

9 BOARDING SCHOOL ON YAMAL: HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT AND CURRENT SITUATION*

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Introduction

This article is dedicated to the analysis of the relationship between the school system education and the indigenous population of Yamal in the modern period and to a short review of the history of these relations. This article is based on data and materials collected on the school at the Yamal cultural centre, which was created in the Yamal tundra in the early 1930s. This school still exists; now it is a boarding school in the settlement of Yar-Sale – the biggest boarding school in Russia.

The modern system of education on Yamal is not new. It was formed as a result of lengthy development, and it is very difficult to understand the many peculiarities of the modern state of these schools without consideration of the ways in which they have developed. That is why I will dedicate the first part of my article to the historical background – to the review of the main stages of development of the educational system in the North. I will base my review – and would like to honestly notify the reader – on a simple but rarely articulated idea that Soviet policy in the field of education in the North, though it seems unified and integrated, is in fact not homogeneous and full of discrepancies. It was not integrated in time and was differently realised in space.

When we speak about education in the North we immediately visualise boarding schools and children forced into these schools against the will of their parents, torn from their native environment and culture into a completely new environment, where, due to strict russification, they are forbidden to speak their own language and their teacher's culture is different from their own. Of course, this image complies in part with reality but with the reality of a certain period, and we should not apply it to the modern situation without additional research. Boarding schools differ and to enhance this idea, I will apply the phrase 'classical boarding school' to educational establishments of the late 1950s until the mid-1980s.

The aim of the article is not to describe the whole system of education in the North. My work is based on my own field data gathered on Yamal, on historical research which I conducted when preparing my Ph.D. thesis (Liarskaya 2003) and on archive materials from the 1930s from the Fund of the North Committee at the State Archive of the Russian Federation.¹

Soviet policy in regards to school education for the peoples of the North: consistency and contradiction.

The history of the formation and reformation of the modern system of education in the Russian North began after the establishment of the Soviet Union, and is still going on. Nevertheless, this history has, as it should, its own pre-history. This pre-history was the missionary schools. They affected neither the level of education of Siberian natives, nor their way of life and culture,² but they are of a certain interest from the point of view of school organisation and detecting the weak points of this process.

The task of the missionary schools was not the proliferation of literacy or positive knowledge but raising Christians and the propagation of Russian Orthodoxy among barbarians. Correspondingly, children in such schools first of all studied prayers, basic Christian notions, the basics of Christian history and, if possible, basic literacy.³ Such schools enjoyed neither popularity nor respect nor even minimal trust on the part of the parents, this being one of their main problems.

However, wide proliferation of education in the North started, as I have already mentioned, after the establishment of the Soviet Union. The reform of school education and the introduction of new educational principles, such as the availability and universality of education, started almost immediately all over the country, together with the creation of a wide network of public schools for the whole population of the country. Available education was always an important integral part of Soviet ideology. So, creation of schools in the North was a part of this process.

The history of northern schools can be divided into four periods:

- 1 First period – the 1920s until the beginning of the 1930s: creation of first separate schools, experiments with the form and content of education.
- 2 Second period – the mid-1930s until the end of the 1950s: beginning of the development of school education as a system, creation of a network of elementary schools for native children of the North, unification of school curricula.
- 3 Third period – the end of the 1950s until the mid-1980s: period of ‘classical boarding schools’. Introduction of universal compulsory secondary education, strict execution of the law on universal schooling, period of maximal activity of the system of boarding schools, the domination of the Russian language in educational establishments.

This period can be subdivided into two steps:

- 3a From the end of the 1950s until the mid-1970s: a stricter regime; the time when, in fact, native languages were totally prohibited; in many districts all children were forced into boarding schools, even in cases when their parents were not nomads but lived in the same settlement.

- 3b The mid-1970s until the mid-1980s: the regime grows a little softer; the majority of settlement children return from boarding schools to their homes (for example, in Chukotka), several concessions were also made to native languages.
- 4 Fourth period – the mid-1980s to the present: softening of the conditions set in the previous period, appearance of new programmes and new forms of education and less consistent and rigid execution of the law on universal schooling. At this time the state stopped managing school education strictly, and the policy towards school education in the Far North ceased to be unified: there appeared possibilities for independence at the local level. And what is especially important is that in this period the changes happened not from above, but from below.

I will emphasise here that the difference between these stages is not only in the amount of pressure from the state onto local minorities and the breadth of involvement. I suppose that the idea of the existence in the USSR of a unified and consistent policy in the field of education for local minorities is not as correct as the idea that schools in the North were always based on the same ‘Soviet’ principles.

Soviet educational policy in the North⁴ is a heterogeneous and inconsistent phenomenon, and it is very difficult to speak about it being consecutive or continuous. On the one hand, there were several principles that were stable during the entire Soviet epoch (such as universality and secularity), and some tendencies and processes that started in the first stage which were really consistently developed during the whole history of Soviet schools in the North. On the other hand, several principles of school organisation (no less fundamental than universality and secularity) changed from time to time, sometimes into directly opposite ones (i. e. the position of the state towards pupils’ native language or their culture and way of life).

Concealing these contradictions and the idea of unanimity arise, to my mind, mainly from Soviet official rhetoric which never announced any change of course and always presented one-hundred-eighty-degree turns as a forward movement of the same ‘Lenin national policy’ in a new stage.⁵ It is quite important for us not to get into this rhetoric trap.

Not to be ungrounded, I will give several instances of both consistent and inconsistent phenomena and processes.

A Examples of consistent processes:

As an example of a stable and consistent tendency we can name the gradual growth in school attendance (the percentage of northern children attending school was growing steadily up to the end of the Soviet period).

As another example of consistency we can mention purposeful work on the creation of a northern minorities *intelligentsia*. The first step in this direction was made by P. G. Bogoraz who created a *rabfac* (university faculty for working people) for northern

minorities (for details see Slezkine 1996, Voskoboinikov 1958: 50–61). Then there appeared a network of national teaching schools and colleges for cultural workers, and a system of various incentives for northern children to enter institutes. This system included not only free education and enrollment privileges, but also social security for students belonging to northern minorities, which undoubtedly boosted the accessibility of higher and secondary special education. This activity did not stop even when native languages were banned in schools and all ethnicity was rendered obsolete. I do not know of any serious changes in this policy in the Soviet period. The result of these activities was the creation within a 50-year period of a rather numerous stratum of people with higher or secondary special education who became activists in national movements in the 1980s and started working on the conservation and restoration of native culture.

B Examples of inconsistent policy:

The brightest example of this kind is the attitude towards native languages. (Here it is very important to remember that the history of the attitude towards northern languages is just a particular case of the history of the attitude towards minority languages in the USSR in general).

It is well-known that in the 1920–1930s, state policy was directed at the development and support of northern languages. Teaching children in their native language was considered to be the only worthy decision and the ideal to strive for. And they did strive for it, creating literacy, textbooks, ABC-books. Teachers were required to study local languages and even a special training of teachers for northern schools was begun (Voskoboinikov 1958). Of course it happened very often in the 1920s and 1930s that teachers in fact did not speak the children's native language or spoke it poorly, but it was considered a temporary phenomenon.⁶ In situations where it was impossible to organise teaching in the children's native language, teachers were asked to pay maximum attention to encouraging pupils not to forget their language, to communicate with each other in it. Teachers were emphatically recommended not only to study the pupils' native language, but also to delve into their way of life, learn about their culture and maintain close connection with the parents. Thus, in the 1920s, teaching in the native language was an independent value, a means for furthering the development of a harmonious personality. In the 1930s, it was officially stated that "teaching in pupils' native language is a very important political and pedagogical task" (Bazanov, Kazan-sky 1939: 33), and the occasional tendency to transfer teaching in national schools into the Russian language was officially called harmful (the Decree by CC of CPSU⁷ and *Sovnarkom*⁸ from March 13 1938).

During the 1940s and 1950s, the position of native languages were gradually changing: the share of Russian in the curricula increased, while the volume and repertoire of literature in minority languages decreased. By that time the practice of teaching Russian from the very beginning to children of different minorities in northern



[21] ABC book in Nenets language, 1934.

schools (i. e. in Chukotka) had been commonly adopted. The same took place also for those minorities whose literacy had not been created (Boitsova 1958: 294–295). By the end of the 1950s, teacher’s books for northern school teachers said nothing about the harmonious development of a personality in the case of teaching in the native language, and the only pragmatic value attributed to studying it was that literacy in the native language was a guarantee for good acquisition of Russian and, as a result, good academic results in high school (Tsintsius 1958: 89). However, the former rhetoric about the importance of native languages was still used.

At the end of the 1950s, a radical change took place in the state’s attitude towards native languages. Officially in the USSR, the right to receive education in one’s native language was always proclaimed. However, in that period education in native⁹ schools began to be criticised. The logic was as follows: teaching in a minority language hampers good knowledge of Russian and insufficient knowledge of Russian, in turn hampers good education. This led to a sharp decrease in the number of schools teaching in native languages all over the country, and in the North native languages were even banned, not only as the language of instruction or as a subject of teaching, but also as a means of communication among children. This practice, in existence between the 1950s and 1970s, was completely opposite to the state policy of the 1920s and 1930s.

Concessions started, as is known, only in 1970s (Vakhtin 1993: 39–40), but in the Soviet period native languages never became official languages of instruction; even in linguistically happy regions, children were prohibited to speak their native language

at school with their friends, and it was never considered necessary (as it used to be in the first half of the 20th century) for a Russian teacher to speak to children in their language.

Thus, we see that during the Soviet period the authorities' attitude towards native languages changed radically. We saw that the position stigmatised as chauvinist, erroneous, not meeting the pedagogical and psychological aims of knowledge and called 'wrecking education', after the second half of the 1950s became the prevailing one and its opponents began to be called nationalists. It is obvious that one cannot speak about any consistency in language policy in these conditions! However, if we look at the official documents, it will appear that in the USSR the right to education in one's native language was always recognised, including in the 1960s, and nowhere was a tendency towards russification or non-recognition of the rights of languages allowed. This example is very typical of the Soviet Union and is very important for understanding what was going on in the country, because it demonstrates clearly the situation, not only in the field of language policy, but also in other fields.

Another example of inconsistent policy, which I would dare to cite, concerns the functions and meaning of boarding schools within schools. Here we can see the same principle: changes that happened in the middle of the century are never discussed in either pedagogical or methodological literature and are presented in all documents not as a change in course but as a logical continuation of the previous stage.

Initially in the 1920s and 1930s, the boarding school appeared as a hostel at a school, without which it was sometimes impossible to organise normal education. As at that time schools in the North were not intended to solve the problem of russification or isolation of children from the harmful influence of the parents' environment, boarding schools were given a rather important but auxiliary function. It should be said that it is quite interesting that in post-revolutionary pedagogics there was a rather popular idea that for the creation of a new personality, all children were to be brought up by the society and the upbringing should be passed on from a family sphere into the sphere of the state, etc. However I have never met with this idea in any texts dedicated to the creation and development of northern schools. On the contrary, the majority of articles and directives of the 1920s and 1930s were full, not of the requirement to take a child out of the family, but of reminders that school should not tear a child from his or her environment, and that it should be based on parents, 'local mass' and so on.¹⁰

Up to the 1940s, the system of boarding schools within schools was the dominant, but not the only form of education. In the 1950s, small-sized schools were liquidated step by step, nomadic schools disappeared completely and there was practically no alternative to boarding schools. However, a form of boarding school began to be viewed as possessing a set of teaching advantages: it allowed children to study better, secured a "healthy lifestyle and organised cultural leisure for children through the long, dark polar night, in blizzards, in severe frosts" (Krongauz 1955: 91). However,

then it was not a closed educational establishment aimed at intensive russification and saving children from a dangerous life in the tundra.

Sharp changes in the attitude towards boarding schools happened at the end of the 1950s (let's mark that as the time of the beginning of great shocks and changes in the North which would last up to the 1980s, and the changes in the sphere of education as just a part of those shocks).

Surprising though it may be, the over-estimation of the role of boarding schools and the announcement that they were the most advanced form of teaching, happened at the end of the 1950s, but were not connected directly with the North. This idea was expressed in an open speech by N. S. Khrushchev at the famous 20th CPSU Congress.¹¹ Khrushchev said that the country was making a "historical leap from a lower stage of communism to its upper stage" and that this would require the state to help schools and families in children's upbringing. He reminded the listeners of the experience of closed aristocratic boarding schools which existed in Russia in the past, and proposed the creation of such schools, not for the establishment, but for all. Children were to be sent there according to their parents' wish, but communication with the family was to be limited to holidays, vacations and extra-curricular time. "It is difficult to over-appreciate the great meaning of this system of upbringing. We should not spare our means and efforts because they will be repaid a hundredfold" (Khrushchev 1956: 97).

Naturally, after this speech, a campaign started all over the country to create 'boarding schools' as the most progressive form of education, and they didn't spare means or effort. Such educational establishments appeared both in big cities and in the countryside. And then the boarding schools which had been working in the North for a long time began to be regarded not as auxiliary means or hostels at schools but as those advanced educational establishments mentioned by N. S. Khrushchev. Later, education in the North was of course supposed to develop only as a system of 'boarding schools', thus implementing the progressive policy of the party and the government.

This new estimation of the role of boarding schools coincided with the introduction of the new law on education (1959), which established universal compulsory secondary education for all citizens of the USSR, and strengthened state paternalism in the North (1957). As a result of these acts, all northern children of school age had to (independently of the will of their parents) enter the full state security in boarding schools (there were already no alternatives to them in the North). In many regions of Siberia this system involved even children of settled parents residing in the same settlements where the boarding schools were located. Unfortunately this coincided also with a radical change in the attitude towards ethnic cultures and languages. Thus, the boarding school in fact turned into an instrument of russification, the consequences of which were even more severe because at the moment of its implementation children were completely torn away from their parents and resettled among teachers mainly belonging to another culture. So the boarding school changed from a hostel at

a school necessary for the organisation of education into a classical boarding school – the central element of the wide, well-organised system of teaching, which greatly increased the state's role in education and socialisation of northern minorities and seriously limited the family's role in this process. This situation remained stable from the late 1950s up to the 1980s. The ideology and practice of education at a boarding school in the late 1950s and 1960s seriously contradicted what the state proclaimed as its goal in the 1920s and 1930s. Similar to the case of changing the course of language policy, these shifts were not thought as a change in the course of either pedagogical literature or mass media.

The next important step began in the mid-1980s. At that time people began to discuss openly the 'problems of boarding schools' and the consequences of their existence. The point of view was expressed both by the local population (and this was for the first time) and by teachers and scientists. The majority agreed that because boarding schools tear children away from their families, they are unacceptable, and it is better to refuse them if there is any possibility and to replace them by ordinary day schools, to restore small-sized schools in settlements or to resurrect the experience of nomadic schools. Where boarding schools remained for certain reasons (this happened on Yamal), the attitude towards them changed radically, even on the part of Russian teachers. Boarding schools are now officially perceived, not as a neutral means to education, as they were in the 1920s, and not as a progressive form of teaching, as they were in the 1960s, but rather as a necessary evil. And if it is impossible to avoid them, all efforts should be made to minimise the consequences.

This transformation of a boarding school from a hostel into a progressive form of school and then into 'a necessary evil' demonstrates to us once again the absence of consistency and direct continuity between the different stages of Soviet school policy.

I hope that the examples cited above demonstrate clearly that it is impossible to speak about any unified Soviet policy in the field of education in the North, a policy one stage of which is logically connected with another and arises from it consistently. It is a mirage created by the rhetoric of Soviet texts. There was no consistency in many important spheres and the main breaks to see, fall at the end of the 1950s and in the middle of the 1980s.

School system on Yamal

Everything written above was typical of Soviet policy concerning the organisation of school education for all minorities of the North all over the territory of Russia. Soviet government and community in a certain sense perceived these population groups and these territories as something homogeneous and thus did not focus their activities on specific ethnic groups or specific territories. There was no separate policy for Chukchi or Khanty, for Amur district dwellers or tundra dwellers; the policy was thought to

be unified in regards to the entire region. But the Peoples of the North is a collective name¹² which unites groups of people who from the very beginning seriously differed from each other, and in the period studied were in different conditions and interacted with the state with different levels of intensity. To understand how the policy was realised, we need to consider not the whole North together but to analyse concrete examples and compare them with each other.

One of the most interesting and instructive cases is Yamal.¹³ This example, I believe, can be interesting not only for those studying western Siberia. Why?

On the one hand, the history of education here has passed through all the classical stages typical of other regions as well. From the end of the 19th until the first half of the 20th century, the tundra of Yamal was inhabited only by nomads (mainly Nenets and a small number of Northern Khanty), who were engaged in reindeer husbandry, hunting and fishing. There was practically no settled population. In the 19th century, missionaries tried to work there and encourage natives to send local children to their school in Obdorsk. This had no result and at the beginning of the Soviet Union, practically the whole tundra population was illiterate. In the 1930s, a standard *cultbase* was created here – a *cultbase*,¹⁴ around which the settlement of Yar-Sale was built. One of the most important parts of this base was the school with a boarding school within it, which in the 1960s was transformed into a classical boarding school, where children were forcibly gathered from all over the tundra. This school continues to work, being the biggest boarding school in Russia. The overwhelming part of Nenets and Khanty of Yamal younger than 60 have gone to this boarding school. Thus, the history of education here is rather typical of many northern regions.

But the condition of the native dwellers of Yamal today, their language and culture, seriously differ from other minorities of the North. For example, nomads not only have remained here, but in 2006 there was practically the same quantity of nomads as in the 1930s, that is, before intensive contacts with the Soviet power. Very important is that not only male reindeer-breeders live in the tundra, but women, children and the elderly as well. Here, as distinct from other regions of the North, there was no collapse of reindeer husbandry in the 1990s; on the contrary, the reindeer herds are constantly increasing. Due to a high birth rate, the number of Yamal indigenous people has doubled in the last 50 years, and half of them live in the tundra. The other half now live in settlements and are engaged in activities absent from nomadic culture. Both halves maintain constant and intensive contacts with each other. Let us note that Yamal Nenets and Khanty have retained their native language better than other minorities, and continue teaching it to their children. This means that there was no separation of Nenets from their traditional way of life, occupations and world outlook, and the prestige of tundra living is still rather high among the natives.

So, the history of education here is the same as in other parts but its results are not very typical of the North. This makes the situation extremely interesting to analyse. It is obvious that even the classical form of boarding school of the 1960s until the 1980s

was not able to prevent the communication of traditional knowledge and skills or to undermine the prestige of tundra living.

To understand how this could have happened we have to carry out a whole historical research project. For us more important is what has happened – it makes Yamal a unique research field. I propose to focus on a comparison of tasks and targets of education on Yamal (as well as of the methods for reaching those targets) in the moment of the organisation of the first school on Yamal tundra (during the 1930s) and in the modern period (since 2000). In fact, we are trying to compare how the answers to the two main questions “Who needs education” and “Why is education needed” have changed in past decades.

The first Soviet schools of the 1930s and the heritage of missionary schools: methods, principles and specifics of the organisation of teaching.

The education which was created in the 1930s had an important peculiarity: organisers had to act, not in a vacuum, but were forced to contrast themselves to what had been before.

I have already mentioned that even before the Soviet Union there was a Russian Orthodox mission on Yamal and a school at it, whose purpose was to teach nomadic children. This school did not influence the level of literacy among Nenets and Khanty and did not enjoy parents’ trust. The analysis of works dedicated to missionary activities on Yamal (Irinarkh 1906: 142–143; Bazanov 1936: 75–79), enables us to compile a list of the main reasons why parents did not want to send their children to those schools.

- 1 Parents did not see any sense in education: their child wouldn’t adjust to living in the taiga or tundra and wouldn’t get any useful skills or knowledge.
- 2 Parents were afraid of russification and suspected the schools of weaning their children from ‘traditional’ life and teaching them to despise their elders.
- 3 Parents did not want to be separated from their children.
- 4 Parents justified their refusal by the fact that if they sent their children to the missionaries, they would lose working hands necessary for the household.
- 5 The conditions in those schools had a bad reputation. It was thought that children there often got sick and even died.

So we can say that parents saw no benefits from the school, but rather much harm and danger. This can explain why Nenets and Khanty voluntarily sent children to school only in the case of extreme poverty (Shemanovsky 2005).¹⁵

The organisers of new Soviet schools faced the same attitude to their initiative and it was important for them to show that the new schools were completely different from the missionaries’, that they had other targets and methods, and the knowledge they gave to children was very necessary for them and their nation.

Analysis of the texts describing the creation of schools in the North in the 1920s–1930s shows that the new schools were theoretically opposed to missionary ones all over Siberia and the North, both for the organisers of education and for ordinary teachers. The old missionary school in these texts turns into the symbol of everything negative that should not exist in a new Soviet school. From this point of view, it is not so important how the missionary school looked in reality; it is more important that the description of the new Soviet school was construed by a rejection of missionary techniques: the missionary school was religious, the Soviet one was secular, the missionary school taught prayers and catechism, the Soviet one gave literacy and the basics of positive knowledge, the missionary school was russificationary, the Soviet one taught in the native language and tended not to separate children from their culture, the missionary was based on mindless drilling, the Soviet on new achievements in pedagogics, et cetera.

If we return to one of our central questions, “Who needs education?”, we will notice that alongside all differences between these two types of schools there is a fundamental similarity: neither parents nor potential pupils saw any sense in school education, and education was needed only for school and state.

In principle, the target of education in both kinds of schools was always to raise the cultural level of a person and a nation and their involvement in world culture. Only the missionary school¹⁶ saw the ultimate goal in bringing the aborigines up as good Christians so as to secure their closer ties with Russia, tried to raise their cultural level through russification and saw, as an ideal, their school-leavers as clerks rather than hunters and reindeer-herders,¹⁷ while the Soviet school at that moment wanted to bring them up as USSR citizens and set the goal to promote the development of language, culture and economy of the native population. It saw, among its most important tasks, the propagation of hygienic norms and new handicrafts necessary for the nomad’s everyday life.

But good intentions were not enough and parents, as they had done before, did not want to send their children to the Soviet school, but instead hid them, sent the agitator off, taught children to pretend to be epileptic, etc.

In such a situation it was possible either to force (which they did not do, unlike in the 1960s), or to gradually persuade parents of the necessity of education, thus building a friendly relationship between the school and the population.

The second way was chosen by missionary schools and the first Soviet ones as well. We cannot but admit that Soviet schools were much more successful and the result of their activities much more notable.

The purpose in the first years of Soviet school on Yamal was to prove to parents and the surrounding population that it did not aim at tearing children from their family and culture, that it gave education to the tundra and not to a city; and to this end, all possible methods which one can imagine were used.

To begin with, the Soviet school, in contrast to the missionary one, did not try to

take children from the tundra into a Russian village (like Obdorsk), which natives (and not all of them) visited once a year for the fair, but moved into the Yamal tundra inhabited by Nenets and Khanty. This fact immediately made the school closer to the local population and, on the one hand, gave it some advantages. However, on the other hand, the position of school and *cultbase* workers was extremely vulnerable. The relationship of trust and cooperation gradually appearing around the base was easily destroyed, in which case not only the school activity but even the mere lives of base workers were endangered. A sad example of such a scenario is given by the event of the Kazym uprising (Leete 2004). Fortunately, it never happened on Yamal, partially because the base workers initially avoided making inflammatory actions. The task of the *cultbase* team was, according to one of its creators, M. M. Bridnev, “to treat kindly the Nenets’ customs, to help in reorganising their household, everyday life, and culture painlessly for the local people, without sudden changes and extremes” (Brodnev 2008: 237).

All the school work was set in such a way as to shatter the parents’ existing anxieties and to prevent new ones. Thus, the children of course were given mainly European food and were taught to cook these dishes, but also a reindeer was slaughtered several times a month, especially for children to eat raw venison, as they were used to. To dispel distrust between tundra dwellers and school, they employed two Nenets women, after which all pleasantness and unpleasantness in the pupils’ lives quickly became known to their parents. According to the teachers, this helped the school development very much (Brodnev 2008: 242–243). Besides, the parents could come to the school at any time, visit their children, watch the lessons, speak to the teachers – the school was at that time maximally open to the parents.

To prove that they taught children skills useful for the tundra, they opened workshops at the school to teach children new crafts necessary for tundra life: netting, bench work;¹⁸ boys could fix traps for their fathers, for example. There were guns and traps for polar foxes and children didn’t stop hunting during their studies under the supervision of a *cultbase* worker.

Though in her first year at the school the teacher could not speak the Nenets language, she began studying it immediately and in next few years tried to speak with the children in their native language (Brodnev 2008: 243; Verbov 1936; Stankevich 1934). And all my informants of the older generations recollect with respect that at that time teachers tried to speak ‘our language’.

The measures named above established a certain level of trust between the school and the community. It is well-known that the main mission of the *cultbase* was to acquaint the ‘retarded’ tundra population with the achievements of culture. For this the *cultbase* had a very specific structure: along with the stationary school, hospital, the Nenets’ house, the local museum, centres for veterinary and zootechnical assistance in the settlement, there were moving divisions (for example, the so-called ‘red tents’). These moving groups had to cure people and reindeer of illnesses, tell about the Soviet

Union and its laws, show films in the tundra where people were living, while at the same time promoting specific settlement services by giving information and raising the level of trust. This form of mobile service for tundra dwellers remained on Yamal for rather a long time and the system of moving medical attendants (specially trained medical workers who lived together with tundra dwellers and treated the nomadic population) still exists. What is very important is that these two ways of working with the population – stationary and mobile – did not contradict but rather supplemented each other, accomplishing the same tasks. In the 1930s, the school was among the services possessing both stationary and mobile forms. Besides the school-boarding-school in the settlement, there were in the first years two constantly working nomadic schools at the *cultbase* (in the north and in the south) and in summer additional ones were opened. According to the existing documents of the cultural base, their task was not to give children education directly in the tundra, they were to interest children, to persuade their parents of the necessity of studies and to help man the school in the settlement. If we believe the report of the *cultbase* to the North Committee, these schools fulfilled this task rather successfully (Stankevich 1934; Shmyryov 1935).

In order to get the school closer to the community where it worked, an unusual step was undertaken in 1935. In January and February, the school together with the pupils and teachers left the settlement for one of the Nenets nomadic camps and worked there. The children lived in a separate school tent, cooked their meals, held regular classes, participated in the everyday life of the nomad camp, led a nomadic life and at the same time received guests showing them their achievements, holding talks and giving reports on recent domestic home and international events. During the period of its existence the school was visited by more than a hundred guests from neighbouring and far-off nomadic camps. The report on practical work which I have at my disposal shows that the school seemed to have two most important tasks: the first was to increase the level of awareness and trust, and the second was a mere *kulträger* one – to teach dwellers of the nomad camp to observe the norms of hygiene. Children took separate tents and explained to adults why it is necessary to wash hands, brush teeth, wash floors, do laundry and wash babies, and tried to accustom them to doing it regularly. A tidiness competition was held between tents and the winners were given valuable prizes (Stankevich 1935).

The fact that the school managed to persuade Nenets and Khanty of the necessity of studies is also proven by the numbers: in the beginning of the first academic year there were only five children in the school; by end of that year there were already 22; the next year, 35, the third one, 55, the fourth, 100 (Brodnev 2008: 243; Stankevich 1934).

For our topic it is very important to stress that at that moment the school strived to destroy the barrier between itself and parents, to maximally increase the level of trust on the part of the population, and to persuade them of the necessity of education for their children. To reach these goals it used various methods: it adjusted the content of education to the parents' needs, made the children's life as open as pos-

sible, and demonstrated by all means respect towards the native population's way of life and language. Reviewing the methods undertaken by school education on Yamal since then, we can characterise the period of the 1930s as the time of the most correct and respectful attitude on the part of the organisers of education towards the native population.

One of the methods of informing the people about the school and of destroying the distrust on the part of the population was the creation of a nomadic school. I would like to stress that it is wrong to speak of an opposition between the nomadic school and the boarding school (for instance, "the former was respectful of the traditional way of life and the latter tried to tear the child away from that life and accustom him or her to the new values") at that time on Yamal.

On the one hand, the nomadic school of that period did not have the special task of retaining the natives' language and skills (as it does now); support and development of the existing culture of the native population and its language was the aim of both forms of school, and both renounced vigorously the intention to tear children away from their natural environment. At that time these two forms of school did not compete with, but rather complemented each other, achieving the same task.

On the other hand, at that time it was difficult to make a clear separation between the nomadic and the stationary school: those who in summer attended a nomadic school, in winter could study with the same teacher in the settlement. And those studying in the settlement could appear in a nomad camp in winter, where their regular studies continued in the tent with their Russian teachers (as it happened in 1935).

It is very likely that the contemporary opposition between boarding school as estranging children from traditional life and the nomadic school, allowing them to live in harmony with their ethnic culture arose much later, after the sharp turn in school policy, as a reaction to the traumatising experience of the classical boarding school with its strict russification techniques and violent recruiting of children.

If we get back to the list of reasons why parents did not trust their children to a missionary school and did not see any sense in it, we will notice that as a result of laborious and well thought-out work, most of the items were losing their validity in the new conditions of the 1930s.¹⁹ Parents could see that the school did not teach children to despise their families, did not wean them away from the tundra, children were not subjected to russification, they knew what their children were eating and how they were living and could even see the benefits of the knowledge given to their children at school.

Inevitable were only the separation from the parents (though its term was minimised due to the transfer of the school to Yamal tundras) and the loss of working hands. Of course these were very important obstacles for the school education and they were not to be avoided. The necessity of help in the tundra still had priority over education, but the problem with working hands was solved by the Nenets for a long time in a rather interesting way. My analysis of family histories of Yamal Nenets shows

that, trying to retain working hands in the tundra, parents tried to keep the eldest and the youngest, but middle children often went to school. As one of the informants born in the early 1930s told me: “I was the fourth in the family and from the tundra point of view the most useless, so they sent me to school”. Thus, typical was a situation where a part of the siblings never studied and a part studied and finished the full school course. Often these people retained connections with each other for the whole of their life and rendered help and support to each other.

Modern schools on Yamal: key changes

It is in comparison with the situation of the 1930s that the specifics of both the classical boarding schools and of the modern state schools is the most obvious.

Let me remind the reader that as a result of the introduction of a classical boarding school system with its strict recruitment at the end of the 1950s, practically all Nenets people younger than 60 went through Yamal boarding school. I have already mentioned many times that these boarding schools in their essence were very different from the schools of the 1930s, and in their russification aims and tasks and, by their attitude towards the native population’s way of life and culture, they were much closer to missionary schools.²⁰ Since the 1980s, the system of northern boarding schools has started to be criticised, but the organisers of education on Yamal failed to find another way to give nomadic children full education, and boarding schools in this region were retained, though they are now treated as a necessary evil.

In reality, classical boarding schools began to change in approximately the 1970s, when the second generation of tundra dwellers came to study there. At the same time people who started working there were representatives of the first generation of school-leavers who had themselves experienced boarding schools, and that is why they could more easily understand the children of tundra dwellers. By that time Russian teachers, who had been working in the boarding school for a long time, had accumulated quite significant experience, and many parents personally knew the teachers and realised who would teach their children.

During the time since the 1930s, great changes have taken place both in the population of Yamal and their way of life. I have already mentioned that half of the ten thousand of today’s Nenets and Khanty of Yamal do not lead a nomad’s life but live in settlements. They have formed a specific settlement variant of native culture, which has much in common with the tundra variant, but is opposed to it in several attributes. The majority of younger Nenets possesses both variants and know the rule for switching from one to another (for details see Liarskaya 2009). As a result of the changes every child going to the boarding school today has these or those close relatives living in the settlement. So when entering the school in the settlement, the child is not isolated from Nenets and their culture. This fact radically differs from the situation of the missionary school in Obdorsk and even from the school at the *cultbase*

of the 1930s. Yar-Sale, with several buildings around the trading station and *cultbase* in the middle of the tundra, has turned into a busy district centre with a population of several thousand people of different ethnic groups. It is quite symbolic that the school and the hospital are so far in the centre of the settlement. So, not only have the boarding schools changed, but also the environment in which they exist.

In the new conditions, the answers to the questions: “Why is education needed?” and “Who needs a school?” are changing.

Based on the field materials which I have gathered since the end of the 1990s, I can state that, first, education on Yamal is acquiring an independent value, and modern parents consider that it is good to study in general and it is bad to be uneducated (I was told this not only by representatives of the *intelligentsia*, but by reindeer herders as well).

In the new conditions, the school on Yamal is starting to fulfil a number of functions which it did not have, either in the 1930s or in the 1950s and 1960s. I will dwell on some of them in detail.

Today, staying at boarding school for the children of tundra dwellers is a specific way to study the interaction with the world of ‘Russians’, with the world which exists outside the tundra, and to study Russian well. A boarding school is also the place to acquire the ‘settlement’ variant of culture and to form the ability to behave in the settlement way when in the settlement and in the tundra-way when in the tundra, all the while remaining Nenets or Khanty. The inability to use either of these variants or to switch between them is now considered a violation of the norm.²¹

Another important function of school is that it gives children the possibility to choose a profession and way of life in the future. The mere possibility of such a choice gives tundra dwellers some freedom and makes their future more stable as they are ready for different variants of events. This is well-realised by tundra-dwelling parents: “What if his life makes him live in a settlement?” – This is what I was told by my informants – reindeer herders who dream that their son will continue their occupation. Another mother, who lives in the tundra, explained to her daughter, who wanted to leave school for the tundra: “Study. What if you have to live in the settlement, would you like to be a cleaner and wash toilets?” These my observations seem to coincide completely with the attitude towards education found by Stephan Dudeck and Alexandra Lavrillier (see *this volume*).

One more principal difference between the situation of the 1930s (and even of the early 1960s) and the modern one lies in the fact that before, when a child went to school, it was an outstanding event, whereas now it is a routine thing, a part of the normal life scenario known in advance by children and parents and thus less scary (see Liarskaya 2004). This has a very important, though not so striking consequence: the attitude towards childhood has changed gradually: it is now longer and regarded as a period for special education (this is the process that has concerned not only the North but also all of rural Russia). Children have turned from workers and breadwin-

ners into creatures in need of training and looking after. It can be borne out by the fact that one of the most popular reasons in the past why not to send children to school, 'working hands are needed,' is now mentioned rarer and rarer (though oftener than in European Russia).

The modern boarding school has received some functions which, it seems to me, were never planned by its creators. For example, tundra families have many children, and since education became compulsory, many siblings and cousins are usually together in boarding school, helping each other and taking care of youngsters. Thus the boarding school has unintentionally boosted intergenerational ties between relatives. On the other hand, having gathered together so many children of a similar age, the organisers of the boarding school have created a specific (and heretofore absent) children's environment, in which a lot of traditional information is transferred. I know examples of the spreading among children of different beliefs, rules of behaviour in specific situations, folklore texts and even a case when children who did not know the Nenets language studied it from their peers when entering the boarding school.

Another important change that has happened is that modern natives don't consider themselves only as Nenets or Khanty, dwellers of the peninsula of Yamal, but also as residents of the big country of Russia, who know about life in other places and have mainly the same cultural background as residents of St. Petersburg, the Far East or Kamchatka. This is a principal change, in which school has played a great role.

An important peculiarity of Yamal is that neither tundra dwellers nor settlement dwellers in their majority consider the boarding school a threat to the Nenets or Khanty way of life. If there is something to connect the threat with, it is the construction of the railway and the industrial development of the region, which endangers both reindeer husbandry and reindeer-herders (see Novikova et al. 2011).

What should a school teach, according to parents? It should give high-quality education of the European type. As far as my materials allow me to judge, no parents expect school to teach children reindeer tending or hunting or to give them the basics of Nenets religious ethics or the so-called tundra laws. My informants, as well as the informants of Stephan Dudeck from the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous *okrug*, believe that these are taught by absolutely different means and not through formal school education. How? In the tundra, by relatives before school, during summer vacations or after studies; in the boarding school, in informal surroundings by other children and teachers, tutors and technical workers of Khanty or Nenets origin, working there and living in the settlement. Judging by the fact that tundra life has some prestige for native residents, reindeer husbandry is developing successfully and the Nenets and the Khanty languages are retained well and widely used on Yamal, the native residents have managed to cope with these tasks rather well.

We can say that of the old problems of the boarding school, only one has remained unsolved – separation from parents. And though it is not the most popular question for discussion in the region, every person telling me about the start of studies men-

tioned this traumatic experience (though all admitted that it is necessary to study). This is the reason why many parents try to send their children to school a year or two later than is required by the law, believing that older children find it much easier to handle the separation. One should admit that it is not a specific problem of northern boarding schools but of the closed form of education in general wherever it is practised – in Russia, England or Switzerland.

The key to understanding the modern situation lies, I think, in the answer to the question: “Who needs school education?”. Before, it was needed only for school and the state, but today, for Nenets and Khanty, tundra dwellers and settlement dwellers themselves want their children to go to school. In the 1990s, the organised recruitment of children to school with the help of helicopters was practically stopped. Then many people thought that in this situation children would stay in the tundra, but as it happened, practically all parents brought their children themselves (without any pressure on the part of the state). School has stopped being something outside the life of the natives. It is no longer made by Russians for Nenets and Khanty, who don’t need it. Natives now put their hopes and expectations in it and start to actively participate in the process of discussing the future and present of school. This creates a principally new situation which was never possible in a missionary school, in the first Soviet schools, or when introducing mass boarding school teaching. Before, the local population used to be only an object of educational system impact, whereas now natives have turned into partners of the school and in the present correlation of school and society on Yamal, have to be based on absolutely different grounds. And this is very important.

Conclusions

In making some conclusions, I would like to return to some important ideas: As I was trying to show, there was never a unified Soviet policy in the field of education in the North; rather, this policy was complicated and inconsistent in time and space.

The ‘classical boarding school’ is just one of the stages in the development of the system, whose ideology in many ways contradicted the previous (epoch of the 1930s) and following stages of the development of education.

With the example of Yamal we have seen that in the 1930s, boarding schools were not in principle opposed to nomadic schools, but acted together with them, complementing each other and serving the same goals; sometimes it is impossible to draw a line between these two forms of education.

The Yamal experience shows us that during the time since the beginning of school education, the relationship between the native population and the boarding school has changed radically. The main change consists in the fact that modern parents want their children to go to school. Boarding school now fulfils many important functions

in modern Nenets and Khanty society, and one of the most important is to give children the possibility of choosing their future life.

Today's Yamal school faces absolutely new tasks and new problems and these are important to be regarded in preparation for any reform of education. Any changes in the form of education and its content must correspond not only to the wishes of the reformers or the Ministry of Education and their ideas about children's benefits and the future of the culture, but also to the functions which are really fulfilled by the school in the modern society of Yamal and to the parents' opinion concerning the future of their children.

Of course in speaking about the Yamal case we should always remember that it is quite unique: many elements of the native culture are retained, are developing and exist in the full sense here, and that is why the conclusions which I have made based on Yamal material cannot be automatically transferred to other northern regions. But perhaps the analysis of the processes which took place here in the sphere of education will help to clarify what goes on in other regions as well.

Notes

- * The article had been translated from Russian by Irina Liskovets.
- 1 I am grateful to EU SPb, which supported my research in the North for many years and the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology (Halle, Germany), which granted me the possibility to work with archive materials of the North Committee (State Archive of the Russian Federation, Moscow).
- 2 Thus, for example, in 1868 in the whole huge Tobol gubernia there were only three schools. In the next 50 years their number increased a little. We can estimate the number of pupils in such schools by the fact that in 1902 even the school at the Obdorsk mission, which specially worked on the organisation of a school for nomadic children and the recruitment of children for that school, had 15 pupils (5 Khanty, 3 Nenets and 10 Komi-Zyryans). (Bazanov 1936: 74, 82; other details: see Shemanovsky 2005).
- 3 In Russia there were two types of missionary schools: 1) the first and the most popular type – with instruction in Russian language. Such schools were considered as openly russificational ones by both teachers and parents. Usually children who started school did not know the teacher's language and the teacher did not speak their language. 2) The second type – schools using the system proposed by Kazan University professor N. I. Il'minsky. According to this system, the teaching of literacy was done in the pupils' native language. They appeared in the second half of the 19th century and influenced greatly the development of education in the Volga region and among Yakut. At the end of 19th century this system was supported officially as a model for the creation of schools in the North, but in reality there were very few schools of this type for the minorities of the North and they existed for only a short time (Bazanov 1936: 3–111).
- 4 In respect to national schools in general.
- 5 Similar observations on the inconsistency of Soviet policy, but towards minority languages, were described by the researchers (compare: Alpatov 1997: 8, 121; Vakhtin 2001: 25–28)
- 6 In 1927, Narkom of Education A. V. Lunacharsky wrote: "We know how ugly and unpedagogical it is to teach children in Russian but nothing can be done here as there are almost no teachers speaking children's native language and these small nations don't have their own *intelligentsia*."

- 7 Full name: Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.
- 8 *Soviet Narodnykh Komissarov* (Council of People's Commissars) – at that time the government of the USSR.
- 9 *natsionalnaia shkola*, a Soviet term of the 1920s and later referring to a school where all or majority of the children belong to a local ethnic minority, with a special curriculum emphasizing teaching in the minority language.
- 10 On the other hand I have never seen in the texts written at that time about the first schools any discussion of the fact that placing children into a boarding school is traumatic and creates problems in education. These texts generally abound, on the other hand, in detailed descriptions of everyday life and the difficulties and problems which the authors had to face. It is possible to think that this topic was not the focus of attention.
- 11 This was the same congress at which Khrushchev first disclosed Stalin's cult.
- 12 About the history of the notion 'Peoples of the North' (see, for example, Vakhtin 2001: 24).
- 13 This work first of all deals with the Yamal region of Yamal-Nenets Autonomous District (centre – Yar-Sale) located on the Yamal peninsula.
- 14 called "Kultbaza" (ru. *kulturnaia baza* – cultural centre).
- 15 Besides, the same attitude to missionary schools was popular far outside western Siberia.
- 16 It was true also for the turn of the 20th century, when the mission school worked according to the so-called *Il'minsky* system, i. e. they tried to organise teaching in the native language.
- 17 It is difficult not to see that the russification ideas and techniques of these schools (with the exception of religious ones) were ideologically much closer to the ideas of classical northern boarding schools of the 1960s and 1970s than to Soviet schools of the 1920s and 1930s. This ideological resemblance, as far as I know, was never an object of reflection in pedagogical and methodological literature.
- 18 This craft was not well-known in the tundra.
- 19 It is silly to state that in a society with no tradition of formal education even the most successful policy can lead to universal schooling in two to three years after the start of schools. Everything takes time.
- 20 With one principle exclusion – Soviet education was only secular.
- 21 In some cases parents, due to family conditions, have to take children into the tundra before the end of secondary school, some children leave school themselves and go to the tundra. But elementary education is now received by practically all children. To my mind this is directly connected with this function.

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