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Western Models and Russian Realities in Postcommunist Education¹

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Abstract

The attempts to reform the Russian education system since the fall of communism have had very uneven results. My research has led me to conclude that both Russian reformers and their international allies miscalculated the degree to which professional activism or a nascent “civil society” would compensate for the loss of state or public administration and financing after 1991. Assuming that the end of “totalitarian” education would result in a flourishing of grass-roots “innovation”, reformers failed to anticipate the deepening financial and administrative crises in post communist education. These severe crises, mitigated only in part by Western assistance, have resulted in the sharp degradation of the public education systems and human resource capacities in Russia and the other newly independent states, and directly threaten the future of democratic and market reform. It seems that both many Russian reformers and their Western allies were guided more by idealized Western models than by an accurate sense of Russian needs and capacities. My conclusions are that international assistance should be focused more directly on helping to foster new professional networks that can better defend and retrain educators and teachers; and also that we must better combine general educational research with area studies knowledge to inform our cooperative efforts.

1 Introduction

The last ten years in Soviet and post-Soviet education have witnessed several of the more dramatic developments in postwar education in the world. The first was the catastrophic economic and administrative crisis that accompanied the disintegration of the U.S.S.R. and its “common educational space”, an unprecedented degradation of an already highly-developed educational system. This has posed a unique analytical and policy-related problem for those engaged in international cooperation for education development: they must work with disintegrating and yet still powerful institutional structures and professional practices, rather than “developing” them as was common in most postwar international education assistance efforts. The second dramatic development was the equally unprecedented level of international cooperation and assistance that has sought to facilitate education reform. Western government agencies; multilateral institutions, most

notably the Council of Europe, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the World Bank; private nonprofits, foundations and exchange organizations, most notably the Open Society Institute/Soros Foundations; as well as individual universities, consortia and professional associations have all been engaged in an extraordinary array of efforts to assist reform.

Several questions present themselves. Why did Russian reformers pursue the education policies they did in the early 1990s, and with what effects? How did the broader political and economic battles of the early 1990s shape the struggle over Russian education? How did various Western influences and models shape that process? Why were Western models that stressed Anglo-American “conservative” solutions (such as privatization and the use of vouchers) chosen over more continental solutions that stressed labor market planning and the state direction of reform? Why did all concerned seemingly fail to anticipate the deepening financial and administrative crises that would soon dissipate the “innovation” movement, and how have those crises shaped the subsequent reform agenda? What exactly have the many bilateral and multilateral assistance efforts accomplished? Based upon our evaluation of what has worked and what has not, how should we approach future international cooperation?

I hasten to add that I have enormous admiration for the political courage and visionary hopes of the Russian educational reformers, and for the dedication of their many international partners. However, I am also convinced that unless we are frank with ourselves and our Russian colleagues about what has worked and what has not, we will be unable to sustain governmental and domestic support for further international assistance to the cause of Russian education reform.

My fundamental argument is that both Russian and Western reformers failed to realize just how deeply the Soviet Party-State had crippled the formation of autonomous professional structures and practices in education, as in virtually all other spheres. The Communist Party-State took upon itself the combined power of the modern administrative state and of “scientific” or “professional” expertise (Engelstein 1991; Balzer 1996). There is an anomalous element to understanding the nature of Soviet professionalization, in that by virtually all accounts educators and teachers in Soviet society felt an enormous sense of professional pride and commitment (Jones & Krause 1991). Yet Russian educators and teachers did not control any of the elements generally considered necessary for autonomous professional development, such as control over access to the profession, training and retraining, accreditation, job placement, the terms of employment, or standards in educational research and publishing. Furthermore, they proved woefully unable to develop such autonomous associational structures when given the opportunity after 1990.

Given this, when the authority of the Party-State collapsed in 1990-1991, the Russian Ministry of Education rapidly and chaotically “devolved” administrative, financial and curricular responsibilities down to the regional and local levels. Both Russian reformers and their Western allies simply assumed that, once freed from “totalitarian” control, professional activism would somehow flourish and drive grass-roots reform. It was, tragically, a common fallacy that a nascent “civil society” was simply waiting to spring to life after the fall of communism. The result, as is now clear, was as much chaos, paralysis and parochialism as a flourishing of professional activism. One could also argue that the weakness of Soviet professionalization cut both ways and that it also prevented conservative forces from mobilizing effective resistance to the radical reformers. The result, however, remains paralysis and systemic dysfunction in Russian public education.

It seems that understandings about the role of the Communist Party-State in Soviet education before 1991 were simplistic on all sides. Establishment and communist Soviet educators saw it as unproblematic. The regime brought the people forth from darkness, and provided the curricular rigor, bureaucratic discipline, funding, and integration with the planned economy that made the Soviet educational system the finest in the world. Liberal and radical analysts, both Soviet and Western, also saw it clearly. The Party-State imposed the dead-hand of bureaucracy, ideological dogmatism, and narrow vocationalism that stifled the aspirations and creativity of teachers and the public, and imposed a false equity and uniformity at the expense of real excellence and pluralism. One can, of course, agree with much of this latter position and yet still find it simplistic *as an education policy for the transition period*.

2 The Ambiguities of Late Soviet Education Reform

The “innovation” movement of the late 1980s offered searing critiques of official Soviet curricula, traditional instruction and bureaucratic administration. The reform movement sought to return to the “child-centered” and developmental pedagogy of the 1920s, and to liberate creative school directors, teachers and students. As the drive for democratization and Western-style economic reform accelerated in the late 1980s, it seems that many Russian and Western reformers failed to understand the possible tensions between democratization and marketization. They simply assumed that moral outrage against “totalitarian education” would translate into a willingness on the part of both educators and the public to give up the stability and security, however conditional or limited, of Soviet “socialist” education and social policy. There also seemed to be many who assumed that there was a necessary analogy between radical economic and educational reform: that one had to first act decisively to destroy the “command-administrative” system, and then educational freedom and pluralism would naturally flourish. Yet no one seemed to appreciate just how fragile the system of public education and social provision really was, how unevenly developed, and how badly funded (on this, see, for example, Ligachev 1988). Most importantly, no one seemed to realize just how thoroughly and deliberately the regime had crippled educational administrators’ and teachers’ ability to act as autonomous professionals.

The education reform movement suffered a reverse in 1988, when the “innovators” failed to win over the majority of the teachers at an all-Union Teachers’ Congress (Materialy 1988). In an attempt to break free from the moribund official Trade Union of Enlightenment, Higher Education and Science Workers, leading reformers attempted to create an alternative Creative Union of Teachers (Deklaratsiia 1988; for an excellent overview of this period, see Kerr 1990). This effort proved still-born because of internal and personal conflicts, a lack of experience or interest in grass-roots organizing on the part of the innovative teachers, and concerted official resistance. The reform movement then received new impetus with the appointment of a renowned historian of education, Eduard D. Dneprov, as Russian Minister of Education in 1990. Initially checked by more conservative forces in the all-Union bureaucracy, Dneprov’s team assumed full sovereignty over Russian education after the collapse of the U.S.S.R. in 1991 (Dneprov, Lazarev & Sobkin 1991; Dunstan 1992). Yet the overestimation of the capacity of the rank and file of

educational administrators and teachers to respond to the demands of radical change would prove to be a fatal weakness at the heart of all subsequent reform efforts.

3 Radical Education Reform in Russia, 1991-1992

One can discern similarities between the broader patterns of Russian political and economic reform after 1991 and the politics of education. First, there was a common inability or failure to develop a mass organizational base, whether in the form of stable reformist political parties or new professional associations, and the reliance upon “emergency” measures and executive fiat to try to force through reform. In 1992 and 1993 the bitterness of the subsequent conflicts and the increasing resistance of conservative forces, whether in the Russian Supreme Soviet or the public education establishment, provoked increasingly aggressive policies, particularly as regarded privatization, in an effort to break up the opposition and make reform irreversible. One could also argue that many reformers had an unrealistic sense of the degree to which international assistance could support their efforts, and that this perhaps militated against compromise and long-term constituency building, at least with the more moderate opposition. In their haste to destroy the old regime before it could reassert itself, the reformers arguably failed to plan adequately for the transition, and simply hoped in some utopian sense that new forces and interests would arise to drive and sustain systemic reform.

The reforms initiated by Dneprov and his team at the Russian Ministry of Education undeniably mark a new era in the history of Russian education. The reformers understood that the education system had to change fundamentally to adapt to market forces and to develop students’ capacity for independent decision making, critical thinking and democratic citizenship. The reformers sought to break up the “totalitarian” bureaucracy and to rapidly “de-monopolize” and decentralize administrative and curricular authority, allowing regions, municipalities and individual institutions to set their own policies and practices. Other important principles included the demilitarization and “de-politicization” of education, especially the social sciences, and the “humanization” of instruction through child-centered teaching and developmental learning. All of this necessarily entailed differentiation, understood as a necessary condition for freedom and pluralism in education (on all this, see most notably Dneprov 1991; Dneprov & Eklof 1993; Dneprov 1994; A. Jones 1994; Dneprov 1996).

The Russian reformers understood the need to coordinate the Ministry’s reform efforts with “civic” and grass-roots activists, but did not fully understand how weak the “pedagogical movement” actually was, especially as the deepening economic crisis scattered its energies (Shchedrovitskii 1996). It is also undeniable that while Dneprov began with the forces of reform arrayed around him, his policies, his demanding and allegedly autocratic style, and what many perceived as his exclusive Western contacts alienated many of his original allies. In their defense, Dneprov and the reformers did face bitter resistance and savage personal and political attacks from the old guard of Soviet pedagogy, and it is understandable that they would avoid creating or empowering professional associations or a new teachers union that could have better mobilized resistance to radical reform. Yet in their failure to organize new, democratically-elected and autonomous professional associations or a new teachers union committed to reform, Dneprov and his allies at the Ministry found themselves increasingly isolated, and lacking in the instruments necessary to defend, popularize and implement their policies.

In response to this impasse, Dneprov and the reformers focused on three issues, all enormously controversial: the development of alternative or “non-state” schools and privatization; the codification of a new education law intended to make reform irreversible; and the cultivation of international financial and technical assistance. All three were integral to the original reform agenda, but took on particular uses and emphases during the bitter conflicts of 1991 and 1992. Privatization was intended to break with the perceived lowest-common-denominator leveling of the Soviet public education system, and was also seen as an effort to revive the rigorous intellectual traditions of the Russian intelligentsia. This was in part articulated as a Western-style drive for excellence and “choice”, and, whatever the intentions of its authors, was often seen as exclusive and elitist by its opponents and by much of the public. This movement culminated in provisions in the Education Law of 1992 that guaranteed state support in the form of subsidies or vouchers for all educational institutions, state and “non-state” alike, although the financial and regulatory realities of this were far from clear. The reformers envisioned the drive for pluralism and privatization as an effort to carve out enduring spaces for experimentation and innovation, perhaps against the possibility of future official reaction.

A second priority for the reformers was the codification of a new education law that would consolidate the new decentralized system and protect regional, institutional and personal autonomy. The Education Law of 1992 gave state, municipal, private and religious organizations the right to run educational institutions, and also legalized home schooling, breaking the state monopoly on education established by the Communists in 1918 (Zakon 1992; see also the commentaries by De Groof 1993 and Glenn 1995). The emphasis was to be on parental choice in type of institution, and on teacher and student choice in curriculum and instruction. Henceforth education was to be divided between federal, regional and local components, with the center of gravity shifted decisively away from the Ministry and the state.

In part on principle, in part out of financial necessity, and in part to prevent a *revanche* from the center, the Ministry under Dneprov also rapidly and chaotically devolved administrative, financial and curricular responsibilities down to the regional and local levels. To check these centrifugal tendencies, the Law ostensibly guaranteed citizens’ rights to education up to a “national minimum”, and established loose federal standards for accreditation and certification. In a move dictated both by financial necessity and by the desire to allow differentiation or “profiling” in upper secondary schooling, the Law guaranteed full state support for compulsory education only to grade 9, or age 15. This measure effectively abrogated the commitment to universal secondary education through grade 11 established in the 1970s.

From one perspective, the institution of the education law was a tremendous accomplishment in placing the Russian education system on new foundations. From another viewpoint, the Law of 1992 was a public relations disaster and questionable politics, inasmuch as it insisted on a “big bang” to force through reform. The rapid devolution of responsibility exacerbated administrative and financial chaos that was already severe due to hyper inflation. The reformers overestimated the capacity of local officials and teachers to respond to the new demands placed upon them, and failed to anticipate the public outrage at the abrogation of a fundamental tenet of the social contract. Granted, Dneprov and the reformers were under enormous pressure from more powerful interests in the Russian government pursuing radical economic reform. Yet the pursuit of

excellence and efficiency at the expense of equity, however useful or necessary, outraged their opponents and the public during a time of acute social distress.

4 The First Wave of International Assistance, 1991-1992

The reformers also sought to sustain the drive for radical change by cultivating international cooperation and assistance. 1992 witnessed several major bilateral and multilateral initiatives, including the passage of the Freedom Support Act in the United States, which authorized new funds for student and professional exchanges and created a clearinghouse to coordinate and encourage private aid efforts (Compendium 1992). The German federal and state governments expanded their existing study and exchange programs (see, for example, Mitter 1994); and The Council of Europe launched a major effort to integrate the new independent states into existing education exchanges, which was later expanded to become TACIS, Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States. It also established new initiatives on educational legislation, the development of new curricula and textbooks, and the reform of teacher training and educational administration. UNESCO, the OECD and numerous private foundations such as the Soros Foundation also launched research and aid efforts (for an early overview, see Anweiler 1992).

These international efforts were clearly vital in sustaining the reform movement in Russian education, and especially in ending the debilitating isolation of Russian educators from the international research community. While this aid bolstered the embattled reformers, might it have also subtly militated against compromise, at least with the more moderate opposition? Could it have allowed the Russian reformers to fatally neglect the constituency-building necessary for sustainable reform? Did it begin to create a “culture of clientalism” that encouraged some Russian reformers to slight moderate indigenous or grass-roots alternatives in favor of ambitious international partnerships? Again, I do not intend to fault the Western advisors’ commitment to pluralism and educational freedom, but merely to question whether radical decentralization, vouchers and sweeping privatization were the most appropriate models for Russian reform, given the very different social, political and professional realities that continued to shape the Russian education system.

Faced with mounting resistance from conservative educators and the rank and file of the teachers, and beset by alleged corruption scandals involving his aides, Dneprov was forced out of office in November of 1992. He then became education advisor to President El'tsin, only to be sacrificed yet again after the rise of communist and nationalist forces in the parliamentary elections in December of 1993. Dneprov remains active, and is one of the leaders of the “radical” wing of the otherwise traditional Russian Academy of Education.

5 Moderate Education Reform and Systemic Crisis, 1993-1996

In the aftermath of the fall of Dneprov, the staff of the Ministry struggled to formulate a more moderate reform agenda, reflecting in part the cautious temperament of the new Minister, Evgenii V. Tkachenko. In response to teachers’ strikes and the protests of regional and local officials, the Ministry struggled to protect funding, yet was hobbled by the fact that funding for education and social policy remained “residual” to all other

budgetary priorities. The Ministry lacked the bureaucratic and political power to compel the government to deliver even on its stated financial commitments. This was taking place amid an unprecedented collapse of GDP and tax revenues. Furthermore, as many industrial and other economic enterprises were chaotically privatized, they simply sloughed off their commitments to provide financial support and property to public education and other social services. While the principles of decentralization, diversity and autonomy were reaffirmed, the post-Dneprov leadership at the Ministry also stressed the urgency of developing compensatory mechanisms such as common national curricular standards and a unified system of examinations, accreditation and licensing to offset the severe disorganization and inequities that had arisen since 1991. Although it was unclear whether funding would be available, there was at least a stated commitment to build up capacities in the locales by using combined federal-regional stabilization and development funds. Again, however, this initiative seemed to focus more on retraining education officials than on cultivating autonomous professional or teachers' associations. While seeking to foster adaptation to the new labor market and to accommodate regional and local interests, the new guidelines sought to maintain a common sense of Russian citizenship and equivalency for students to move across and through the system (Tkachenko 1994; Ob itogakh 1995).

While efforts have been made to restore the directing role of the Ministry in reform, earlier reform impulses have continued. For example, efforts continue to encourage critical thinking in the new curricula, developmental instruction, a "de-ideologizing" of the social sciences and humanities, and the "profiling" or differentiation of curriculum and instruction (the latter beginning in 1993-1994 in upper secondary schooling, and partially extended in 1995-1996 to elementary schooling). These measures are intended to prevent the extremes of "esoteric" teaching that does not meet federal standards or does not allow student mobility across or through the system, or of simply using the old methods and textbooks, which are hopelessly out of date and ideologically pernicious. There has been an extensive program of cooperation between the Ministry and the autonomous republics and regions to develop national programs in education, and to implement education laws that correspond to federal requirements and standards.

Consistent with this effort to correct the "excesses" of earlier reforms without reversing them altogether, measures have also been taken to restore guaranteed rights to universal secondary schooling, to hedge in the scope of privatization, and to restrict the role of religion and especially of foreign religious organizations in Russian public schools. After a storm of protest, the extremely controversial and unpopular provision of the 1992 Education Law requiring compulsory education only through grade 9 was rescinded in 1994. In the same year, the rights of parental choice and cautious privatization were reconfirmed in other measures, albeit with certain limitations (Zakon 1994; Kontsepsiia 1994). Furthermore, it was stipulated that all "de-nationalized" institutions were to be strictly non-commercial and non-profit. The Ministry, after initially welcoming Russian and foreign religious organizations into the public schools in exchange for grants and equipment, was then forced by public pressure to cancel several contracts with foreign evangelical groups and to reassert secular principles in public education.

6 The Expansion and Effects of International Assistance

1993 and 1994 also witnessed a massive expansion of international assistance to Russian education. These included the rapidly expanding educational exchanges funded through the U.S. government's Freedom Support Act and the European Union's TACIS program, as well as sustained research and cooperation efforts, which were clearly intended to foster the professionalization of educational administrators and researchers (for an overview, see OECD 1994). The Council of Europe expanded its research seminars and training efforts in minority, language and human rights education; the democratization and decentralization of administration; and on curriculum development, especially in the teaching of history (Council of Europe 1994a, 1994b; Leclercq 1994; Mitter 1995). All of these efforts were joined together in 1994-1995 as the "Demosthenes 'Bis' Education" Program. While undeniably very useful, one senses that the real goal of these efforts is more to introduce the Russians to European standards than to examine the increasingly complex if not chaotic Russian standards and practices in detail.

By far the largest direct effort to assist Russian education was launched by the Cultural Initiative Foundation, the Russian branch of the New York-based Soros Foundations. The two most important initiatives were the \$100 million International Science Foundation (ISF), which included support for science education through the International Soros Science Education Project (ISSEP); and the \$250 million "Transformation of the Humanities and Social Science Project." ISF/ISSEP and "Transformation" were intended to pioneer models for the reform of Russian education in several ways. First, by directly supporting promising students and teachers and innovative schools. Second, by running open competitions for drafting new textbooks and curricula; then by publishing large editions of the new textbooks and demonstrating them; and finally, by a massive program of teacher retraining to use the new texts and instructional methods. There were also parallel efforts to retrain school directors (Building 1994). These efforts were all intended to create models and to cultivate new professional leaders that the Ministry could then apply and deploy throughout the system.

Another intention of the vast Soros efforts was to pump large amounts of hard currency quickly into Russian education, and the grant programs undeniably provided a vital lifeline to many thousands of researchers, educators and teachers. And yet, the haste of the myriad efforts meant that they were often eclectic, poorly organized, wastefully funded, and badly coordinated with other international assistance. In 1994, audits revealed financial irregularities at the Cultural Initiative (Soros) Foundation in Moscow, and the Foundation's accounts and programs were frozen. The Soros office in Moscow was subsequently reorganized and relaunched, yet "Transformation" had nonetheless wound down, and it seems that only about a quarter of the funding committed was actually spent in Russia. The most tangible legacy of Transformation is 25 new textbooks that are being produced in editions of 1 million each, and being sold at cost to Russian schools. The Soros Foundation is now committed to a new \$100 million initiative to create a modern telecommunications network for Russian education, and then using the 32 new University Internet Centers (UICs) as the engines of systemic reform in Russian higher education and research.

7 The World Bank Report on Russian Education, 1995

There are also two other major international efforts underway: a detailed OECD survey, and a research and assistance program developed by the World Bank. The World Bank report on Russian education issued in late 1995 is notable for its rethinking of some of the Bank's usual approaches to systemic reform such as the use of vouchers and privatization (Heyneman 1995b; see also Heyneman 1994, 1995a; for an overview of the Bank's role in international educational development, see Ph. Jones 1992). The fundamental premises of the Bank report are that Russian administrators, educators and teachers must be willing to reform their institutions and practices to respond to the new labor markets and to improve internal efficiency. Given that, the Russian government as a whole, and especially the Ministry of Finance, must be willing to provide the financial resources to support those reforms. Furthermore, the international community must be willing to contribute its advice, technical assistance and, of course, development loans. This latter part of the agenda remains problematic given the seeming lack of interest on the part of the Russian government, and especially of the Ministry of Finance, in assuming such loan obligations.

Proposed measures include emergency financing to protect preschool and compulsory education and ease the social costs of transition; adapting obsolete institutions and curricula to the new labor markets, and shifting away from the scientism and narrow vocationalism of traditional Soviet curricula; downsizing inflated pedagogical staffs; fostering responsible and effective decentralization through the development of regional and local management and financing; forging greater coherence between federal, regional and local functions and policies; leveraging federal funds to ensure relative equality of educational opportunity; establishing a national and meritocratic examination system; opening up and privatizing educational publishing; renewing and reforming vocational education by means of consumer and employer demand; and reforming teacher training by moving it out of the grossly-underfunded pedagogical institutes and into the state universities and the mainstream of the subject disciplines. Overall, the role of the federal government would shift from direct financing and bureaucratic control to "quality assurance and equality monitoring". Furthermore, new central agencies for testing, gathering statistics and licensing teachers would be needed.

While many of these proposals are undeniably necessary or at least inevitable, I would nonetheless argue that there are several serious analytical and interpretive problems with the Bank report. These problems are arguably typical of those that have plagued international assistance to Russian education as a whole, the persistent blurring between Western models and Russian realities. Granted, the Bank report is intended merely as a "starting point" for discussions between Russian specialists and the international community. However, while Bank reports often suggest that they must be neutral about "politics" and personalities, the authors of the report on Russia often seem to simply accept the specific choices and policies pursued since the late 1980s as a given. There is a certain irony in all this. Former Minister Dneprov justified his commitment to vouchers, privatization and radical decentralization in part by reference to earlier World Bank and other Western studies (Dneprov 1996); while the Bank report suggests that the authors are merely trying to make the best of a situation in which such policies are a given.

After laying out this ambitious agenda for systemic reform, the authors of the Bank report arrive at several seemingly utopian conclusions. These proposals are unrealistic in the sense that they often seem to consider human agency, in both the recent past and the

near future, as essentially unproblematic. The report seems to suggest that if only the correct framework for policy formulation and implementation can be forged, then all actors will behave in an efficient, competent and honest manner. The most obvious problem with this is that it rests upon the wildly unrealistic assumption that Russia in the late 1990s will somehow rapidly become a “normal”, economically stable and law-governed state, with reliable tax revenues and a functioning administration. The authors of the Bank report also fail to directly address how these ambitious goals for financing and managing education are being undercut by the ongoing economic crisis, and by the policies of uneven fiscal austerity and structural adjustment being pursued, however fitfully, by the Russian government.

Thus, while international assistance remains central to the future of Russian education reform, the questions raised above about the coordination, sustainability and effects of such cooperative efforts persist. Other threats include the refusal of Russian tax authorities to exempt foreign aid foundations, and the effects of participation in cooperative programs upon Russian educators and teachers in an increasingly nationalistic and xenophobic political climate, particularly in the regions. There is also a clear pattern of donor “burnout” and declining interest in the West, particularly in government-funded efforts.

8 Conclusions: Focusing the Agenda on Professional Development

All too often, when discussing the future of Russian education reform and shaping an agenda for international cooperation, Russian reformers and their Western allies simply return to the same hopeful assumption: if educational administration, finance and research can only be successfully decentralized and made more efficient, then regional and local officials and educators will rise to the occasion in a responsible and highly professional manner. Or, if small groups of administrators, educators and teachers can be involved in joint seminars, exchanges or research projects, then their insights and new practices will somehow be transmitted to others throughout the system. However, again, I would caution that the well-developed, autonomous professional associations and practices that must exist to guide and realize these processes of transformation and decentralization *remain fatally weak and underdeveloped*. This fundamental weakness of professional and associational structures virtually guarantees that further decentralization will not result in democratization and educational pluralism, but will only deepen the already severe paralysis and inequality and lead to the impoverishment – and possible collapse – of the Russian public education system.

Looking back over the last five years, an overarching conceptual and strategic error in Russian education reform becomes apparent. By allowing the energies of reform to fragment into private, alternative, religious and ethnic schooling, reformers failed to anticipate that they would also shatter the public consensus for the taxation and commitment required to rebuild the public education system. It seems that both many Russian reformers and their international allies were guided more by idealized Western models and practices than by the more prosaic needs and realities of Russian teachers and students. These errors were compounded by the failure to use state or ministerial power to help forge new professional associations and a new, democratically-elected teachers union, instruments that were absolutely necessary to guide decentralization and democratization, and that could have sustained reform after the inevitable waning of central initiative and financing.

Furthermore, we must also ask ourselves some hard questions about our own efforts. How, specifically, *has* international assistance shaped and furthered Russian education reform? How well-informed are our efforts? What exactly can be done to improve the research base and access to detailed institutional and regional data? Here I would argue very forcefully for a more systematic effort to combine general Western educational research with detailed area studies knowledge, and for the expansion of comparative education research on Russia and the other Soviet successor states. There are very rich traditions of German and British research on communist and especially Soviet education, although those programs must be sustained and expanded (for an earlier overview of German research, see Horner 1993). Many of the recent international efforts have been led or shaped by educators who are experts in their countries, but who neither read Russian nor possess detailed knowledge of Soviet or Russian education. While drawing upon American and European experience is vital, we must also work to encourage detailed research and statistical compilations in Russia, and then better use that knowledge to inform our assistance.

Beyond such questions about the quality of our data, what exactly are the educational values and policy goals that will drive and inform our efforts? Are we to encourage the cultivation of elite schools and excellence at the expense of social equity? How might we address the sharpening disparities in educational access and funding by region, ethnicity, class and gender? To begin with, I would suggest targeting expanded international assistance much more directly on professional development, most notably the training and retraining of educational administrators, teacher educators, school directors and leading methodologists in teaching. We may not always approve of the agendas that emerge from these new professional networks, but we should accept them as necessary tools to stabilize the profession and the public education system, and then do our best to keep their agendas attuned to European standards. I hasten to add that I consider this advocacy of professionalization as not simply another American model naively projected onto Russian reality. Given the irreversible collapse of central financing and the consequent inability of the Ministry to direct reform, such professional structures and networks are absolutely necessary to prevent further parochialism, profiteering and systemic paralysis (for a broader defense of professionalism as opposed to nakedly market-based or bureaucratic authority, see also Friedson 1994). Lacking such professional organizations to defend educators' and teachers' pay, pensions and working conditions, the reformers have lost many of the best and brightest who could have been the leaders of a broad-based professional reform movement, as they have scattered into isolated, and often failing private institutions, or left the field altogether out of sheer economic desperation and professional frustration.

The international community could work more systematically to encourage the formation of enduring partnerships between Western professional associations, teachers' unions and new Russian organizations, organized by subject discipline, function and region. These new professional organizations could work to defend educators' pay and pensions, to evaluate the new curricula and texts, and to help popularize new approaches to teaching and learning. Given the new regional focus in Russian politics, and the sharp regional inequalities in financial and administrative capacities, national forms of such professional organizations will also be absolutely vital to maintain the coherence and integrity of the Russian public education system.

There are several promising initiatives in Russia along these lines, such as the Association for International Education, dedicated to fostering distance learning; the Association of Civic Educators led by Petr Polozhevets and others, the Association for Developmental Education led by Vasilli Davy'dov and Isak Froumin, and the Association of Innovative Schools and Centers led by Anatolii Kasprzhak and Petr Shchedrovitskii. Yet all of these new groups remain small and divided, and it is unlikely that such thematic organizations will ever unite a broad cross-section of Russian educators.

In conclusion, the question remains: how best can Russian reform efforts be encouraged and coordinated with international cooperation to build sustainable domestic professional capacities and public constituencies, and thus allow education reform to continue even after the loss of initiative from the central government and the waning of international cooperation? This, and not the short-term or parochial interests of particular institutions, partners or factions, must be our common agenda for the future.

Note

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