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School Discipline as Reflected in Children's Folklore

In discussions of the pragmatics of folklore texts on the theme of schools, many researchers remark that these texts cater for the needs of the informal culture of school pupils [Belousov 1998]. In some anthropological and sociological studies, the folklore of school pupils is resolutely placed in the arsenal of means for opposing official school authority [Kehily, Nayak 1997; Shchepanskaya 2003]. Nevertheless, just as the theme of pupil resistance is peripheral for works on folklore, so folklore material is peripheral for works on anthropology and sociology, and in the literature discussing the folklore of school pupils, the discussion of resistance takes either a highly generalised or, on the other hand, fragmentary form.

I would like to examine in more detail precisely which aspects of everyday life in the school prompted reactions in the folklore culture of school pupils. For the sake of focus, I will analyse just one category of everyday school life: discipline — which embodies the authority of pedagogues over school pupils and hence becomes an obvious target for the interpreting and parodying drive of folklore. My primary objective is to elicit the conceptual categories that are characteristic of the folklore perspective on school discipline, and draw some overall conclusions from these.

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The folklore of school pupils contains quite a diverse array of characters, plots and realia that correspond to the practices in use at mainstream schools and refer to the experience of studying at these institutions. This is also true of various genres of contemporary adult (urban) folklore, above all humorous stories (*anekdoty*). Folklore studies has identified a number of school characters (e.g. Vovochka)¹ [Belousov 1996] and individual plots [Ilchenko, Panchenko 2012] and has put forward text-generation models using school material [Arkhipova, Kozmin 2004], as well as giving general reflections on the mechanisms whereby school images in folklore are degraded and travestied [Lurye M. L. 1998; Belousov et al. 2005].

The boundaries of genre are traditionally the most intractable subject delimiters for research within folklore studies. Perhaps this is why the corpus of school narratives has not generally been taken up for separate research. A cross-genre perspective on school narratives as a single corpus demands a shift away from analysis in terms of genre-based units (whether they be specific plots, characters, clichés etc.) towards the underlying arrangement characterising everyday school life situations. This level of analysis offers an opportunity for differential research which describes, on the one hand, the genre distribution relative to the importance of various school situations, and on the other, the differences in the way in which the same situational arrangement is realised in different genres.

Of particular interest here are the situations where everyday practices that form part of school discipline are realised. Generalised social discipline [Foucault 1977] can be viewed as the principal mode by which authority is realised in schools; from this point of view, a great many practices and everyday micro-interactions could be interpreted as disciplinary, even if the school's official culture did not explicitly label them as such. In order to elaborate on the material, and avoid straying too far from the category of *discipline* as it was actually used in school communities, I will limit my analysis to two types of situations where the disciplinary component is obvious: *misdeemeanours* by school pupils and *disciplinary measures* (punishment) exercised by pedagogues.

Research material

The central source material for this study consists of texts from two different genres of orally-transmitted text: the so-called school chronicle, a specific type of children's folklore that circulated actively

¹ Vovochka, the hero of many narrative jokes, is an academic 'bottom feeder' whose naïve or deliberately stupid questions expose the absurdity of the school system. One example from *anekdoty.ru* goes as follows: 'Vovochka comes home and says to his mother, "I need a picture of dad." "What on earth for, dear?" "Teacher said she'd like to see the idiot who did my school homework"'. See further examples below. [Eds.].

in schools, and humorous stories (jokes) on the theme of schooling, which, while not necessarily circulating in the school environment itself, actively exploit the models of everyday school situations. For my comparative material, which will allow us to determine the nature of the disciplinary practices that folkloric texts fail to represent systematically, I draw upon official school texts dedicated to the regulation of school pupil behaviour: the rules for behaviour in schools, and the list of disciplinary measures employed against those guilty of misdemeanours.

The chronological framework of the discussion is not overly strict: based on the highly stable nature of everyday school life and the available fragmentary information about the existence of the two selected genres and individual texts belonging to them, we can say very generally that this material describes schooling in the second half of the twentieth century. The focus, then, is on the late Soviet period, though the conclusions drawn are not without relevance for other periods also.

School Chronicle

Certain features of everyday school life are visible in extremely diverse genres of children's folklore, including sadistic rhymes and parodistic poetry by school pupils. However, the genre in which school life occupies the most prominent place is a relatively unusual one, which, in research tradition has secured the name 'school chronicle'. The school chronicle is a type of written folklore genre, which is organised according to the principle of a parody dictionary where the realia of school life are given definitions in the form of clichés borrowed from precedent-setting cultural texts (often taken from films and works studied in the school curriculum). For example: 'Truant = I don't want to be harried, I want to get married', 'Pupil behind the door = Zaporozhian Cossack on the Danube' and so on.¹ According to data collected by Alexandra Arkhipova and Artem Kozmin, the earliest mentions of a school chronicle of this kind relate to the mid-1950s, while its period of active presence in the school environment came in the 1980s, and the first folkloric recordings were made in the early 1990s [Arkhipova, Kozmin 2004]. For the purposes of this study, the unit of analysis will be the definitions of school realia offered in such school chronicles. The corpus of definitions used in this work was compiled based on material from two major publications [Novitskaya 1994; Lurye V. F. 1998] and includes 618 definitions. The range of school realia

¹ The phrase 'I don't want to be harried' (literally, 'I don't want to study...' [*ne khochu uchitsya*]) is a quotation from Denis Fonvizin's 1781 comedy *The Booby* [Nedorosl], a set text in literature classes, and *The Zaporozhian Cossack over the Danube* [Zaporozhets za Dunaem] is a patriotic opera by the Ukrainian composer Semyon Gulyaka-Artemovsky (1863). [Eds.]

encompassed in the corpus includes characters ('teacher', 'head teacher', 'pupil'), loci ('toilets', 'canteen', 'cloakroom', 'study room'), statuses ('dunce', 'A-student', 'year-repeater'¹, 'boffin'), time and calendar ('lesson', 'break-time', 'holidays', 'graduation'), marks and material objects that contain them ('2' [*dvoika*], '5' [*pyatyorka*], 'register', 'diary'), misdemeanours and punishment ('truancy', 'prompting',² 'copying') and school subjects and their respective teachers.

Jokes about school

In Russian twentieth-century tradition, there are various well-known joke cycles that are closely associated with the theme of school, such as the jokes about Vovochka (which are often, though not necessarily, set in the school environs), jokes about Georgian schooling³ and others. It would be wrong to amalgamate these cycles into a single series of school jokes since they differ in terms of their origin, pragmatics and circulation. However, for the purposes of this work there is some logic in including in our analysis all jokes that refer to school images, interpreting them as an ad hoc thematic selection. The website 'Jokes From Russia' (anekdot.ru) was used to generate a sample for analysis.⁴ The list of key words used to search for jokes on the theme of schooling was compiled on the basis of the corpus of definitions taken from the school chronicle. The list incorporated all nouns and verbs from the left-hand section of the definitions (the name of the school realia — 'teacher', 'lesson', 'to copy'), with the exception of particularly frequent words, such as 'board' and 'bell', which would have seriously cluttered the selection with texts that bear no relation to school. After excluding texts on extraneous topics⁵, the search results allowed the isolation of 1 328 jokes about school life posted on the site between 1995 and 2013. The beginning of this period coincides with the first fundamental recordings of school folklore being made by professionals, which form the basis of our knowledge today about late-Soviet and post-Soviet school

¹ 'Year-repeater', *vtorogodnik* in Russian, refers to a pupil who is studying in the same form for the second time, known as 'grade retention' in the USA. [Transl.].

² The habit of whispering the right answers to pupils who are being cross-questioned on their homework, the standard opening ritual of the Soviet lesson. [Eds.].

³ These include jokes about Georgian teachers with impenetrable accents trying to teach their pupils correct Russian pronunciation and so on. [Eds.].

⁴ There are numerous arguments in favour of using this site as a guide to the circulation of modern jokes on the Internet: the site has user-derived content, and has been in existence since 1995; it has enjoyed a high level of popularity, particularly in the 1990s-early 2000s; it has no restrictions for posting variants on existing jokes, which gives a sense of relative popularity; searches through the entire site's archive can be made using key words. On the use of anekdot.ru in folklore studies research, see: [Alekseevsky 2010].

⁵ The search interface on anekdot.ru always incorporates stemming algorithms (reducing words to their root form), so owing to ambiguity in the search results, texts on other topics appear.

folklore, including school chronicles. Overall, this collection of jokes can be considered to typify a similar elastically delineated range — the second half of the twentieth century — to that typified by the corpora of texts of all different genres used in this study. The generally conservative and timeless nature of the poetics and topics of the texts work in favour of this method, as well as the small number of references to post-Soviet events and realia, and the presence of a series of plots that bear witness to life during the 1950s — 1970s.¹

The collection also incorporated texts in which school situations have very different aims: the realisation of ethnic, linguistic and social stereotypes (Georgian, Jewish/Odessa, Chukchi schools, New Russian schools),² derision aimed at well-known figures (famous politicians or footballers from school-days), irony with regard to the teaching profession (especially in terms of salary) and post-Soviet educational reforms, the coming-of-age and sexuality of school pupils, and finally, the relationships between teachers, pupils and parents. Texts whose plot revolves around lessons and the educational process in school and the family are however, the most relevant for the purposes of this research. It may be noted in passing that all of the troublemakers in every joke are exclusively boys.

Rules of behaviour for school pupils

The practice of compiling and distributing rules of behaviour for school pupils dates back to a pre-revolutionary tradition, but in early Soviet schools, there was no uniform corpus of rules. Only in 1943 were Union-wide 'Rules for Students' introduced, incorporating the most general disciplinary policies in relation to Soviet school pupils. At the same time, it was still considered the prerogative of individual schools to regulate the details of everyday school life.³ From the early 1950s, pedagogical literature began to mention particular 'universal requirements for students',⁴ which were represented as lists of procedural prescriptions and interdictions designed to clarify the general 'Rules for Students'.

¹ In particular, a series of plots about Jewish schools and those in Odessa, as well as some plots known from later recordings in joke cycles about Vovochka, were recorded in a handwritten exercise book of jokes kept by a Leningrad engineer from 1949–1990. The jokes in the book are dated by the year in which the author heard them. I am grateful to Mikhail Lurye for the opportunity to make use of this source.

² Chukchi, one of the minority nationalities in the Russian Federation, are the butt of jokes about their supposed simple-mindedness and poor command of the Russian language. 'New Russians' are the newly rich of the 1990s and 2000s, who are mocked according to a 'more money than sense' stereotype. [Eds.].

³ For example, some schools banned pupils from leaving the premises during the breaks, while others did not. [Eds.].

⁴ 'Universal' in this sense signifies 'universal for the pedagogical schooling collective'.

This study uses both texts setting out the universal requirements and the rules of behaviour issued by specific schools (or sometimes regional education departments) in the form of pamphlets to be given out to pupils. The corpus comprises 16 pamphlets issued in various regions of the USSR between 1937 and 1984.¹ According to the published excerpts and standard lists, it is possible to deduce that the realms of everyday life that were regulated by these universal requirements remained quite stable. For example, a standard list printed in 1959 contains the following sections: ‘Before the beginning of lessons’, ‘In lessons’, ‘In the workshop and when producing’, ‘At break time and when leaving school’, ‘At assemblies, evenings and Young Pioneer gatherings’, ‘At home’, ‘On the condition of textbooks, exercise books, homework diaries and workspaces’, ‘On external appearance and uniform’, ‘On student speech’ and ‘On the street and in public places’ [Boldyrev 1959: 54–58]. Nevertheless, the pamphlets selected for the study display a certain variability both in the array of rules and in the details of everyday school life that are subject to regulation. The micro-scale of behaviour that was regulated by the rules can be gauged from the following examples: ‘Sit up straight at your desk, do not sprawl or turn round; it is forbidden to have your hands in your pockets or rest your head on your hands’ (1980, Bausk); ‘When you meet adults, turn to face them, make way for them and greet them politely’ (1956, no place given); ‘On the stairs walk only on the right-hand side, do not hold onto the handrail’ (1957, Khmelnskiy). In general, the universal requirements strove to encompass even the minute details of everyday school life, designing an ideal mechanism for the educational process that some researchers have termed ‘school choreography’ [Eggermont 2001]. Thanks to the elaborate formulation of these universal requirements, we also have detailed records of situations where teachers were supposed to carry out regulatory disciplinary actions. The units for analysis that I have cited here are the behavioural interdictions and prescriptions contained within the rules.

Scale of punishments

The issue of applying punishments in the school environment was extensively debated in Soviet pedagogy following the point in the early 1930s when the declarative refusal to enact any punishment made in 1918 was overturned, and the right to impose punishments in schools re-established [Gordin 1971: 27–35]. The lists of officially acknowledged disciplinary measures in Soviet schools can be found in two types of sources: school charter documents and ministerial

¹ These pamphlets were preserved in a collection of the Russian National Library in the Group Processing collection [Fond gruppovoi obrabotki, Moskovskii prospect reading rooms]. When citing, the pamphlet’s year and place of publication are given.

memoranda — as well as pedagogical literature. For example, an imperative from the Education Minister 'On Consolidating Discipline in Schools' in 1951 listed the following punishment measures:

Punishments: censure from the teacher, class leader, head of department or head teacher (director) of the school; an order from the teacher for a pupil to stand by his or her desk, reprimand in front of the class, removal from the classroom and lesson; remaining behind after lessons to finish the uncompleted homework or classwork; summons for disciplinary conversation at the pedagogical council; reprimand announced by the head of the school; lowering of conduct mark;¹ transfer from the class to another parallel one or to another school; exclusion from school [Deineko 1954: 181].

Pedagogical guidance from this period and later has the same array of disciplinary measures, usually supplemented by an acknowledgement of the validity of situational punishments on the principle of 'natural consequences': if you broke it, fix it; if you made a mess, tidy up etc. [Boldyrev 1974: 178–182]. In all of the sources, the punishment measures are given in a specific order that reflects the hierarchy of punishments according to the strength of the disciplinary action.

Genre distribution of disciplinary situations

The differential analysis in this study necessitates a unified nomenclature of disciplinary situations that allows a comparison between texts from different genres. When selecting the disciplinary situations and choosing titles I attempted to follow the terminology used in the texts as much as possible, although this was not always feasible given some of the genre differences. In all cases, when a generalised research title was chosen to designate a situation, I give details of the specific plot developments associated with this situation in various genres.

Misdemeanours

As far as misdemeanours are concerned, it is most natural to examine infringements of the direct interdictions and prescriptions laid out in the 'Rules for Students' of 1943. For example: '2. Work diligently, be punctual for lessons, do not be late for any school activities. <...> 14. Do not use foul or coarse language, do not smoke. Do not play games for money or "for keeps"' [Deineko 1954: 174]. Mentions of school pupil misdemeanours can be traced in three genres: school chronicles, jokes and rules. Since Soviet pedagogues had renounced the pre-

¹ In most cases, pupils automatically received an overall conduct mark for the year of 5, or 'excellent', and a lower mark could create problems, for instance, when the pupil concerned sought to move into higher or further education. [Eds.].

revolutionary ‘scale of punishments’ in Soviet schools, i.e. the formal correspondence between the seriousness of the misdemeanour and the form of punishment [Gordin 1971: 14], even pedagogical literature in its lists of disciplinary measures omitted to give almost any specific examples of misdemeanours. A general picture of the distribution of the main misdemeanours according to genres is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

**Distribution of the main misdemeanours
in folkloric and official genres**

	School chronicle	Joke	Rules
Late for class	+	+	+
Inattention in class	+	+	+
Incomplete work	+	+	+
Prompting	+	+	+
Copying	+	+	+
Smoking	+	+	+
Obscene language		+	+
Dirty drawings		+	
Truancy	+		+
Group truancy	+		
Disrupting the lesson	+	±	

The misdemeanours mentioned in all three genres can be considered prototypical school infringements: *late for class*, *inattention in class*, *incomplete work*, *prompting*, *copying* and *smoking*. Remarkably all these misdemeanours, apart from smoking, correspond to the most prototypical school context — lessons. However, these indications of acknowledged situations conceal substantial differences in the details of how they are realised in each genre.

Late for class in the school chronicle is represented by three important components: a request (‘Late for class = 713 in line for a seat’), making excuses (‘Excuse for being late = old wives’ tale’) and a moment of choice for the pupil – whether or not to enter the classroom and how to explain themselves (‘Late for class = meditation at the door’). In jokes, the request and excuse from the latecomer is expanded to include an exchange of responses between the pupil and teacher and the content of the pupil’s response (or, more rarely, the teacher’s) and comprises the climax of the joke.

Teacher in class: ‘Vovochka, you’re late! Dear Masha here says that she left at the same time as you and she’s already here!’

‘Naturally,’ Vovochka answers, ‘she only has to pull her skirt back down, whereas I have to pull up my underpants and do up my fly...’

The cliché of ‘better late than never’ is regularly evoked both in school chronicles and in jokes. Rules forbidding lateness, on the other hand, do not mention any interaction between teachers and latecomers, but prescribe interaction with the head of department or head teacher, who decides whether the pupil should be permitted to enter the classroom. This event, though, is not present in folkloric texts.

The ‘passive’ forms of opposition to the educational process — *inattention* and *incomplete homework* — that are anticipated and censured by numerous rules, appear only occasionally in folklore. In particular, in school chronicles, inattention is only actualised in an abbreviated plot about falling asleep in class (‘Girl pupils = sleeping beauties’). In jokes, it is handled in plot situations centred on a teacher noticing an inattentive pupil:

Ninth class is having a biology lesson. The teacher is explaining the structure of the monkey. Vovochka is messing around and not listening. The teacher calls him to order, saying, ‘Vovochka, pay attention and look at me, or you won’t have the first idea about monkeys’.

Folklore representations of ‘active’ forms of infringements upon the educational order — *prompting* and *copying* — are much more diverse. All versions of the rules contain the interdiction regarding prompting, while copying is only directly mentioned in one instance (1941, Molotov). In school chronicle texts, both situations involve co-operation (‘The pupil who lends work for copying = a person of talent’; ‘A pupil who prompts = inside man’; ‘A pupil who knows but doesn’t prompt = dog in the manger’) and risk (‘Prompting in front of the head teacher = mission impossible’; ‘Getting a 2 for prompting = woe from wit’).¹ Copying scenarios also have themes drawn from the process of copying (the necessity to sneak a glance quickly: ‘A sideways look = peeking at a cheat sheet’; ‘Copying = God speed!’) and the cheat sheet as a tool (‘Pupil with a cheat sheet = man with a smoking gun’). The plot-forming core for prompting scenarios in jokes is the means of prompting, which in several versions includes showing one’s genitalia.

Singing lesson at school. The teacher calls upon Vovochka: ‘What composers do you know?’ But Vovochka has not been studying. He stands there looking at his desk mate. He takes a book and bangs it on the desk.

‘Bach,’² says Vovochka.

‘Correct. Who else?’

A friend tore a page [‘listok’ or ‘list’ in Russian. — Transl.] out of his exercise book.

¹ *Woe from Wit* [Gore ot uma], from the famous stage comedy by Aleksandr Griboedov (1824), another pillar of the school literature syllabus. [Eds.].

² From *bakh* — the sound of something walloping down. [Eds.].

'Liszt'

'Good, and another one?'

'Chlennikov' ['chlen' means 'member', which has the same double entendre as in English. — Transl.]

'It's Khrennikov, not Chlennikov.¹ And you, Petrov, quit prompting.'

In the genre of jokes, copying, unlike prompting, is not so much a process as a result: at the centre of the plot scenario is the reaction of the teacher to two identical pieces of work. The collection analysed contains some jokes about the future of pupils who have copied that are marginal from the perspective of joke genre attributes.

Smoking provides an example of acutely divergent interpretations of the same situation in different genres. In school chronicles, smoking is associated with just one locus — the boys' toilets ('Boys' toilets = The Great Fire of Moscow'; 'Boys' toilets = Nikolai, let's go smoke!')². Smoking also appears in two texts in the joke collection, beginning with a teacher asking a pupil about smoking (children force the head teacher to smoke in the classroom; a fifth-class smoker justifies himself with reference to President Wałęsa). The small amount of variation supports the idea that smoking occupies an incidental and peripheral position in the corpus of stories of school misdemeanours.

With regard specifically to the genre distribution of misdemeanours, it is worth noting which ones are present in just one of the genres listed above. Table 1 does not reflect every school pupil misdemeanour that could be reconstructed from the rule texts, since this would have yielded an unmanageably immense list. The inclination of the compilers of the rules to record the slightest details of the school routine (which number peg to hand your clothing in the cloakroom, precisely how to label your bag of spare shoes, which side of the corridor and staircases to walk on and so on) shows the extent to which the everyday school cycle was completely suffused with opportunities to apply disciplinary powers, whilst at the same time demonstrating the blurred boundaries of the 'misdemeanours' category owing to the arbitrariness of the demands on school pupil behaviour. School chronicles also record the school modal zones to which the rules relate (entering and leaving school, break time, canteen), although they do not separate them out into disciplinary infringements, instead referring generally to chaos (fight, noise, pandemonium: 'In the cloakroom = Storming the Winter Palace'; 'School at break time = the mad house'; 'Cafeteria = the front line').

¹ *Khren* is a vulgar word for the same body part (cf. 'dick' in English). [Eds.].

² The title of a popular song. [Eds.].

In jokes, on the other hand, this point of disciplinary tension can be realised in a skirmish between a pupil and teacher arising through the former's infringing the rules:

Vovochka is dashing along the corridor after a lesson and almost bowls the head teacher over. The headmaster indignantly grabs him by the shoulder and says:

'Now go back and walk calmly! And greet me as your father would greet someone he knew!'

Vovochka ambles back a few paces, hands in his pockets, comes up to the head teacher, claps him on the back so hard that his glasses almost jump off his nose, and yells at the top of his voice:

*'Well hullo there, you old f#%\$! It's been an age since I saw you last, b@\$g*r you, slaphead!! You haven't kicked the bucket yet then, you whiskered lard#rse!!!'*

Joke plots are also open to infiltration by disciplinary scenes that are not characteristic of rules or school chronicles. Here too the boundaries of what constitutes a misdemeanour are blurred: in the very same communicative framework of the lesson, a humorous plot can unfold around obvious escapades (dirty drawings on the board) or obscene language when responding to entirely innocent questions from the teacher ('give me a word beginning with the letter C'),¹ but the basis of the plot can consist of reading an erotic magazine, replying with an erotic subtext or even an inoffensive ironic comment on a teacher's explanation. "Today, children, we are going to write an essay on our bright futures". From the back of the class: "Digging the dirt?" I believe that the joke material gives no grounds in this instance to draw a strict line between misdemeanours and jokes.

The situation which generates a model for these kinds of plot outlines is one in which the teacher passes the communicative initiative over to the pupil (by asking a question, making a remark and so on) or draws in a third party into the discussion (parents, head teacher) and thereby loses control of the situation.

Teacher: 'Vovochka, do you ever stop talking? Come up here instead of me and carry on!'

*Vovochka comes up to the board: 'THANKS EVERYONE, THE LESSON'S OVER!'*²

However, it is also possible to construct a text according to this model in which the communicative initiative is lost by the pupil when they provoke disciplinary action:

¹ Or in Russian, p. [Eds.].

² This example is borrowed from the website 'shytok.net' <<http://shytok.net/anekdots/anekdoty-provovochku.html>>.

A female teacher walks into the classroom and there is a huge member drawn on the board. She grabs Vovochka, drags him out into the corridor and, in a piercing voice, yells, 'Send your father to the school immediately! Do you hear? Right now!'

In alarm, Vovochka replies, 'Oh please miss, I'm sorry. They told me that it would inflame you.'

The schoolmarm answers, 'Well they told you right. Get your father to school quick smart.'

Table one has three categories of misdemeanours that are characteristic only of school chronicles: *truancy*, *group truancy*, and *disrupting the lesson*. The absence of truancy in school jokes can be easily explained by the fact that the conflict-based nature of the joke genre requires direct contact between multiple characters, therefore the action usually takes place within the school walls. The category of *disrupting the lesson* is a more interesting case. In the collection of jokes, this term is mentioned only once, and provides the outgoing situation for the conflict, rather than supplying its substance:

Vovochka had disrupted the lesson of a young female teacher.

'Bring your parents to school tomorrow!'

'After the lesson, Vera Ivanovna, please go the head teacher's office, Dad would like to get to know you a little better too.'

In school chronicles, disrupting the lesson is represented as a planned activity ('Disrupting the lesson = Operation Y'), while pupils who disrupt lessons are allotted a unique status ('Lesson disrupters = The Avengers'). The plan of action and the resulting status are indicators of the fact the *disrupting the lesson* is an event that is collectively devised in the school community. In other words, for the specific conflict to qualify as lesson disruption, it should be called such in the school community (both pupil and teacher communities). A joke depicting a specific conflict can reflect this interpretive plan for disciplinary situations only in compressed form.

Disciplinary measures (punishment)

The concept of *disciplinary measures* encompasses any action taken by figures of school authority (pedagogues, duty pupils, first-aiders,¹ and so on), which is intended to regulate the behaviour of school pupils. This understanding allows us to examine the disciplinary measures as independent phenomena, unlike the concept of *punishment*, which makes disciplinary actions dependent on the

¹ 'Duty pupils' and 'first aiders' were school pupils with particular tasks such as ensuring the classroom was tidy and recording late arrivers (see below), which gave them a certain level of authority over fellow pupils. [Eds.].

misdeemeanour. The scale of punishments proposed by school documents and pedagogical literature remains extremely consistent throughout the period of our analysis and the majority of its disciplinary forms also have parallels in folkloric texts. In the school rules of behaviour disciplinary measures are mentioned only sporadically. A comparative analysis shows an incomplete intersection of disciplinary measures in folklore and the official list of punishments and a significant difference in the representation of the same punishments in different genres. An overall picture of the genre distribution of disciplinary measures is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

**Distribution of the main disciplinary measures
in folkloric and official genres**

	School chronicle	Jokes	Rules	Scale
Forced to stand (by the desk, in the corner)	+	+	+	+
Removed from classroom	+	+	+	+
Detention after lessons	+	+	+	+
Criticism in class	+	+		+
Comment in school diary ¹	+	+		+
Exclusion from school	+	+		+
Referral to pedagogical council	+	±		+
Reprimand from head teacher				+
Lowered marks for behaviour				+
Transfer to another class/school				+
Parents checking school diary	±	+	+	
Parents summoned	+	+		
Meeting with parents	+	+		
Punishment at home	+	+		
Conversation with head teacher	+	+		
Knock on the head (with a pointer) ²	+	+		
Class punishment	+			

As it turns out, very few disciplinary measures are to be found in all four genres. The most frequent measure in folklore is *removal from the classroom*. As is the case with other misdemeanours, the different genres bring to light different dimensions to each situation. Thus, the

¹ I.e. the pupil's disciplinary record; the equivalent of a bad report. [Eds.].

² The pointer was an important accessory of Soviet 'chalk and talk' teaching — used to highlight material on the blackboard. [Eds.].

only aspect of removal from the classroom picked up by school chronicles is the result, expressed primarily in a change of spatial localisation and the pupil being separated from his group ('Chased out the door = died a hero's death'; 'Pupil out the door = crossed the front line'). The whole disciplinary process preceding this result remains outside of the description.

The genre of jokes demonstrates an almost completely complementary distribution with the genre of school chronicles in terms of their depiction of this situation. Here being removed from the classroom is primarily a performative response by the teacher, and often follows a response from the pupil, who had to have the last word, even if that means leaving the classroom.

Music lesson...

Teacher: 'Children, let's play a game — you think of the surname of a composer and I will guess who it is.

Petenka: This composer begins with T and ends in Y.

Teacher: That's Tchaikovsky. I like the way you're thinking.

Mashenka: This composer begins with B and ends in N.

Teacher: That's Beethoven. I like the way you're thinking.

Vovochka: It begins with F and ends in K, with a C in between.

Teacher: Vovochka! Get out of here!

Vovochka (while leaving): Well actually it was César Franck, but I like the way you're thinking.¹

The fact that the teacher's reaction to ordering a pupil to leave the classroom is an essential episode in this disciplinary situation is confirmed in the genre of rules, which sometimes anticipate pupils starting a dispute: 'If you are removed from the classroom, leave the room with no dispute and go to the head teacher or his deputy to inform them that you have been punished' (1962, Leningrad). However, from the perspective of rules, the central episode is the pupil being sent to the head teacher: most often stipulated is the fact that the pupil required to leave should not hang round in the corridor, although sometimes making one's way to the head teacher accompanied by prefects is prescribed. In jokes, the episode where the pupil meets with the head teacher can also feature in the plot:

'Vovochka, think of a sentence with the verb "to have".'

'Any man who likes can have Verka Perepelkina.'

¹ In the original joke, the figures are writers, with Hemingway (in Russian, Kheminguei, which includes the letters spelling out an obscene word). [Eds.].

'You insolent boy! Get out of the classroom!'

At break time the female teacher goes out into the corridor and notices Vovochka guzzling down a bar of chocolate.

'Who gave you that chocolate?'

*'The head teacher. He asked me why I'd been kicked out of the lesson, and when I told him, he got Perepelkina's telephone number off me.'*¹

Similarly, there are episodes in both the school chronicle and joke genres that feature the situation, much more rarely mentioned in folklore, where a pupil is *made to stand in the corner*. School chronicles record the pupil's state while they are in isolation: 'Pupil in the corner = far from the Fatherland'. In jokes, it is one of the teacher's main means of disciplinary reaction, usually in response to a pupil answering back:

During the lesson, Marya Ivanovna was walking past Vovochka. He dropped his pen, bent over and said, 'Marivanna has red knickers on!'

'Vovochka! Bring your dad to school tomorrow!'

'I'd rather leave the classroom.'

The following day, Vovochka again dropped his pen: 'Marivanna has navy knickers on today!'

'Vovochka! Bring your dad to school!'

'I'd rather stand in the corner!'

On the third day: 'Today Marivanna has no knickers on at all!'

'Vovochka! Get yourself off to the head teacher!'

'Nooo! I'd rather bring my dad to school!'

The rules and scale of punishments mention an order for the pupil to stand by his/her desk, which never appears as an instruction to stay *in the corner*, but according to the description it is close to this punishment:

If a teacher orders you to stand as a punishment, silently step out from your desk and stand by the door facing the board. Do not enter into any conversations about your punishment during the lesson (1960, Vologda).

There is a revealing difference between the genres of rules, jokes, and school chronicles in the interpretation of pupils *kept behind after lessons*. If, from the point of view of the rules, the primary aim of this punishment is to finish some incomplete work, then both the folkloric genres characteristically work to undermine this perception. In school chronicles, the situation is devoid of any events and is reduced

¹ In the original, 'address'. [Eds.].

to an extension of study time that is always negatively assessed as a restricted state: ‘Pupil kept behind after lessons = in vain, old lady, will you await your son at home’.¹ Some jokes feature a face-to-face encounter with the teacher during detention, which opens up possibilities for erotic interpretations: ‘Vovochka was very upset when, after his detention, the teacher said to him one-on-one, “Unfortunately, it’s unsatisfactory again. Tell your father to come along next time!”’

A number of officially acknowledged punishments in the scale of disciplinary measures are absent in the rules of behaviour for pupils — this includes *reprimands* made orally in the lesson or recorded in the pupil’s school diary, *being summoned to the pedagogical council*, and *exclusion from school*. Evidently the main reason for this is that the pragmatics of the genre of rules of behaviour presupposes an attempt to interiorise disciplinary control in the pupil’s mind when there is no opportunity to realise this effectively from outside. In all the situations mentioned above, the pedagogue has direct control, therefore all these measures are irrelevant for the rules.

Worthy of separate attention is a *reprimand* during the lesson — the most widespread disciplinary measure in the school environment. Pedagogical recommendations usually stipulate the manner (tone) of the reprimand: ‘It is recommend that the reprimand is made in a tactful but formal manner’ [Boldyrev 1974: 178]. In school chronicles, a reprimand as such is not mentioned, but it does include the *teacher’s anger/shouting*. In this way, school chronicles record directly, and pedagogical literature indirectly, one and the same stereotype of the teacher’s speech behaviour.

Some forms of punishment have no parallel in the folkloric texts examined above. This applies to *reprimand from head teacher*, *lowered marks for behaviour* and *transfer to another class/school*. All these measures feature high up on the scale of punishments (in order of seriousness) yet at the same time falls outside of the field of vision of the school chronicle and joke genres. The reason for this could perhaps be that these disciplinary measures are too far removed from the ordinary life of the school community to be worth commentary. Texts from the school chronicle and joke genres, though aimed at belittling and ridiculing the school routine, were nevertheless deeply ingrained in this and expressed a paradoxical sense of loyalty to the school system of values, which constrained their own imaginative expression.

Some of the pamphlets relating to universal requirements also contain descriptions of disciplinary measures that are absent in all

¹ Another famous popular song. [Eds.].

other genres. Most often this relates to the authority and powers of duty pupils:

Having arrived at [name of school] after the appointed time you should present your school diary to the duty pupil. The duty pupil by the door will place a stamp in your diary saying, 'Late' (1960, Sverdlovsk).

Once a week, the class on duty stays behind after lessons to review the misdemeanours committed by students during break times. The class on duty is vested with the right to put forward for disciplinary review the misdemeanours of any students who have infringed the established order in the school (1972, Voronezh).

Evidence of this kind affirms the existence of significant variation in the array of disciplinary measures applied in Soviet schooling, which was not limited by the forms of punishment according to the principle of 'natural consequences' recommended in pedagogical guides.

Both folkloric genres expand the list of disciplinary measures with punishments that are absent from the official scale. Above all this relates to a group of disciplinary situations involving parents: *the summoning of parents to school, meeting with parents, and pupils punished by parents* for school offences. From the perspective of official pedagogy these ways for the school to work with parents are not acknowledged as punishments, although in folklore they are assimilated to other disciplinary measures. In the joke genre, one's parents being summoned is on a par with being removed from the classroom, being sent to the head teacher and a number of other plot outcomes that are seen as interchangeable with these measures. In one school chronicle, after parents' evening the father of a failing student is described using the same cliché as the enraged teacher: 'Fantômas flew into a rage'. In this way, the family educational process in school chronicles is represented as part of the school disciplinary system. In jokes, the summoning of a parental figure (usually the father) into school as a result of disciplinary conflicts allows three fundamental issues to be exploited: sexual relations with the female teacher, authority (the high status of the parents), and the dysfunctional family.

Vovochka got a 2. Dad was summoned to school. Your son got a 2! Well, if he does this one more time, I'll string him up by his %#%. A week later Vovochka got a 2 again, then another week later he wasn't at school. Dad was summoned to school. Where is your son??? Well, I strung him up by his %#%, like I said!!!

The other type that is not mentioned in the scale of disciplinary measures is a form of punishment that is forbidden and denied by Soviet pedagogy. School chronicles contain punishments that were unacknowledged by the official culture of Soviet schools — both physical ('The pointer = truncheon of the twentieth century') and

collective ('Mass detention = trees die standing tall'). Even such a well-known method as the disciplinary conversation between the pupil and head teacher, which figures in both the school chronicle and joke genres, is absent from the official nomenclature of punishments.

School chronicles give grounds to include the at first sight exclusively educational method of being *called to the board*¹ in the list of disciplinary measures. 'Calling to the board' is identified as a punishment in terms of the right-hand side of the 'definitions' given in the educational 'devil's dictionary': 'By the board = far from the fatherland'; 'Pupil in the head teacher's office = far from the fatherland'. Behind this likeness lies the assimilation, manifest in school chronicle texts, of the educational and disciplinary process: both are conceptualised as an unpleasant, unavoidable state initiated by school, but one ultimately of only temporary duration.

Conclusion

I began this article with a question about the categories underlying the representation and interpretation of school discipline in folkloric texts. The comparative approach that I applied, with folkloric texts analysed alongside official ones, was intended to achieve one fundamental aim: to move from the level of describing the poetics of separate genres towards detailing the general principles of how school disciplinary interactions are narrativised in these very different texts, created both within the school walls and outside them, and expressing the perspective both of school pupils and pedagogues. The limitations of this approach (though it was partly illuminating) proved to be that each of the descriptive models explored turned out to be linked predominantly to just one of the genres examined, and hence to tell us at least as much about the pragmatics of that particular genre as about the daily routine existing independently of this. Nevertheless, we can identify several conceptual categories that can be traced in the various genres of school folklore examined, and all of which can lay claim to the role of being key components in the overall concept of *school discipline*.

The genre of school chronicles reveals that *discipline is understood as a component of study*, inseparable and indistinguishable from it. The disciplinary situations here are placed alongside educational ones and are described using the same devices. Characteristically, the

¹ This was part of the review of homework procedure that began the Soviet lesson. A series of pupils would be 'called to the board' to regurgitate the material that had been prepared. The entire class could not be reviewed in one session — just a few pupils — and so the teacher could exercise power through the selection. He, or more often she, might choose to pick on the best pupils (to act as good examples), or on the other hand, make a spectacle of the idle and ill-prepared. Pupils who were in the middle were also likely to find the occasion an ordeal, hence the identification with a 'punishment'. [Eds.].

specific content of both educational and disciplinary processes is completely ignored. In this way, the school chronicles express a supremely generalised protest against the school system, in which teaching and discipline amount to the same form of intrusive control.

Jokes, on the other hand, depict disciplinary episodes primarily as a conflict space between pupils and teachers. A significant category for explaining the narrative structure of jokes is the *risk linked to entering the territory of disciplinary conflict*. Remarkably, the risk can be taken on both sides, since there are plots where the conflict initiator is a pupil.

The rules of behaviour for pupils, on the third hand, emphasise the *correlation between disciplinary routine and everyday school routine*. In their embodiment of an attempt to control the tiniest behavioural reactions of pupils, the rules denote specific tension points in everyday school life, each of which is capable of expanding into an actual disciplinary conflict.

The organising principle for the scale of punishments, on the fourth hand, is the *hierarchy of disciplinary measures and disciplinary agents* (the teacher, head of department or head teacher), which discloses the underlying internal structure of the school disciplinary system.

At the same time, the nomenclature for the types of disciplinary situations (misdemeanours and punishments) defined as the starting point of this analysis allowed the clarification of certain internal relationships in the system of stereotypes from which the common cultural concepts underpinning the opposition between school pupils and the disciplinary authority of pedagogues were formed. We have discovered that school chronicles, school-themed jokes, rules of behaviour, and the scale of punishments all have significant overlap in terms of their coverage of disciplinary situations. This allows us to isolate the common prototypical core of all the genres examined. They all emerge as focused on a small array of insignificant misdemeanours and punishments linked primarily to the lesson situation (being late, being removed from the classroom, prompting, copying). At the same time, by paying attention to the genre distribution, i.e. the presence or absence of certain situations in the various genres of text preoccupied with school discipline, we can identify a watershed between the official representation of disciplinary practices in Soviet school pedagogy, the semi-official everyday practices that actually had disciplinary meaning, and, finally, the officially unacknowledged disciplinary practices (such as physical and collective punishments).

All in all, the exploration of the terminology of misdemeanours and punishments reveals a considerable margin of flexibility in defining various situations from the disciplinary point of view. Thus, the material provided by the genre of school jokes gives no grounds to

draw a strict line between conflict and striving for humorous effect in the spectrum of narrative situations, while the variation of behavioural prescriptions in different versions of the rules of behaviour for pupils bears witness to the flexibility and arbitrariness of the category of *misdemeanours*. These observations allow us to designate the last category that was fundamental to the construction of school discipline: *interpretation*. The situation became ‘disciplinary’, we may hypothesise, primarily because both teachers and pupils themselves assigned it to or recognised it as one of the familiar types of disciplinary events (disrupting lessons, lateness, rudeness and so on). It seems likely, by extension, that the process of interpretation was therefore a fundamental driving force behind all disciplinary events in schools, but firm conclusions on this point would require further investigation, using a wider range of comparative material and fieldwork evidence.

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