925

Yordanka Valkanova

The Russian Revolution of February 1917 displaced the autocracy of the Romanov royal family and aimed to establish a liberal republican Russia. The Bolsheviks, who came to power a few months later in the revolution of October 1917, announced that their new policy in education “had no analogy in history.”¹ Their reforms sought to establish a Marxist-based education system, in an attempt to raise new citizens for a new, communist society. Above all, the Bolsheviks regarded education as a means to engineer the ideal human being, the “new man” and the “new woman.”

The Bolshevik reforms led to a large and rapid expansion of preschool and day nursery places. Preschool education became an integral part of the school system in 1918.² Some 5,000 kindergartens, nurseries and childcare centers were opened in Soviet Russia in the 1920s.³ This expansion in services for young children was a remarkable achievement at a time when primary schooling did not begin until age eight. *The New York Times* reported in 1931 that, “there are more day nurseries in Soviet Russia than in all the rest of the world.”⁴ The contribution of the Bolsheviks to the expansion of childcare and education is highlighted in many scholars’ accounts of the history of Soviet preschool education. These include descriptions by visitors to Russia, such as American educators Patty Smith Hill and John Dewey, who witnessed these processes firsthand in the years that followed the

¹“Osnovnye Principy Edinoy Trudovoy Shkoly,” Ot Gosydarstvennoy Komissii Po Prosveshcheniyu,” in *Narodnoe Obrazovanie V Sbr. Sb. Dokumentov 1917–1973*. (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1974), 10.

²“Polojenie Ob Edinnoy Trudovoy Schole Rossiyskoy Socialisticheskoi Federativnoy Sovetskoy Respubliki. Utverzdno Na Zasedanii vCUK 30 Sentebria 1918 g.,” in *Narodnoe Obrazovanie vSSSR. Sbornik Dokumentov. 1917–1973 gg* (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1974).

³“Primechania,” in *Istoria Sovetskoy Doshkol’noy Pedagogiki. Hrestomatia*, ed. Maria Kolmakova and Valentina Loginova (Moscow: Prosveshchenia, 1988), 434.

⁴Hilda Angeloff, “The Soviet Pushes Pre-School Work; Dont’s for Russia’s Parents,” *New York Times*, December 27, 1931.

October revolution.⁵ Toward the end of the twentieth century, American scholars such as Meredith E. Kiger have argued that the preschool education established in Russia in 1917 had changed little ever since. Kiger writes, “the communists’ initial establishment of child care and education policies—as well as their extensive commitment to build and operate preschools—afford Russia the distinction of being a pioneer among industrialized countries in this field.”⁶

This essay focuses on the massive commitment to the education and care of young children in Russia from just after the revolution of 1917–25. It seeks to identify how liberal and progressive ideas were accommodated within the Marxist labor school philosophy, elements of which were incorporated in the preschools established by the Soviet regime. I will argue that there were two types of internal relations (to use Marx’s notion) that dialectically shaped the intention of adapting the labor school to preschool theory and practice in 1917–25.⁷ The first relation of this explanatory model examines the establishment of the tradition of preschool education and care within the society, while the second observed relation reflects the way the preschool served the development and the necessities of the new state.

Fundamentally, the Bolsheviks designed Soviet ideology and practices in opposition to what they perceived as bourgeois. As part of the conception of Soviet identity, Bolshevik party members defined the Soviet preschool in opposition to what the bourgeois or previously existing preschool had been. Ultimately, however, the resulting Soviet policies and practices were in many respects as bourgeois as anything before them, reflecting not only John Dewey’s ideas about progressive education, but also the liberal philosophy expressed in the works of the prominent bourgeois scholar and advocate of Froebelian pedagogy Petr Kapterev (1849–1922).⁸

The impact of liberalism and educational progressivism on preschool reforms in the Soviet Union during the pre-Stalin period was neglected by Soviet scholarship for many years. Moreover, there was not much information available to Western scholars to inform a

⁵John Dewey, *Impressions of Soviet Russia and the Revolutionary World* (New York: New Public Inc., 1929), 3–133; Catherine A. Grubb, “Didn’t Someone Invite Patty? How Patty Smith Hill’s Vision of International Education Has Crossed the Border in a Most Unusual Place,” (ERIC, 2002), 19.

⁶Meredith E. Kiger, “The Nature of Experiences of 4-Year-Olds in Two Russian Preschools.” *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* 13, 2 (1999): 120.

⁷Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, trans. S.W. Ryazanskaya Jack Cohen, 3 vols., Vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971), 491.

⁸Tamara Krasovitzkay, “Idei N.K.Krupskoy i ih Rol v Istorii Bolshivistkogo Eksperimenta.” *Noviy istoricheskiy vestnik* 1, 6 (2002): 4–29; Valeria Muhina, “Psihologicheskie Idei Peotra Fedorovicha: K 150-Letiu So Dnia Rojdenia.” *Development of Personality* 3 (1999): 15–21.

comprehensive account of either the pre-revolutionary liberal reforms or the influence of Deweyan progressivism on Soviet early childhood policy.⁹ Until recently, only a few studies had been published addressing the impact of liberal education and the pedagogy of John Dewey on Soviet education, and with the exception of Kirschenbaum, even the recent works do not directly address the education of children in their early years.¹⁰

Labor School Education for Young Children

The labor school is a concept that was employed by Marxists to define the process through which children learn through the experience of working.¹¹ Soon after the Bolsheviks took power, they undertook the reform of preschool education as part of what they called “the unified labor school.” This was codified by two documents: *Thesis of the United Labor School of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic* and *Main Principles of the United Labor School* (1918).¹² In these, the “labor” kindergarten was the foundation of Soviet education and thus the foundation of the Soviet itself. Although there are several accounts of the role of the philosophy of the labor school in establishing the new early childhood education, this topic is in need of further analysis, since the Bolsheviks in the early period articulated the labor school as the leading philosophy of Soviet education as a whole.¹³ It is still not clear

⁹Among other hindrances were source problems that put limitations on the users of Soviet archives. Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Politics as Practice: Thoughts on a New Soviet Political History,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5, 1 (2004): 27–54.

¹⁰Larry E. Holmes, *The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse: Reforming Education in Soviet Russia 1917–1931*, Indiana-Michigan Series in Russia and East European Studies (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 5–214; Irina Mchitarjan, “John Dewey and the Development of Education in Russia before 1930—Report on a Forgotten Reception,” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 19, 1 (2000): 109–131; William Partlett, “Bourgeois Ideas in Communist Construction: The Development of Stanislav Shatskii’s Teacher Training Methods,” *History of Education* 35, 4–5 (2006): 453–474.; Lisa A Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades: Revolutionizing Childhood in Soviet Russia, 1917–1932* (New York: Routledge Falmer, 2001), 224; Lisa Kirschenbaum, “The Kindergarten and the Revolutionary Tradition in Russia,” in *Kindergartens and Cultures: The Global Diffusion of an Idea*, ed. Roberta Lyn Wollons (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 195–213.

¹¹Alexander Fortunov, *Theoria Trudovoy Shkoly v Eu Istoricheskoy Razvitiu* (Moscow: Mir, 1925), 38–46.

¹²The title of the thesis is translated in some sources into English as *Statement on the United Labour School*, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts under Lunacharsky October 1917–1921*, Soviet and East European Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 33.

¹³Tamara Krasovitzkaya, “Idei N.K.Krupskoy I Ih Rol V Istorii Bolshivistkogo Eksperimenta,” *Noviy istoricheskiy vestnik* 1, 6 (2002): 4–29; Alexander Rapport, “Tretiy Internatsional V Malahovke,” *Lehaim* 1, 153 (2005): 40–44; Fortunov, *Theoria Trudovoy; Grubb*, “Didn’t Someone Invite Patty?”

how the Bolsheviks' interpretation of the labor school differs, either from the labor school education elaborated in Russia before the revolution by Stanislav Shatsky (1878–1934) or from Dewey's activity school, which gained wide popularity both in Russia and throughout the world. Nor do we know the extent to which both of these perspectives on the labor school informed the policy on preschooling in Soviet Russia.

Since their leading conception of education was based on Marxist philosophy, the Bolsheviks set as their main task an attempt to ensure that the school was a place where the re-education of the new man and woman would begin. Polytechnic education, on which the labor school was based, was regarded by Marx as the education of the future. He wrote in *Compulsory Education* that socialist education must consist of "mental, bodily and technological training, which imparts the general principles of all processes of production, and simultaneously initiates the child and young person in the practical use and handling of the elementary instruments of all trades."¹⁴ He believed that this labor training, resulting in the development of a broad technological culture, would raise the working class far above the level of the upper and middle classes.

This idea was embraced by Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya (1869–1939), Lenin's wife, and developed further by her in the Russian context in a series of articles about socialist education and the labor school in particular. Krupskaya played a leading role in the authorization and legislation of the new preschool educational policy in Soviet Russia. In the process she earned her reputation as one of the principal educationists in the Party.¹⁵ After the October Revolution Krupskaya was appointed by Lenin as a deputy Commissar of NARCOMPROS (the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment). Krupskaya's perspective derived in large part from a socialist interpretation of progressive education in Russia, which had been developed in Shatsky's school in 1905. Like many Russian socialists, she had long been attracted to Tolstoy's educational explorations; in addition, she had published eleven articles in the Tolstoyan "new education" journal *Free Upbringing*.¹⁶ She was exceedingly positive in her attitude towards Friedrich Froebel's original Kindergarten pedagogy, which also held work and activity to be central to the education of young children.¹⁷ She

¹⁴Karl Marx, "Compulsory Education," in *On the Third International*, ed. Saul K. Padover (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), 113.

¹⁵Pinkevitch, *The New Education in the Soviet Republic*.

¹⁶Partlett, "Bourgeois Ideas in Communist Construction."

¹⁷Yordanka Valkanova and Kevin J. Brehony, "The Gifts and 'Contributions': Friedrich Froebel and Russian Education (1850–1929)." *History of Education* 35, 2 (2006): 189–207.

had no professional background in education, a fact that was noted by John Dewey in his account of their meeting in 1928. Dewey described her limited competence as “strange.”¹⁸ Contemporary accounts of Krupskaya’s interpretation of the labor school describe it as “simplistic and pathetic” and as predominantly criticizing the liberal reforms undertaken by the Kadets (the Constitutional Democratic Party which came to power in the February revolution), rather than explaining what labor education really was.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Krupskaya did show her broad knowledge of education in her articles, where she used leading educational ideas to support her theory.²⁰

However, even Krupskaya’s direct comments on the implementation of the labor school in preschool settings were ambiguous. As Krasovitzkaya rightly points out, the ideological vigor of Krupskaya’s works targeted the Kadets, who intended to reform the school and make it a social institution fitted to a society of free, democratic citizens.²¹ How then were Krupskaya’s ideas adopted and the new agenda set in post-revolutionary Russia? The theory of the united labor school developed further after the Revolution but, as Albert Pinkevitch (1884–1937), a former teacher who became Rector of Moscow University argued, the new, Marxist agenda of pre-school education frightened everybody involved.²² According to Pinkevitch, the aim of preschool labor education was not well formulated. He pointed to the influence of Montessorians and “neo-Froebelians” in the interpretation of the labor school in the preschool settings.²³

The place of the kindergarten as a first stage of the labor school was announced in the *Declaration of Preschool Education*, signed in 1920 by Anatoly Lunacharsky (1875–1933), Commissar of NARCOMPROS:

We agree with those people who say that the idea of the united labor school is somehow a natural continuity of the kindergarten. For this reason the labor school itself will become stronger and will take the place in the education of the working people which it deserves, but only if it receives young material

¹⁸Dewey, *Impressions of Soviet Russia*, 111.

¹⁹Krasovitzkaya, “Idei N.K.Krupskoy,” 14; Tamara Krasovitzkaya, *Modernizacia Rossii: Nacional’no-Kul’turnaya Politika 20-b Godov* (Moscow: RAN.In-t pos.istorii, 1998), 414.

²⁰Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya, “K Vaprosy O Socialisticheskoy Shkole,” in Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya *Pedagogicheskie Sochinenia* (Alma-Ata: Maarif, 1959), 10–14; “Proidenny Put,” in Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya, *Pedagogicheskie Sochinenia* (Alma-Ata: Maarif, 1959), 209–18; “Ob Osobennostih Doshkol’nogo Vozrasta,” in Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya, *Pedagogicheskie Sochinenia* (Alma-Ata: Maarif, 1959), 341–43.

²¹Krasovitzkaya, “Idei N.K.Krupskoy.”

²²Albert Pinkevitch, *The New Education in the Soviet Republic* (New York: The John Day Company, 1929), 114–22.

²³*Ibid.*, 116.

from the kindergarten, where generally the character of the child will be built in a positive way, with a vital and joyful perception of the world, deep respect for, and a friendly attitude towards, others, through working by playing and using all the organs of perception and movement.²⁴

According to Lunacharsky, there were two main features of the interpretation of the unified labor school. The first one, which he called “psychological,” referred to active learning. Knowledge, he wrote, is acquired easily when it is understood or learned via play or work. From his point of view, the labor component of education is itself an active dynamic creative acquisition of the world.²⁵ The second feature of labor education was based on crafts for younger children. Lunacharsky noted, however, that the aim of the labor school was to give not vocational but rather polytechnic education and that the activities were the same for male and female children. As he explained, “Labor develops children’s character, their will, and enhances their solidarity.”²⁶

This interpretation of the labor school is evident in the first *Instruction on Preschool Education for Kindergartens and Centers (ochagi)*.²⁷ According to this first curriculum, all occupations were to be based on the ideals of individualism, socialization, independence, creative labor and contact with nature. The environment was to be designed with a view to psychological consideration and sensitive pedagogy that encouraged progressive enhancement of children’s understandings, senses, language, and the design of the content of play-work. The environment had to allow the occupations to be initiated by the children, rather than by the teachers.²⁸ The authors of the program regarded labor as a free activity that was creative and joyful.²⁹ A leading role in the creation of the curriculum was played by Vera Shmidt, who had been trained at the Froebel Institute in Kiev and was a Deputy of the Preschool Department at NARCOMPROS. Elizaveta Tiheeva, who had visited Maria Montessori’s Casa dei Bambini in Rome in 1914, developed learning material that supplemented the instruction.³⁰

²⁴Anatoliy Lunacharsky, “Declaration of Preschool Education,” *Egenedel’nik NKP “Narodnoe prosveshtenie”* (Moscow: NARCOMPROS: 1920): 69–70.

²⁵Anatoliy Lunacharsky, “Declaration of Preschool Education.” *Narodnoe obrazovanie* 8 (1967): 46.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 49.

²⁷Doshkol’ny Otdel Nar.Kom. po Prosveshteniu, “Instrukcia po Vedeniu Ochaga i Detskogo Sada,” in *Spravochnik po Doshkol’nomu Vospitaniiu* (Moskva: Lit.-izd. otdel Narodnogo Komissariata po Prosveshteniu, 1919), 82–83.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹Valkanova and Brehony, “Gifts and ‘Contributions.’”

³⁰Margarita Terzieva, “Elizaveta Tiheeva i neinite vazgledi za rodnoezikovoto obuchenie.” *Preduchilishtna pedagogioka* 54, 5 (2006): 6–7.

The identification of labor as an important activity for the development of the child was proposed by a number of academics, including developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934), who advocated the labor school in his book *Educational Psychology* (1926), and the philosopher, psychologist, and educator Pavel Blonsky (1884–1941) whose theory, as he himself pointed out, was derived from Froebel's, Montessori's and Dewey's works.³¹ Blonsky's pedagogy connected play and work; like Froebel he claimed, that work emerged from play, especially manipulative and pretend play. The benefit of labor in education, according to Blonsky, appears in the development of the child's attention span and dexterity, in his knowledge about materials, and his motivation. All of these, he contended, would positively impact children's school readiness.³²

Most of these ideas were consonant with the Russian liberals' ideal of labor education. Frobelian Petr Kapterev, who was considered the brains behind the reform, played a leading role in the movement.³³ His works had a significant influence on the promotion of the theory of labor education. Kapterev's efforts led to the opening of some labor schools in Russia under the Tsarist Minister of Education Paul Ignatieff. He belonged to the Kadet Party, an organization of liberals comprising the largest party in the Provisional Government formed in February 1917. Kapterev also contributed to the development of a policy framework for preschool education and to the founding of labor schools as part of the Bolsheviks' school reforms.

The Experimental Station-Preschools

The expansion of the kindergartens increased the demand for teachers, trained in the new school philosophy. The unified labor school was piloted in the experimental station-schools (there were about 20 such schools in Russia) established by NARCOMPROS for spreading and sharing good practice in the implementation of the party's conception of the labor school. Among them were several schools which had kindergarten sections associated with them, such as Shatsky's school and the school-commune Malahovka.³⁴

Shatsky's school was the biggest among them.³⁵ Marxism was the primary inspiration behind Shatsky's educational philosophy.

³¹Lev Vygotsky, *Educational Psychology* (New Delhi: Pentagonpress, 2006), 199.

³²Pavel Blonsky, *Izbrannyye Pedagogicheskie Trudy* (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1961), 420–23.

³³Krasovitzkaya, "Idei N.K.Krupskoy"; Krasovitzkaya, *Modernizatsia Rossii*.

³⁴Rapport, *Tretiy Internatsional V Malahovke*.

³⁵Partlett, "Bourgeois Ideas in Communist Construction."

Although his group, comprised of Alexander Zelenko (1871–1953), Luiza Karlovna Schleger (1862–1942), and his wife Valentina Shatskaya (1882–1978), had learned much from the new schooling of Dewey. Their work was also informed by Froebel's pedagogy and the free upbringing approach.³⁶ This blend, or "amalgam," as historian William Partlett calls it, looked natural to Shatsky.³⁷ Zelenko, who had visited Hull House in Chicago and also the University Settlement in New York, inspired Shatsky's interest in education. On his return, Zelenko, together with Shatsky and Schleger founded The Settlement, a colony for working-class children in Moscow in 1905.³⁸ Schleger, the head teacher of the kindergarten section there, described her experimental methods for educating young children in *Practical Work in the Kindergarten*. The latter book served as a guide for organizing nursery schools in Soviet Russia.³⁹ The station worked in agreement with Krupskaya's interpretation of the labor school and explored large block constructing materials and natural materials collected from the environment, such as sand, clay, and wood. Many seminars, exhibitions and conferences were organized regularly in the kindergartens that were associated with the station. Dewey was highly complimentary about the achievements of Shatsky's group when he visited them in 1929.⁴⁰

Another experimental school was Malahovka, founded by intellectual Jews and located approximately twenty miles from Moscow, which represented a school-commune and prominent center for the implementation of the labor school serving the needs of orphaned Jewish children. Among those who worked there was the artist Mark Chagall, who served as an art teacher in Malahovka from 1919 to 1922. The talented educator Boruh Schwartzman took a leading role in the school.⁴¹ Schwartzman, like many Jews in Russia, embraced socialism as a potential escape from persecution and believed that it offered better prospects for improving the life of the Jewish community. Under Schwarzman, teachers at Malahovka gave priority to the development

³⁶Stanislav Shatsky, "Na Puty k Trudovoi Shkole," in *Izbrannie Pedagogicheskie Sochinenia*, ed. Maria Skatina and Valentina Shatskoy Nadezhda Kusina (Moscow: Pedagogika, 1980); Luiza Schleger, "K Rabote Doshkolnogo Otdela," in *Etapy Novoy Shkoly*, ed. Stanislav Shatsky (Moscow: 1923).

³⁷Partlett, "Bourgeois Ideas in Communist Construction," 453.

³⁸Kevin J. Brehony, "Representations of Socialist Educational Experiments in the 1920s and 1930s: The Place of the Sciences of Education. Passion, Fusion, Tension," in *New Education and Educational Sciences—Education Nouvelle et Sciences de L'éducation (End 19th-Middle 20th Century—Fin 19e-Milieu 20e Siècle)*, ed. Rita Hofstetter and Bernard Schneuwly (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), 271–304.

³⁹"Luiza Karlovna Schleger," in Kolmakova and Loginova, *Istoria Sovetskoy Doshkol'noy Pedagogiki. Hrestomatia*, 190.

⁴⁰Dewey, *Impressions of Soviet Russia*.

⁴¹Rapport "Tretiy Internatsional v Malahovke."

of a creative atmosphere, to labor and to self-governance. The preschool children were grouped according to age, one for five-year-olds and one for six-year-olds. There were two group rooms, a small woodworking shop, and a large room for dancing in the building. Along with gardening, children constructed woodwork, molded models from clay and played with other types of toys. According to the noted progressive American educator Carleton Washburne, who visited the Malahovka kindergarten in 1927, they did "all the things one sees in any good New School for little children."⁴² The contradiction observed within this particular example was not an isolated case; rather it was typical of the preschools during the first years after the end of the Civil War in 1922.

Ready to Join the Workforce

Along with the industrialization of the country after the Civil War of 1918–20, the dominant labor education paradigm shifted from learning through work and play to vocational education. The Bolsheviks mobilized all material and social resources in the country to achieve intense post-war development. While pre-war industrialization took place in the urbanized parts of the country, it brought little improvement to rural areas. A large segment of the population still lived at subsistence level. Land reform policy was introduced in 1917, but economic improvement depended on inefficient peasant farms. In addition, civil war destroyed the balance of normal economic life in many districts. The government undertook rapid forced collectivization and mechanization of agriculture and the battle for socialism became a battle for the village.

The Third All-Russian Congress of preschool education focused on the establishment of quality preschools in villages, where work, along with play, still had a leading position in children's everyday activities.⁴³ However, more attention was paid to work in the local community. Children's work in the nursery school or in the kindergarten was based on the urgent demand for the introduction of methods of manual and industrial discipline, in order to give the child skills that were formerly obtained at home and in its social life. In addition, the preschool teachers were advised to create a modern working ethos in the preschool, involving planning and the division of labor. They themselves were encouraged to take part in agricultural work in the villages and to use this as a pedagogical means.⁴⁴

⁴²Carleton Washburne, "The Good and Bad in Russian Education." *The New Era* 33 (1928): 8–12, 9.

⁴³Krasovitzkaya, "Idei N.K.Krupskoy."

⁴⁴*Rezolucia Po Dokladam Tretego Bserasiiskogo Saezda Po Doshkol'nomu Bospitaniiu.* (Moscow: NARCOMPROS, 1924).

Although the majority of the school-communes, including Malahovka, still closely followed Dewey's activity school model, the Bolsheviks' interpretation of the labor school doctrine had not been generally accepted within NARCOMPROS experimental contexts. The radicals in the party questioned Krupskaya's theory of the labor school as polytechnic education and a monotechnic alternative was suggested. The advocates of monotechnic education, such as Otto Schmidt (1891–1956), the Commissar of the Committee of Social Care, and Zinaida (Zlata) Lilina (1882–1929), the wife of leading Bolshevik Grigory Zinoviev, insisted on creating curricula that were relevant to the party's industrial needs and that targeted young people's readiness for a particular profession instead of general labor knowledge and skills.⁴⁵ The preschools were blamed for spending too much time on teaching self-help skills and too little time on meeting the state's need for a well-trained work force. The result was a poorly conceived program that was abandoned a couple of years later.

Conclusion

Bolshevik critiques of "Bourgeois preschool education" as a category were central to the establishment of Soviet preschool educational policy. Notably, the majority of the Bolsheviks who took part in this process originated from middle-class families, and they themselves had belonged to the bourgeoisie or petit-bourgeoisie, as described by Marx. This fact, of the socialist elite's involvement in other socialist movements, was pointed out by the Italian Marxist theoretician, Antonio Gramsci, as a serious obstacle in the process of establishing socialist culture, including education. Moreover, realizing the difficulties such intellectual-socialists may encounter in the process of creating their own new identity, Gramsci suggested that the intellectuals should not abandon their identity; rather, they should stay distant, but not as an elite.⁴⁶ The creators of the new education in Russia were representatives of the intellectual elite. They expressed in their critical discourse a passionate separation from the bourgeois morality, while describing the new Soviet education. Thus, bourgeois preschool education was a subject of abjection and the creation of symbolic boundaries within this process of identity formation was the major issue in the discourse on education within the party. The implementation of the theory of the labor school as a philosophy of Soviet education provides a clear example of this.

⁴⁵ Fortunov, *Theoria Trudovoy Shkoly V Eu Istoricheskom Razvitiu*.

⁴⁶ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 24–43.

Thus early childhood education in Soviet Russia was constructed by the needs of the party for self-identification. The expansion of preschooling during the period from 1917 to 1925 was supported by an effort to validate the power of the Bolsheviks within the society and to establish a new state. For its part, the labor school as presented and promoted was a vague concept and did not gain a clear definition when placed within different preschool agendas.