

Tatiana Basilova

**History of
Deafblind Education
in Russia**

Ergon

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Translated by
Tamara Mikhailova

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The Preamble: Translator's Word

This may look a bit strange to some people but only to some, I hope. A translator writing a preface before the author?!!! Nonsense, isn't it? But if we have to think about the importance of the human word, or, rather, language in our everyday life and about the importance of communication among people, it becomes clear. If we want people from other countries, speaking a language different from our own, but experiencing similar problems, to find a responsive chord in the strivings which people experience all over the world, the role of the person, of the teacher, of the translator of other people's thoughts into a language understandable to everybody, it becomes evident. It's alright when and if you can speak, but if you cannot speak, see and hear? How will the word be heard, seen, and felt by the people who are deprived of these abilities? And what great responsibility lies on the shoulders of those people who have devoted their lives to the noble cause of making these people see, hear, feel and live the life which has been given to them in decency and without moral pain. Incidentally the people of whom Tatiana Basilova is writing about have lived difficult, sometimes fraught with the danger of personal destruction, lives. Despite this they have been persistently and ardently trying to translate the word into an understandable image. In a sense, the content of this book has already been translated into an understandable language by its characters-professors, psychologists, psychiatrists, surdologists and numerous teachers who have devoted their lives to their patients. But above all, this book is about the real heroes—the deaf blind people who are fighting a winning battle with their lives. This book was written in Russian by my best, my closest friend Dr. Tatiana Basilova. We met a long time ago, practically when we were young inexperienced graduate students, with no knowledge of the world around us, pinning great hopes on the life before us. For over 45 years we have been friends. And for 45 years I have been acquainted, by proxy, with the people whom Tatiana is writing about in this book: Avgusta Yarmolenko, Ivan Sokolyanski, Alexander Mescheryakov, and Sasha Suvorov. They have been my life companions due to Tatiana Basilova. On one occasion when I came to Moscow Tatiana said to me: "You know, to appreciate what we all have, people should visit the Care Home in Zagorsk, after this visit people will be able to look at themselves and the world differently." This is why I have agreed to translate this book. I want people to understand.

Like the book which has been written by Tatiana Basilova, its translation has been a collective effort and a tribute to the people, some of whom have been my students at the Faculty of Philology of St. Petersburg State University. This translation is a joint effort of me, my assistant Alexander Diubenko, a young promis-

ing translator from St. Petersburg, the son of my former student Valery, a childhood invalid, a wonderful professional and expert on American jazz, now, unfortunately, deceased, and Michael Freese, our English language editor from Bard College, USA, a kind, generous and highly professional colleague. And of course, most importantly, I have to mention the Fund for Supporting the Deafblind “Con-nection” for making this project possible.

T. M. Mikhailova,
Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences,
Saint Petersburg State University

Author's Acknowledgements

I first heard about the deafblind quite a long time ago. It was in the spring of 1971, when I was a senior student at Moscow State University in the Faculty of Psychology. It was during a class on the psychology of memory taught by V.Y. Lyaudis. Some time later, Lyaudis took us to a residential care facility for deaf people located on Kropotkinskaya embankment: four deafblind young persons lived there. At the facility we met Professor Alexander I. Mescheryakov, Director of the Laboratory at the Scientific Research Institute of Defectology of the Academy of Pedagogical Science of the USSR, which specialized in educating and caring for deafblind learners. After our meeting, Mescheryakov spoke to us and answered our questions while sitting on a park bench near the Krymsky Bridge. I remember how struck I was by the fact that deafblind people actually existed, and what is more, that they could study at a university. I still wonder what made me agree to Lyaudis' offer to work as a care giver in the Experimental Group for deafblind children, namely taking them out for a few hours a week. My next step was getting a new academic adviser and changing the subject of my diploma paper at the end of my fourth year of study. During my fifth year, I had a pre-graduation internship in the family of a deafblind child, and wrote my graduation paper under the joint supervision of Lyaudis and Mescheryakov. E.V. Ilyenkov and A.A. Leontiev later reviewed the paper. My paper was about the development of primary communication skills of deafblind children. I read various works by Sokolyanski, Yarmolenko, and Mescheryakov. While working with my deafblind mentee, I constantly sought advice from Sokolyanski's devoted pupils – Raisa A. Mareeva and Galina V. Vasina, who taught me the practical techniques and training approaches when I worked with this particularly difficult six-year-old child. I now understand that my first experience working with a deafblind child was the most invaluable one for my future professional career.

After graduating in 1972, I was assigned to Mescheryakov's Laboratory and worked there for more than thirty years. Initially I was responsible for organizing the education of deafblind students at university. This marked the beginning of my long-lasting friendship with N.N. Krylatova (then Korneeva), Y.M. Lerner, S.A. Sirotkin, and A.V. Suvorov. Later I supervised the education of deafblind children in an experimental group and taught class on a regular basis. While teaching in this group, I became acquainted with the wonderful work of experimental group teachers such as A.Y. Akshonina, Vasina, and L.V. Pashentseva. I then participated in, and some time later headed, the psychological and pedagogical diagnostic examination of children with grave sensory disturbances. I was lucky enough to observe Mareeva examine them. I witnessed M.S. Pevzner and G.P. Bertyn, both excellent doctors and scientists, whom I consider to be my teachers, participate in the initial stages of such examination. Together with Bertyn, we examined over five hundred

children with grave sensory disturbances at the Scientific Research Institute of Defectology, Care Home for Deafblind Children, Goloven'kovsky's Orphanage in the province of Tula, and at the School for Deaf Children 65 in Moscow where I worked part-time as a psychologist from 1991.

I am grateful to V.N. Chulkov, who became the Laboratory's director after Mescheryakov and Mareeva, for making me complete my research on the possibilities of developing games among deafblind children and defend my thesis on this subject. Thanks largely to Chulkov, V.I. Lubovsky, and to the changes that took place in our country, I was able to travel around the world, to take part in international conferences on the problems of deafblindness, and to become acquainted with leading foreign specialists in this field.

I left my position as the Institute's Laboratory director in 2002, which by that time had been renamed to "The Laboratory of Content and Methods for Educating Children with Multiple Disabilities." The Scientific Research Institute of Defectology also had its name changed to "The Institute of Correctional Pedagogy at the Russian Academy of Education." After taking a job at Moscow University of Psychology and Pedagogy, I started giving lectures on "How to Teach the Deafblind."

This book about the history of teaching deafblind in Russia was designed and started as research work at the Institute. At its core lies my acquaintance with Sokolyanski's archives, which were donated to the Laboratory of Research and Education of Deafblind Children at the Scientific Research Institute of Defectology by his widow, N.S. Margolis, my private meetings with her, and also innumerable stories about Sokolyanski as told by his pupils Vasina and Mareeva. Of great help was my work with Yarmolenko's archives at the Laboratory of History of Psychology at The Institute of Psychology of the Russian Academy of Sciences. In compiling the list of references, I relied significantly on the highly professional work of N.D. Shaposhnikova, a staff member of the Central Library for Blind People, who encouraged me to write articles about Sokolyanski, Mescheryakov, and Olga I. Skorohodova for the Commemorative Dates Calendar, published by the Library on a regular basis.

While writing this book I tried to show the reader how the actual experience of teaching deafblind children resulted in the discoveries made by teachers and researchers at different stages of both their academic and private lives. Teaching deafblind people is almost always an individual process, and it requires not only knowledge and patience, but also certain sacrifices from the teacher. As a psychologist, who had been for many years observing and participating in the process of teaching deafblind children, I have tried to highlight the most interesting and illuminative aspects of this process in my book.

From my years as a student I was lucky enough to witness the evolution of teaching the deafblind in Russia and to take a modest part in it. Because of this, I feel it is my duty to share this knowledge with my readers.

I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who has helped me in this undertaking and above all the Support Fund for the Deafblind “Con-nection” for making the publication of this work possible.

