

# EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE

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## COMMON LEGACIES AND THE STRUGGLE TO REFORM

The conference titled as *Contemporary Central and Eastern European and Eurasian Education: Common Legacies and the Struggle to Reform* of the 15–18th of June, 1994 held in New York city, gave fresh impetus to the rapid and wide-ranging issues that face educators in the countries of Central Europe and Eurasia.

Among papers presented was one by *Bohdan P. Buzdan*, executive director of the *International Renaissance Foundation* – a group that works closely with the *Soros Foundation* to support and encourage academic and educational reform in Ukraine. It was noted by Dr. Bohdan that different countries of the area have varying priorities and strategies, complex inter-geographical issues that affect the process of reforming and improving the educational system. For instance, in Ukraine raising the level of education is not the burning issue that it may be in other countries. Ukraine has been lucky enough to enjoy a rather high level of general education. However, the impacts of economic and social changes threaten to decay the general level of excellence. The strategy thus becomes not to attain, but to maintain, *to retain*, what has thus been achieved so far.

As a case in point for a particular problem cited for Ukraine it was noted that it suffers from a flow of highly trained academic personnel and professionals away from critical institutions of learning, especially from the teacher training institutions. This particular explanation served as a reminder to the specific problems of reform that cannot be shared throughout the region. But other questions could be defined that affected all countries equally and, although the reaction to them may vary, they none-the-less underscore the region wide consensus that these pan-regional struggles are mutually educational for all neighbouring countries. For example, four general themes were presented in this vein: the removal of ideology from education, re-orientation and the individual, diversification of educational establishments and modernizing teaching methodology.

Ukraine illustrates in this sense a commonly shared theme – the educational emphasis of quantity over quality. Success was measured by a simple yardstick – how many passed through the system, graduated irregardless of knowledge or competence in their given field. Another unfortunate side effect of this mechanical process on the student population was the overlooking of those with genuine talents and aptitudes, unique abilities and gifted individuals that often went underrecognized and thus unnurtured to full development. More unfortunately still, the same was true of the teacher evaluation process which allowed “ossified” and stagnant, sometimes incompetent teachers to retain their posts for want of a critical evaluation system that could ascertain the true level of the academic work being done.

In this area the challenge is two-fold – first to maintain the academic access created in the former system while shifting the focus to maximize individual interests, needs and abilities. The second re-orientation becomes developmental on the side of teacher trainings.

How the first problem is being dealt by the foundation in Ukraine is at a young age to foster individual ability and uniqueness of personality. Programs such as Head Start, Junior



Achievement and health education are illustrative of the kinds of programs that target these fundamental years of personality development. Later programs such as international support for Science Education, the Central European University, Management Training Program "Educational Travel Grants" and other programs that help postgraduate education.

The diversification of educational institutions is another sought after enterprise in the Ukraine. Until 1989 the educational system was built solely upon government establishments and institutions, with strict controls from the central government that obviously stifled flexibility, innovation and progressive change. The foundation became instrumental in establishing a plethora of new, independent schools, lyceums, gymnasiums, colleges, methodology centers and institutions of higher education. These schools become models of progressiveness that serve as models to other more entrenched institutions. Further the foundation actively supports educational conferences, seminars internships and other forms of productive information exchange to facilitate positive change.

Modernizing the teaching methodology also was a priority targeted by Dr. Budzan. The old system tended to have a teacher-centric pedagogic paradigm that weighted the interaction on a hierarchy that flowed down from the lecturer. Although new teaching medias have been introduced (computers, television, audio-visual equipment), new dynamic psychological theories of the learning relationship that foster and stimulate creative abilities and improvement in the evaluation process that are finding their way into the mainstream more and more, the unfortunate fact remains that the old system still monopolizes the Ukrainian teaching establishment and manipulates policy disproportionately. Emphasis is placed on reversing this situation and garnering enthusiastic support for its implementation.

Lastly presented in Dr. Budzan's paper is the model employed to critically evaluate programs and projects presented to the foundation and the the Soros affiliates. It serves as a style guide to aim the energies that rail against the problems discussed in the preceding pages for maximum success. Being that each emerging educational establishment clamors for greater independence from the former confines of the regimes which dictated policy, the experiences of the Renaissance Foundation are germane to wider audiences.

Firstly the programs and successful projects state and strategize towards specific, concrete and attainable goals. In this of course comes methods of how to attain these said goals, what are the best actions to foster maximum participation and support for the program from all actors involved. What are the terms for the realization of the project. And what are the expected results, who specifically will be the recipients and how inclusive is their input? The effects of the program should be long-term, have a wide impact and have within it the ability for renewal and repetition – with or without the original initiators at the helm. Also the accounting for resources, for area considerations such as populous, infrastructure logistics and hierarchy elements are factors that have to be successfully navigated for program implementation.

Finally, when the program is initialized, the implementation of critical methods for evaluating results and monitoring the in progress project are essential. This is to witness that the greater part of the financial or technical assistance is in fact reaching its destination, the client, with the least amount of bureaucratic interference as possible. Many proposals are submitted whose real goal is less to help and aid potential recipients or a particular group than to serve as continuous employment for the grant author. The grant or program author literally profits in this scenario, all the while appearing to help others. Without these elements spelled out, the Soros network, as aptly put by Dr. Budzan, "will not grant funding". In closing the conference a call of support was drafted that gave an opportunity to the fellow conferencees to submit a petition to the Soros foundation and all other

government or NGO bodies that would find common ground in the field of educational reform in the emerging democracies of Central Europe and Eurasia.

It is hoped that the discussion of common and country specific problems will lead to greater information sharing in the future and the building of powerful agents of change to actualize a more responsive educational system in the years to come.

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## TRANSFORMATION INITIATIVE FOR THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

The Transformation of the Humanities and Social Sciences Project is underway in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Estonia and Lithuania. This set of comprehensive and integrated initiatives involves a multifaceted approach to reforming how the humanities are taught at all grade levels, from pre-school through post-secondary levels. Such comprehensive efforts include re-writing the textbooks and creating new classroom materials, pilot-testing the new curricula, retraining the teachers in methodologies, staff development for the administrators and publication of the results.

### The Transformation Project in Russia

In Russia, this set of integrated programs has been underway for one year under the joint leadership of the Ministries, the Cultural Initiative Foundation and the Soros Foundation. At present, more than 500 teams of textbook authors (having been selected via open competition) are working on the development of new texts, innovative curricula is being pilot tested, over 100 school administrators have been trained. An advanced system of distance learning is underway in conjunction with the Open University in London.

Some next steps include the translation and publication of Western texts identified by expert international commissions in higher education, testing/evaluating the new curricula/texts, training teachers to utilize these new approaches to teaching, and creating comprehensive teams in pilot schools where these methodologies will all be brought together.

#### *Lessons Learned: Common Elements*

The hallmarks of the Transformation Project are:

- comprehensive approaches which mutually reinforce each other;
- empowerment of local curriculum-developers through open competition for manuscript proposals and subsequent textbook development workshops for successful applicants;
- collaboration with international experts to test and adapt curriculum in fields for which no local authors have come forward;
- pilot testing experimental projects at demonstration sites and making consequent revisions;
- management development for superintendents, principals and other university administrators;
- rapid development and implementation of initial programs to demonstrate the possibility of significant changes in a timely fashion;
- limited translation of texts designated by international experts as indispensable for humanities disciplines; and
- a public/private and international partnership approach to program development and administration from among the country foundation, the country ministries of education and the Soros Foundation network.



Indeed, on this last point, the ministries have identified the role of the foundations as critical – not only in their funding capacity but in their ability to both identify exemplary local partners, and to encourage their participation through an atmosphere of independence.

### *Common Elements with Unique Emphasis*

The lessons learned in Russia are being considered in Belarus, Ukraine, Estonia and Lithuania. All countries are using open competitions to develop new curricula and demonstration sites to pilot test their effectiveness. However, each country is developing a unique focus.

Within this framework, the challenges of each country are different. For example, in Belarus the focus is on the use of computers in education, education for handicapped children and ecological education. In Ukraine, a primary emphasis is placed on evaluation, testing and measurement as the nation attempts to move from a standardized curriculum, yet ensure national standards. In Estonia, the focus lies in policy analysis on the international level for education reform, and in Lithuania the emphasis is on developing a national center for teacher training and education innovation.

## Transformation of the Humanities Initiative in Russia

### *Background*

George Soros has defined the *Transformation of the Humanities* as an initiative of three phases. The first Phase has been the “concept and demonstration” phase, followed by Phase Two, the textbook publication phase. Phase Three is the “teacher retraining” effort. The objective is to ensure cohesion among these phases, where one phase builds upon and expands the previous efforts. Beyond phase three may be the *World Bank* loan to Russia for education. It is hoped that this potential funding would be used to further initiatives from the Transformation Project which needs to be done on a larger scale than the project can afford.

### *Concept*

Cohesion among project phases is important. Similarly, cohesion and coordination among the programs within phases is essential. All the separate initiatives must fit together like the pieces of a puzzle – to create a comprehensive whole.

To date, the Phase One initiatives have considered of Russian initiatives to write textbooks and partnerships with Western experts when required. The effort has been to produce textbooks which are better than anything currently existing in Russia or in the West. The texts have been written to be “interactive”, to encourage critical thinking about various perspectives. Authors have been selected by open competition, and publishers have been selected in a similar manner.

The Mega-Project needs to build upon Phase One and Two initiatives in a comprehensive approach to education reform. It should be noted that the Mega-Project will produce a distinct economic impact, in developing a labor force which is flexible and mobile and can shift occupations as the labor needs of the country change.

This is an on-going integrated approach consisting of the following elements:

- Continued creation of new textbooks and teaching materials.
- Sequencing the new materials into the total curriculum.
- Identifying innovative schools, assisting their efforts and replicating successful practice.
- Retraining teachers in the new material and methods, stressing critical thinking.
- Training administrators and school teams.

- Developing additional initiatives to address education through other mechanisms (i.e., television, museums, libraries).
- Developing a system of standards and examinations to measure the success of the foregoing efforts.
- Supporting local initiatives.

### *Roles*

The Strategic Planning Committee governs the program. It develops the philosophy and concepts, oversees evaluation and ensures the coordination among the on-going efforts. The “working group” has explored some specific programmatic options for the next phase, and is proposing the following initiatives to build upon the on-going efforts of the first two phases. The Foundation is the facilitator and organizer. The Foundation recruits and selects partners, manages the funds and public relations. The Ministry of Education provides expertise in the educational needs of Russia, gives legitimacy to the work, ensures that the work reflects the broader interest of education in the country and not merely the self-interest of a small group, disseminates the materials throughout the country, and recommends impressive programs for widespread use. The main aim of the Ministry is to develop exemplary demonstration sites and programs which can be disseminated later.

In terms of the Western partner, New York is the program management office. The New York office of the Soros Foundation is the partner of the International Center and is the program management office for all Western grantees.

### *The Mega-Project*

#### *Continued creation of new textbooks and teaching materials*

More than 150 new textbooks and teaching materials and teaching materials are being published currently as a result of the open competitions held last year, and the workshops held for textbook authors. This includes works written for both primary/secondary education and higher education. A limited number of translations from Western seminal texts will also be made available. These materials are pilot-tested at the regional centers (see below), and produced in experimental runs of 10,000.

Examples of textbooks sponsored by the project include:

- Geography of Central Russia
- The Art of Listening
- Russian History: 1941–1945
- Ecology
- Contemporary World
- Economics for Everybody
- Human Psychology
- Psychology of Human Development
- Psychology of Human Education
- A Set of Volumes: Latin and Ancient Culture
- Fundamentals of Economics and Entrepreneurship.

#### *Sequencing the new materials into the total curriculum*

Provide guidance to teachers about the use of the new materials in terms of their potential place in the sequence of the curriculum, and how to make choices regarding the most appropriate materials.



*Identifying innovative schools and assisting their efforts*

Hundreds of Russian schools throughout the country are engaged in innovative activity which deserves to be encouraged and will be rewarded by grants which will be used in schools to further the activity. The first 100 grants were awarded in March. Hundreds more will be awarded in the months to come.

*Retraining teachers in the new material and methods*

The elements proposed to move forward with retraining of teachers are as follows:

1. Develop and expand the existing "pilot sites" to create new non-governmental organizations which will coordinate these efforts. These are "intermediate organizations" between the government and the masses. The objective is to concentrate a variety of services and programs in these new "NGOs" to create a critical mass of education reformers who can carry on the work of the Strategic Committee. An education and human resources database would also be created.
2. Design a curriculum for teachers in new instructional methods to encourage critical thinking (by themselves and their students). This basic curriculum will then be adapted locally by Russian educators to fit the needs of each subject for each grade level. Initial design to be piloted in the spring of 1994 for adaptation and use in schools in the fall of 1994.
3. Teacher training and retraining will center around new instructional theories and methods which stress the development of students' ability to think critically. This involves redefining the roles of teachers and students as well as redefining theories and teaching methods. Detailed planning sessions between our identified Russian/Western experts will be held on March 12 and 13 in Moscow.
4. As an addition to the "critical thinking" project, work with New York's Museum of Modern Art to adapt their program "Teaching Critical Thinking Through Art." Began pilot site work in St. Petersburg in January, 1994.
5. Integrate U.S. government teacher exchange programs into this initiative by targeting the pilot sites as a primary source for teachers to participate in the exchange programs. Develop the teacher exchange programs to further the training received by teachers in Russia, and to include a project component which requires participating teachers to do work in the U.S. which directly furthers the Transformation work in Russia upon return.
6. Integrate other U.S. government education exchange programs in a similar manner. These programs would include undergraduate programs for students who aspire to become teachers, and the secondary school exchange program.
7. Begin immediately with the retraining of 3,000 teachers of economics, building upon the work of the Russian/American Center for Economics Education which has been on-going under the Transformation initiative.

*Training administrators and school teams*

1. Continue the on-going workshops for the 100 new participant administrators and the follow-up workshops for the 100 administrators from the 1992-93 cohort.
2. Integrate the U.S. "Freedom Support" programs for school administrators in two ways: (a) continue the graduate degree program for administrators and potential administrators. Continue the "project" component, and ensure the linkage for the participants back to the Transformation programs, and (b) use the upcoming internship programs for school administrators as a program enhancement for a sub-group of administrators who have participated in the Transformation next century leaders' program. Select these participants via open competition from among the successful participants.

The current training for school administrators will expand in 1994. Results so far include nine promotions, the creation of an independent principals' association, publication of a journal *The Principal*, and many innovative projects being implemented in participants'

schools. There will be over 300 people trained at each pilot region site. The people would represent teams from selected schools, with principals, teachers and parents.

*Developing additional initiatives to address education through other mechanisms (i.e., television, museums, libraries)*

Although the preceding elements are essential for education reform, alternative programs should be developed which reach children in reinforcing ways – outside the classroom. Projects should be developed which use media outside the school to implement the curriculum of the Transformation project. Three specific methods are proposed:

1. Development of innovative children's television programming. "Sesame Street" is a very successful American children's program with a 25 year history of success in developing learning readiness in young children. Developing the Russian co-production of "Sesame Street" requires extensive curriculum development as well as training of Russian children's television professionals. Producing 130 hour television shows is as 18 month job, but it will have a long life on generations of children.
2. Develop automated library capacity for children to use to explore the world independently. A potential partner in this is "kids Net", from National Geographic which links children all over the world to library resources. Additional Russian library projects should be developed.
3. Design collaborative educational programs with Russian museums with educators which bring the museums into the classroom, and bring the children and their parents into the museum. There could also be exchange programs an on-going relationships between Russian museums and western partners. The Museum of Modern Art program is a pilot. Russian museums should participate in a defined set of projects. This may include the development of a new "hands-on" educational museum in Russia.

*Developing a system of standards and examinations to measure the success of the foregoing efforts*

In order to have these efforts create true educational reform, results must be measurable for both schools and students. This requires that educational performance standards be created and used, and that examinations which students take measure the new curriculum which they are being taught. Entrance to universities may not be negatively affected by the new curriculum, and learning the "new" way must be positively reinforced for the students.

The relationship between school improvement and performance standards is key, as is the relationship between the schools and their communities. The "Mega-Project" will concentrate on the development of both – developing standards of school performance by involving the community.

*Supporting Local Initiatives*

A major aspect of the program has been, and remains, support for local projects which can be piloted and later replicated if successful. These programs are the initiative of the respective grantees, and are evaluated and approved by the Joint Strategic Planning Committee.

Some examples of projects funded to date are:

Primary/Secondary Education

- Retraining of teachers of pedagogy
- Innovative approaches to elementary school education
- A Russian economics magazine for teachers
- Support for Russian teachers' newspapers
- Law curriculum for secondary schools



- Paradigms in education
- Schools for gifted children
- Higher Education
- Independent Institute of Russian Entrepreneurship
- Educational material – “Ancient Civilizations”
- Competition in humanities materials
- Scientific Research Institute of Higher Education

### *The Development of NGOs.*

There are nine “pilot regions” which now form the nucleus of potential NGOs. These eight sites coordinate the activities of over 100 schools in the region which are testing the new textbooks. They are also sites of workshops for textbook authors, and of assistance for “local projects” funded by Transformation.

Each “pilot region” is now outfitted with equipment (computers, fax machines, copy machines) and a computer database which is in place at each site. This database will provide consistent information about the projects, human resources and financial accounting from each site. The “pilot regions” are: Moscow (2 sites), St. Petersburg, Yekateringburg, Kasnyarsk, Nizhny Novgorod, Novosibirsk, Samara and Chuvasia.

The International Center for Economics Education is making wonderful progress. This organization is working with Junior Achievement and the National Council of Economics Education in New York – and has trained over 300 teacher trainers during the past 18 months. They have a distinct mission from Management Training or from the Institute of Privatization because they train teachers of primary and secondary school students in the values and concepts of market economics.

The Institute of Educational Innovation, headed by Eduard Dneprov, is responsible for those portions of the Mega-Project which involve research and competitions for innovative teaching projects. It is anticipated that one part of the Mega-Project will be running a competition for “innovative projects”.

In February 1994, the Institute sponsored a conference of over 1,000 schools. This project will culminate in a “Festival of Innovative Schools”, later this spring. In addition, there is another part of the Mega-Project which will provide support (incentives) to scholars in educational theory development. This Institute will take the lead here as well.

### *Higher Education: Rector Training and HESP*

This portion of the program has run competitions for authors to write approximately 200 new textbooks which are currently being published. Expert commissions in nine disciplines were formed among Russian and Western experts. These commissions recommended strategies for Russian higher education in these disciplines, and suggested seminal Western texts for translation. These translations have been underway, and copyrights secured, led by Dan Davidson, Strategic Planning Committee member, and Executive Director of the American Council of Teachers of Russian.

Grants to universities are now part of the Higher Education portion of Transformation. Training will be done for the rectors and assistant rectors in project management and proposal writing, and they will be invited them to apply for this new funding as a result. This should be a great catalyst in having the rector training programs move forward. As in the primary/secondary program, local initiatives have also been supported.

*(edited by Samuel Coleman)*