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Douglas Ray

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**RUSSIAN-CANADIAN COOPERATION IN CURRICULUM
DEVELOPMENT:
RUSSIAN CIVIC EDUCATION, 1990-1996***

**Douglas Ray
University of Western Ontario**

INTRODUCTION

The Russian educational system inherited from Soviet schooling some significant strengths. Every one had the right to schooling for about eleven years, instruction was by qualified teachers, instructional materials were free and adequate for the purpose, minorities had access to instruction, and the priority of education in government spending was second only to defence.¹

In 1990 and 1991, the USSR was disintegrating and part of the future depended upon decisions that were made quickly not by President Mikhail Gorbachev of the USSR, but by the Yeltsin government of the Russian Republic. Other developments (such as the liberation of the press²) depended on private initiatives, alone or in combination.

It was a time of opportunity, hidden difficulties, and unresolved questions, all of which had an impact on education, and particularly civic education.

A few political and administrative decisions were bad; several were realistic choices for the new system; and some were not only right but far-sighted. If we confine the discussion to things impinging directly upon education, here are examples of each category.

Bad Decisions

1. Rushed identification of official ideology. It was wrong to quickly proclaim or condemn official ideologies, instead of agreeing on a framework where differences could exist. Among these decisions was the move to abolish the Communist Party without attempting to hold it accountable for some of the mistakes of its past,³ particularly while not recognizing that communist ideas continued to have millions of adherents within the Russian population. New parties stampeded into the gap, some of them called by other names but led by old Marxists. The Party, but not the

name nor the idea, had been exorcized. The June 1996 election saw an increased number of Communist deputies elected to the DUMA, but not necessarily with the old characteristics. One of the strengths of Soviet society was that, since the time of Khrushchev, there had been stability and security at the personal level. This broke down as "democracy" was gradually introduced by Presidents Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin, so that confidence in job tenure, savings, apartments, access to education, and even (temporarily) affordable vodka, were sometimes threatened.

2. *Recognition of many exclusive rights for the Russian Orthodox Church.* It was natural to restore many rights to the Russian Orthodox Church and to return a substantial prestige to its clergy, but other faiths with long and respected existences in "civilized societies" were not given like recognition. The Islamic and Judaic populations had lived for centuries in Russia, and recent missionary activities were trying to restore a religious influence to balance secular ideology after the long period of official atheism. In one dispute (i.e., which is the official church for Estonia?) the quarrel is a messy blend of nationalism and religious politics. In another, Islam is one of the distinguishing features of the Caucasians, and Chechnyans in particular.⁴ More broadly, how should religion in the Russian schools be dealt with? Could and should religious indoctrination by the "official" church be avoided?

3. *Russia (as opposed to the former USSR) was declared to be a federal state* but the regional governments were given little authority. Recognizing the diversity of populations and circumstances within Russia (which is twice the size of Canada), it is possible that some national decrees should have been decided by the regional governments. On the whole, dogmatic identification of ideologies is not compatible with democratic principles. It is better to build a commitment to a range of transparent procedures while negotiating answers to the various value based questions that may be posed. The rush to fill the power vacuum was too swift. In the extreme case, Chechnya insisted on its independence rather than mere autonomy, partly from a linguistic and religious base, but these were shaped partly by old fashioned ambitions for power and wealth. Other "nations" are in waiting.

Neutral Effects

Decentralizing schooling decisions. Decentralization of educational choices

within the Russian Federation was variously arranged. Some decisions are now exercised by local governments, school principals or teachers, or the family. Some 25--30 percent of instruction time for grades X and XI became a regional government responsibility. The rest remained under federal jurisdiction so that there remained an underlying system.⁵ Sometimes local governments reorganized the previously comprehensive schools into *gymnasia* (focusing on the arts) or *lycea* (science and maths concentrations). There were five patterns of concentrations: schools with mandatory, elective and optional subjects; schools with specialized subject profiles (music, language or business for example); *gymnasia* or *lyceums*, innovative and experimental schools; and private and religious schools.⁶ There could be some choice of subjects engineered by the school teachers or administrators (which languages would be offered? what resources would be available to help with learning?) Many of these decisions were prompted by scarce physical resources (e.g., computers and software) but human resources mattered also. Some music, language and computer teachers left their classrooms to pursue increased income in the private sector. Other decisions reflected the professional preferences of those in a school -- especially the principals. These choices are always subject to the constraints of securing entry to the various institutions of higher education. *But for the first time, Russian parents and youth could exercise meaningful choice.*⁷

There are opinions but little Russian research about the success of decentralization, regardless of whether power was exercised by the regional government, members of the profession, or the pupil and her/his family. The official decrees on decentralization are criticized as too complex to be workable.⁸

It is my impression that poorer families, especially in cities, will be likely to withdraw their older children from school, and this may even be *encouraged* by educators for example by principals who can rent disused space (classrooms), by industries that can exchange modest sponsorship for training programmes specifically tailored to their needs, and by teachers who can tutor during unclaimed professional hours in the private marketplace. The private sector justifies gains for both pupils and teachers. In effect, a two-tier system of education has emerged, with international levels of quality still available to those pupils whose parents can afford to pay, but the general system is starved for resources. Similarly, there are two

levels of income available to teachers: abysmal pay and diminishing security to typically qualified and especially rural professionals, and substantial additional benefits for those with currently desired expertise, who are willing to exact its full market price by tutoring. For some, the education system has been opened up by diversifying the control and curriculum; for others its traditionally excellent scholarship has been undermined. It is questionable if the Ministry of Education controls and sponsors the leading edge of educational development. It is also doubtful that the Ministry can lessen the pain of the educational neglect that it certainly recognizes. The resources are not available as Russia restructures.⁹

Desirable Effects: Russian schooling internationalizes

Perestroika (reforming, refining, renewing) and *glasnost* (transparent, open to debate) were two key concepts driving reform during the Gorbachev regime. Education was placed under the microscope of parliamentary, professional and media appraisal and emerged with a reasonably good report card.¹⁰ But the changes in other social and political institutions which followed the collapse of the USSR had the effect of undermining whatever was not essential -- or more precisely whatever was not supported by a currently fashionable ideal. Among the changes came a freer curriculum, more emphasis on effectiveness, and even expansion of some neglected studies.

Civic Education is one subject that went through the complete cycle. After 1990 the Marxist-Leninist studies in civic education, which had been steeped in ideology, were forbidden -- a casualty of the fall from public esteem of the Party. It made no sense for politicians and other leaders within society to be burning their Party membership cards if the school continued to flog the old ideology. The traditional school courses disappeared after 1990; the camps, houses and palaces of culture and friendship redirected their activities. Their places were taken in part by other social sciences.

But civic education continued to have a theoretical contribution that was widely acknowledged. There is now a need for instruction *about democracy* if Russia is to have a population able to practice what the government proclaims: leaders will be popularly elected by a population that will be able to weigh the achievements of various levels of governments, to understand the editorials and articles of a free press and to

tolerate even those ideas they did not accept, to respect the decisions of an independent judicial system, and to recognize that laws requiring or forbidding certain practices might not always be desirable. There might be room for personal decisions and informal support or criticism for them.

Social science and history classes might propose alternative sources of stability and opportunity (i.e., freedom *from* government, in both the political and economic sectors, instead of decisions by it). Good information and decisions need not necessarily come from the government - - certainly not exclusively. Neither need *independence* be diametrically opposed to policies of government. Is it reasonable to assume cooperation, or perhaps coexistence of independent or complementary programmes? And might interdependent programmes spark discord without necessarily reflecting animosity?

There was also a repudiation of the assumed differences in objectives between Russia and other modern nations and a willingness to work in cooperation -- despite fifty years of cold war rhetoric. Just as Russians were revealed to the West as tolerant and peaceful people whose society was being remoulded through their efforts, so the Soviet perceptions about the rest of the world needed to be addressed. A scholarly course in democratic civic education might help. History courses are being revised.

Initiating International Cooperation

Personal interest and international professional experience have led me to make periodic career and holiday choices that involved the USSR and then Russia. Many professional colleagues hold similar interests. When the USSR collapsed in 1991 it seemed useful to participate in the reorientation of society, perhaps by transferring lessons learned in Canadian curriculum development (Alberta social studies, IDECO, CHRF, etc.); from bilateral international programmes like Canadian University Services Overseas (CUSO), Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA); international cooperation and development projects in Asia, Latin America or Africa; or from 25 years of contact with UNESCO and UNESCO Associated Schools.

In 1991 I included a visit to Moscow in a series of professional investigations of human rights in education, at the invitation of Zoya Malkova, then Director of the Russian Institute of Theory and History of

Education. I was impressed by the effects of *glasnost* and *perestroika* on the institutions that I visited there, coming away with many materials, some prospects for future cooperation and a realization that Russia was a little like the poverty stricken Alberta of my youth: there were opportunities for those who chose to think positively. I believed it might be as important as similar educational cooperation with developing nations. The need for creating the basis for long term cooperation was evident. 11

Very shortly after this Moscow visit I wrote a paper for a Norwegian conference on "What are the implications for international education of the reforms of Eastern Europe?" I proposed offering to cooperate in the replacement of the Marxism-Leninism course with one on Democratic Civic Education. This became the theoretical model to be operationalized by a 1992-93 contract from External Affairs and International Trade Canada. (The Canadian government had set up a Task Force to respond rapidly to proposals of various types.) A short contract established the feasibility of the project. It was followed by a more elaborate proposal involving a textbook, teacher education seminars, and the preparation of support materials for teachers and pupils. My Russian contacts soon produced collaborators, whose contributions are briefly mentioned below.

Financing International Cooperation

The resources for curriculum development in any country are combinations of personal time, non-budgeted institutional facilitation, and cash for the things that might (or must) be bought. An international project may be unusual in its attention to contributions to the project as a rough indication

Figure 1.
Democratic Civic Education III, 1996 - 1999

Contributors	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Canadian Institution	100	75	75	250
Russian Institution	70	70	70	210
UCGF	60	20	20	100
TOTAL	230	165	165	560

of commitment to it (Figure 1).

Cost allocations are not easy. In this case, Russian school teachers rarely earn more than \$200 per month unless they take two or more jobs, and only some of their expenses (rent and perhaps food and transportation) are actually lower than comparable costs in Canada. Other expenses are high for Russian salaries: for example, electronic equipment sells at nearly the same prices anywhere. The major assumptions are:

- (1) Russian professionals make as big a contribution in a day's work as do Canadians;
- (2) personal contributions are really institutional because they are allocations of time that is fully compensated by the employer;
- (3) support services are either paid fully (communications), assigned only nominal value (financial services), or no value (photocopying).
- (4) transportation would be paid by the Task Force for the cheapest available tickets;
- (5) other travel costs would be met with an official government *per diem* and cheapest available hotel expenses;
- (6) equipment bought for the project would be donated to the appropriate Russian project supporters .
- (7) one research associate received nominal part time salaries in Canada;
- (8) no honoraria would be paid to the Russian or Canadian co-directors or Canadian consultants;
- (9) Russians would be paid an honoraria reflecting their contribution, but not necessarily on a personal basis. For example, *schools* rather than *teachers* might earn honoraria.

DEMOCRATIC CIVIC EDUCATION: THE PROJECT

Democratic Civic Education may be described as a single project in progress since 1992, to be achieved in three consecutive stages, funded by a combination of Russian and Canadian sources. It is conceptually divided into three components: a grade ten or eleven textbook entitled *Democracy: State and Society*, supporting educational materials, and a programme of in-service education. The project is co-directed by Natalia Voskresenskaya and Douglas Ray. Other Canadians involved are B.B. Kymlicka and Robert

Clark, supported by research associate Dien Tran of the University of Western Ontario. More than 100 Russian professionals have contributed, writing materials, pilot teaching, testing students, evaluating conceptual levels, refereeing data, and illustrating materials. A small Russian private sector company (International Pedagogical Systems) has taken the risks of developing and printing the book and many of the supporting materials, with the informal support of the Russian Ministry of Education and several regional departments -- especially Moscow. The project enjoys support from the educational profession, notably the Russian teachers' newspaper *Uchitelskaya Gazeta* and the Russian Association of Civic Teachers. Democratic Civic Education has been endorsed by some of the biggest foreign players in Russian education: the Soros Foundation, The Council of Europe, and The American Federation of Teachers.

The Textbook: Democracy: State and Society

Democratic Civic Education for Russians is defined, conceptualized, illustrated and Russified in the 300 page, 1995 second edition of the project's textbook: *Democracy: State and Society*. It was written largely by Natalia Davletshina, a history professor at the Bauman Technical University in Moscow. It was subjected to ruthless and extensive refereeing and revisions in an effort to define the field correctly while using Russian examples and theory where possible. The next edition will retain most of the content but will be reorganized and further Russified.¹² The text is an important tool in Russian teaching so it is important to get it right.

In a value oriented subject like democracy, it is vital to maintain a distinction between responsible, value directed criticism and imposed indoctrination. *Democracy: State and Society* declares its bias in the title and maintains it consistently. In Russia, some authors and some teachers feel democracy, human rights and similar concepts should not be advocated in schools but be treated as another form of indoctrination.

The Civic Education Project does not accept this view. It argues that democracy is a label that has been borrowed and employed casually to lend legitimacy to authoritarianism, and that the USSR actually promoted such possible confusion in its traditional Marxist political education. It is important that democracy not be discussed as perfect anywhere, nor as totally bad in any system. When Russifying the concepts of democracy, it is

necessary to acknowledge a kind of democracy in Medieval Russia - akin to that in medieval Florence or Venice but nevertheless completely detached from (for example) the development of the *1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation*. However, this embryonic civic culture was not an enduring characteristic of subsequent Russian experience. Effective leadership was defined in different terms, permitting even tyrants and despots to be frequently lauded in Russian history. To be honest, so was much of the experience in other nations. And so it continues.

Other Educational Materials

Russian schooling resembles that in Canada in that teachers are always seeking materials that will make their lessons more interesting, effective and relevant to ordinary life. Civic education should promote civic behaviour: respect for justice, minorities, the rule of law, informed decisions about elections, thoughtful discussion of potential dangers to society (like inflation, unemployment, crime, militarism, etc.) Opinions differ about what educational materials will best accomplish these worthy objectives.

In Russia, there is a current confidence that the pupils would benefit from workbooks that would require or invite them to manipulate data about civic issues. So data about political parties and election systems, games for lobbying authorities, model parliaments, mock courts and similar challenges are posed to individuals or groups. Sometimes the pupils work with materials that are more akin to monopoly games than to workbooks. And there are always Russian teachers who believe that more is better:¹³ children would welcome information about the voting system of Italy and Fiji, of the election results of Israel and India, of the relative merits of the court systems of the Czech Republic and Japan. So the Democratic Civic Education Project established priorities among the proposals for researching, writing, publishing and marketing the various projects intended to make the lives of students more rewarding.

Similarly there are arguments that teachers must be helped to become more effective -- particularly since correct scholarship on democracy is the latest minted. The encyclopedic sources are one solution. Another is the prefab lesson plan where teachers and students learn to follow "the bouncing ball" to successful civic knowledge.

Figure 2
Organizational Questions

1. How are seminars effective at broadening the impact of democratic civic education?
2. Where should seminars be located to have maximum impact and/or feedback?
3. How can seminars be operated most efficiently? (with subordinate questions of sponsorship, direction, participation, frequency and size).

In-Service Seminars

Teachers like to work together, to share their insights, and complain about those things that should be changed. Democratic Civic Education was committed to textbook revision on the basis of pilot teachers' experience, and seminars provided the most efficient means of securing and validating such professional advice, for several teachers and schools could report at the same time. As textbook difficulties were gradually identified and removed, seminars began to take a new character: they addressed effective teaching strategies. Lesson plans and innovative ideas were demonstrated, critiqued and modified. As the project was interested in more than writing the perfect textbook, three organizational and strategic questions began to take the spotlight.

The answers seemed to be predictable on the basis of professional practices for most nations with a schooling system that has been improving for many years.

1. Teachers like to be a part of the professional development team, rather than ears that are to hear the truth. They like to be rewarded by being heard, and heeded when they caution. They like to provide local examples, to suggest extensions of the theory, to weigh rival political theories, to anticipate pedagogical challenges, and to assert their

opinions. The first seminar of the project gave a severe critique to a draft textbook prepared by six academicians, caused its rejection by the Moscow Department of Education, and led directly to the current (*Democracy: State and Society*) textbook series. The teachers demonstrated their vigilance and creativity: it is wise to take their in-puts seriously.

2. Seminars are portable and can be located conveniently to where a given group of teachers work. To date, seminars have been organized in large and small cities. Plans will expand this pattern.
3. Two types of seminars will be organized: (1) those set up by the project and (2) seminars conducted by noted teachers or organizations of the hinterland. The first type will usually start with content from *Democracy: State Russian Civic Education and Society* and include discussions of values and methods of effective teaching. The plan is to present about ten sponsored and nearly fifty regional professionally-organized seminars, widely dispersed, and over a period of three years. All seminars will be small enough to be interactive, large enough to be cost effective. The objectives and details will be changed progressively so that repetition will be minimized.

Conclusion

By Canadian standards this project is small and inexpensive. With the contributions of Russians added, it gains some lustre but remains essentially Spartan particularly with respect to the numbers and complications involved. It proposes international standards of civic education but does not recommend a single national model. It promotes discussion of Russian experiences through the models of other democratic systems. It recognized that Russian democracy still has to be promoted, and sometimes defended. It is a challenge that offers a great reward.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- * Presented to the Annual Meeting of the Comparative and International Education Society of Canada, Brock University, June 1996.

ENDNOTES

¹ Brian Holmes, Gerald H. Read and Natalia Voskresenskaya, *Russian Education: Traditions and Transitions*, New York: Garland, 1995.

² Nicholas Daniloff, "Educating Russians for a Free Press," in Anthony Jones (editor) *Education and Society in the New Russia*. London, M.E.Sharp, 1994, 213-230.

³ Gorbachev was severely undermined by the events of August 1991, when he was in effect placed under house arrest at his dacha, at the order of some of his colleagues in the Kremlin. He never recovered full control after being publicly rescued with Yeltsin's help. But the courts did not treat the affair as a foiled attempt at a coup. Later the charges of treason were set aside. See John Morrison. *Boris Yeltsin: From Bolshevik to Democrat*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991.

⁴ Helen Krag and Lars Funch. *The North Caucasus: Minorities at a Crossroads*. Minority Rights Group International, London, 1994.

⁵ S. Brian Holmes, Gerald H. Read and Natalya Voskresenskaya. *Russian Education: Tradition and Transition*. New York Garland, 1995.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 312.

⁷ Martin McLean and Natalia Voskresenskaya. "Educational Revolution from above: Thatcher's Britain and Gorbachev's Soviet Union." *Comparative Education Review*. 361 (Feb. 1992) 71-90.

⁸ Pam Poppleton, Boris Gershunsky and Robert T. Pullin. "Changes in Administrative Control and Teacher Satisfaction in England and the USSR." *Comparative Education Review*, 38, 3 (August 1994) 323-346.

⁹ Stephen Kerr. Diversification in Russian Education in Anthony Jones (editor), *Education and Society in the New Russia*. London, M.E. Sharpe, 1994, 47-74.

¹⁰ Anthony Jones. The Educational Legacy of the Soviet Period, in *Education and Society in the New Russia*, 3 - 24.

¹¹ Holmes et al, op. cit. xii-xiii.

¹² The first (1992) edition introduced internationally accepted theory and some Russian examples. It was pilot tested in Moscow schools and the most frequently requested change was for more Russification. It was written by Ray, Kymlicka and Clark in a few weeks.

¹³ Natalia Voskresenskaya. "Russian Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace, and Education to Promote Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms," in Douglas Ray et al. *Education for Human Rights: An International Perspective*. Paris: UNESCO and Geneva: IBEX. 1994, 205-222.