Russian Education Reconstructed: "Perestroika"

Alla V. Kourova and Rhea A. Ashmore
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Alla V. Kourova is the director of the International and Linguistic Center of the Regional In-Service Teacher Training Institute, Penza, Russia. She is the author of four textbooks and 15 articles focusing on teacher education in Russia. She was selected as a fellow in the Junior Faculty Development Program for teaching Russian language and culture courses at the University of Montana and edited two Russian textbooks. Her current research addresses cross-cultural differences and components in teaching English as a second language.

Rhea A. Ashmore is a professor of literacy studies in the School of Education at the University of Montana. She is the author of Teacher Education in the People's Republic of China, the second volume in the Phi Delta Kappa International Studies in Education series, and of two fastbacks related to education in China. Her recent research includes investigating the effects of phonemic awareness instruction on phonological awareness and word reading performance of Chinese children learning English.

Series Editor, Donovan R. Walling
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by
Alla V. Kourova
and
Rhea A. Ashmore

ISBN 0-87367-908-3
Copyright © 2004 by the Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation
Bloomington, Indiana
To my mother, Albina Jones,
who is my greatest fan.

To my daughter, Maria Kourova,
who studied to be an English teacher,
and to my American friends —
Margaret Mason, Gail and Rick Peterson, and Johanna Kowitz — who
helped me adapt to American culture.
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Introduction

When Mikhail Gorbachev stepped down as president on 25 December 1991, it marked the end of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the acceleration of perestroika. This term describes the Russian movement, launched by Gorbachev, that promotes overall reconstruction for a better life. This fastback describes Russian education both pre-perestroika (*Mnogo budesz znat bistro sostarishcyja: “If you know too much, you will get old quicker”*) and since perestroika (*Za odnogo bitogo douh nebitih daut: “An experienced person is worth two inexperienced ones”*). These two popular Russian proverbs capture the contrasting themes of education. Following the examination of the Russian education landscape is a look at the cultural differences between perestroika Russia and the United States.

The United States and Russia are affecting (and are being more deeply affected by) global forces more than at any other time in history, so the awareness of culture is imperative. Cultural diversity is a motivator to be alive, to test who we are and how we fit in this world. It provides endless opportunities to learn, make friendships,
and prosper. In that spirit, we hope this fastback will inspire readers to:

- discover common teaching values,
- share experiences of teaching culture through language,
- broaden one’s knowledge of foreign countries,
- establish networks for exchanging materials,
- explore and evaluate materials,
- collaborate and create new materials, and
- broaden teachers’ and students’ worldviews.
Historical Background

What is the effect of perestroika — the restructuring of the Soviet economy and bureaucracy that began in the mid-1980s — on Soviet education? In order to answer this question, a historical perspective is necessary. Knowing where the past ends and where the present begins is not easy. This section describes the state of education pre-perestroika.

Prior to perestroika, and for more than 70 years, the schools in the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) "were an integral part of the Communist Party's attempts to bend society to its will" (Jones 1994, p. 3). The system served the needs of industrialization and enhanced the Party's ideological hold over society. Likewise, these goals created a double-edged sword that involved tensions and conflicts that still are being resolved today.

In certain circles a high regard for education predated the October Socialist Revolution of 1918. Education was expected to serve the revolution and to help the regime in its attempts to create the "New Soviet Man." Social reformers were concerned that the attitudes held by the
public toward work and community were inconsistent with those needed for the building of communism, so enlightened educators molded children’s personalities in the direction of the new ideals (Ispa 1994). Education institutions, such as the local government schools and the church parish schools, developed two- to four-year courses in the rudiments of learning. Secondary education was indefinable. Gymnasia (specialized schools for the upper classes) offered in-depth studies, such as Latin and Greek; technical schools specialized in the trades. Social status and wealth determined one’s educational direction.

Before the revolution, the literacy level was low. According to the 1897 census, only 24% of the total population over nine years of age was literate (Sweeney 1993). After the Revolution of 1918, efforts to bring literacy to the masses led to the establishment of literacy schools in 1920. By the end of the decade, these flourished. The main goal was to teach reading and writing to adult learners. At the same time, workers’ schools were formed to prepare workers for university-level work.

In the 1930s a return to more conventional approaches to learning, including strict discipline in the classroom and a uniform national curriculum, dominated. Pedagogy was based on the premise “that the teacher’s task is to pass along prepackaged materials, and the student’s task is to memorize these materials” (Jones 1994, p. 4). Four years of compulsory primary education was instituted in the countryside and seven years in the urban areas. This mandate inculcated the
basic ideas of order, numeracy, and literacy; and within nine years it permitted the claim that 81% of the population over nine years of age could read (Lane 1992). By 1949 children in the Russian Federation received seven years of schooling.

By the 1950s access to the assorted levels of the secondary system was available on the basis of choice, and access to the higher education institutions was available on a competitive basis. Because schools were tuition free, in theory, there were no financial or social barriers to the success of any child who was mentally able. However, social factors did affect educational attainment. This practice led to reforms aimed at reducing the effects of social background while maintaining education standards.

Sociological studies of educational attainment from the 1960s onward demonstrated that, despite the government's claim of equality of opportunity, family status continued to be an important factor. The parents' education and occupation affected student progress in school, and various schools enrolled students from select socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, vocational schools enrolled children from working-class families and were also the dumping grounds for troublemakers.

The administrative structure of Soviet education was multifaceted and chaotic. A variety of schools existed: preschool institutions, general secondary schools, schools specializing in particular subjects, vocational secondary schools, specialized secondary schools (providing paraprofessional and skilled-trade education), boarding schools, evening schools, and schools for children with
special needs. At the higher education level, the system included universities, polytechnics, and specialized institutes. As the variety of administrations responsible for running the various systems was complex, integrating and coordinating education was problematic. New policies for one part of the education system led to problems at other levels. Very few of the reforms actually achieved their goals.

In the late 1980s, public frankness on the part of officials about lamentable conditions in schools increased. Physical conditions were poor, and the state of affairs was worst in rural schools. Although the Soviets strove to educate a literate and technically able population, adjustments were needed.

The advent of perestroika increased the willingness to discuss societal problems. Educators called for a new philosophy of education and for its democratization. Rather than uniformity of organization, application, and curriculum, more active involvement of teachers, students, and parents and greater differentiation of the curriculum was heralded (Eklof and Dneprov 1993).

Most significant during the pre-perestroika era, the people had no voice. The emphasis was "upbringing" — the notion that the school is responsible for molding the personality of the student. That people could be molded was the central assumption of the reforms of the Soviet period. In labor education reform, for example, "the goal was to fit the student's personality to the needs of the economy, rather than to reorganize the way things were done to fit the needs of the individual" (Jones 1994, p. 4). The education system was like a straitjacket.
The Education System Under Perestroika

Russian education reform moved forward under perestroika. Perestroika attempts to change long-established socialism into socialism with a human face (Bain 2003). The reform stated that "all main indicators of the system of education and training of manpower must be strictly determined by the requirements of the national economic complex" (Lane 1992, p. 293). The reforms attempt to provide a general and common education for all, with regional variations for children with special needs, and a means to improve the national economy.

The new Russian education system is less restrictive. Uniformity and the total control of the federal education authority, based on the tenets of Marxism-Leninism, are gone. For example, the compulsory vocational training in the general school and the plans to create the integrated secondary school were revoked in February 1988. Universal youth education now includes a nine-year program of general schooling with subsequent secondary education divided into various academic and vocational tracks. However, now also absent are both moral and financial support for education. The Russian
government fails to adjust salaries to inflation, and colleges respond either formally by charging tuition or informally by requiring bribes. Researchers seek funds to do what they formerly were both paid and honored to do; teachers are less willing to tutor potential repeaters; and technical school educators augment their salaries by holding second jobs.

The acceptance of capitalism has vitiated the rewards of education somewhat; yet people aspire to explore the real world and earn real money, a prospect not open to them before. As their children eagerly study computers and English but unenthusiastically engage in the arts and sciences, parents who value traditional education look on in disappointment. The current, modern saying of students enrolled in specialized schools is, “Thank you for beating English into our heads.”

The Russian education system is divided into four basic parts, representing preschool, primary, secondary, and higher education. “Before school” comprises the nursery (yasli) and kindergarten (detskie sady) or the combined system (yasli sady). The “general schools program” or “secondary education” is primary education at two stages: grades 1-4 and grades 5-9. Schooling is expanded at grade 10, with four options for continued schooling:

1. The student completes grades 10-11 in the same building (some regions have experimental schools with grades 10-12).
2. The student attends a gymnasium or lyceum, schools that offer advanced levels of education in a chosen field, before entering higher education institutions.
3. The student attends alternative schools, such as pedagogical, sport, or military colleges.
4. The student enters technical school and maintains a profession while in school.

Finally, higher education options include academies, institutes, and universities.

All school calendars begin on September 1 and dismiss on the last Saturday of May. The school week is five or six days in length, depending on the school’s mission and curriculum. Vacations include autumn holiday (one week), winter holiday (10-12 days), spring holiday (one week), and summer break (three months).

The school system uses five grades for assessing and distinguishing its pupils: excellent (5), good (4), satisfactory (3), poor (2), and very poor (1). The last two grades both signify failing; very poor is rarely assigned. A grade also is given for conduct, with “5” indicating exemplary behavior.

For primary school children, how and when grades are dispensed is important. The student is issued a booklet or diary that lists the assignment and grade for every subject on each day of the school year. The diary also has a back section for quarterly reports, including socially useful work. The children never know when they will be addressed in class. Once called on, their answers, or lack of them, supply the grades in the subject for that week. At the bottom of the page is the signature of the homeroom teacher; parents’ signatures also are required. Attendance is noted on the bottom left-hand side and shows the number of lessons lost and the tardiness for
the week. The diary ensures that the student and parents are aware of weekly academic performance and homework assignments. After ninth grade, students are not required to maintain the diary. Rather, at the end of each quarter a student receives a grade in each subject.

A student can legally quit school at the end of the nine-year program or at the end of the school year after reaching the age of 16. A pupil who fails a course must retake the course and is labeled a repeater. This unhappy prospect is diminished when the pupil realizes the disaster, studies during the summer, and retakes and passes the necessary tests before the next school year begins.

Academic achievement is both the students' and teachers' responsibility. A teacher with too many repeaters is regarded as not doing her job well.

Graduating students earning very good grades from secondary schools are awarded gold or silver medals on graduation night. To warrant a gold medal, all final grades in all subjects in the last two years of school must be A's; all final exams also must be A's. A gold medal affords the applicant to higher education the privilege of taking only one of the five required entrance examinations into college. Those awarded a silver medal must have earned a majority of A's with some B's; they are required to take two of the five entrance examinations.

State exams are administered at the end of the academic year after the ninth and 11th years of school. Exam areas include Russian language, Russian literature, mathematics (both in oral and written forms), and two subjects selected by the examinee. However, in special-
ized schools, students take exams every year, and the areas assessed include the specialized subjects.

**Before School**

The changes since perestroika in early childhood education are significant. Gone is the “Program for Upbringing and Teaching Preschool,” the curriculum guide that was mandated for all childcare centers throughout the former USSR. Instead, a manual, *Fundamentals of Programming for the Preschool Child* (Zaporozhets Center 1997), defines standards of child competence that centers strive to achieve. How the standards are achieved is the responsibility of each center’s staff. Ispa reported that “greater freedom for staff is coupled with greater valuing of children’s individual differences, personal well-being, and creativity” (2002, p. 407). Furthermore, as access to the best public schools is now highly competitive and admission is based on children’s scores obtained during an entrance interview, directors and upbringers (early childhood teachers) prepare children for the new competitive marketplace by nurturing creativity, assertiveness, and academics.

*Nurseries.* If child care is required, parents enroll their children, ages six months to three years, in a nursery. Services range from one to six hours per day; and the cost is high, affordable only for those who work for institutions that sponsor the service. Fearing exposure to germs, many parents prefer homecare with the grandmother or babushka. Still, nurseries are popular, and the demand exceeds the space.
Nurseries emphasize physical well-being, collaboration, good manners, and aesthetic appreciation. Intensified goals are appreciation for Russian history and traditional folk art, respect for individual differences and independence, happiness, self-confidence, self-esteem, and academic preparation (Ispa 2002).

**Kindergartens.** Formal education begins here. Kindergartens enroll children from three to six years old and prepare them academically and socially for primary education. Full-day kindergartens, 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., are the most common. Tuition is based on a family’s income but remains high. Sponsoring employers, such as factories and ministries, often cover the costs.

Language training, including pronunciation and letter correspondence; arithmetic, including addition and subtraction; physical activities; daily life and health habits; ethics; general knowledge; music; dancing; and art are the curriculum. Some of the required learning occurs during twice-daily didactic lessons. Also, through play-based activities, children learn to read, write, count, draw, design, sing, and dance. In some kindergartens foreign languages, usually English, are introduced.

Great attention is paid to physical education and “the practice of ‘toughening’ wherein children are systematically exposed to cold air and cold water so that they will develop resistance to winter weather” (Ispa 2002, p. 399). In any weather, children spend from two to three hours outdoors. Many of the urban kindergartens boast swimming pools, gyms, and sport grounds. High stan-
dards of nutrition, demonstrated by meals and snacks served four times daily, ensure sound nutrition.

**General Schools Program or Secondary Education**

The Russian government provides universal, free, compulsory education in a nine-year general schools program. Students enroll at the age of six or seven, the preference being seven years of age. According to Sweeney:

Students matriculate the general schools program at the primary education level in two stages: an initial and an intermediate. During the initial stage, students learn reading, writing, arithmetic, elements of theoretical thinking, speech patterns, and basics of personal hygiene. Students cover this stage in three or four years, depending on their personal abilities and aptitudes. At the intermediate stage, students continue their general educational training but with a greater concern for a more analytical understanding. (1993, p. 3)

Furthermore, Russian literature, language, and mathematics are key subjects learned in both stages.

Grades 1-4 mark the beginning of learning in the school setting. The school day usually runs from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Students are assigned to one teacher for the core subjects: native tongue (Russian), literature, arithmetic, geography, and environment (early science). Specialists teach physical education, music and art, and foreign languages. New to the classrooms are play areas where students independently read books or play with toys and interact with other children.
Stage two of the general schools program offers five years of instructional and curricular variety. The core curriculum is native tongue (Russian), literature, geography, general and modern history, algebra, geometry, chemistry, biology, physical training, and foreign language. According to the abilities and talents of their children, parents choose alternative curricula or schools. For example, if a student excels in mathematics, he will receive more math instruction per week. A different teacher teaches each subject, and class periods range from 40 to 45 minutes. After successful completion of the first nine years of school, the student is awarded the Secondary Education Certificate of Partial Completion.

Perestroika has pioneered the role of “class moms.” The class mom, or homeroom teacher, is charged with monitoring pupils’ progress, conduct, health, and parent relations. Once a week she leads a “class hour,” in which duties, grades, and class activities are discussed. For example, she appoints a class duty officer who sweeps the floor, tidies the classroom, opens and closes windows, and cleans the slate board. The class mom maintains a class journal that is a permanent school record of the pupils’ quarterly grades and attendance. She is also the Russian instructor and fulfills her duties not only for one semester but also for the entire general schools program. This system encourages strong ties among class members and proffers a caregiver and counselor for the students.

The typical classroom configuration places the teacher’s desk in front facing student desks that traditionally seat two pupils side by side. The class mom
assigns students to their seats, and most arrangements place a male next to a female. As there are no lockers, most desks have hooks for holding the required briefcase or backpack that each child carries. Slate boards are common and require chalk for writing and a rag for erasing. The Russian obsession with potted plants extends into the classroom. Thanks to perestroika, there are video and audio recorders in the classroom, and some elite schools feature sofas and armchairs accompanied with books and toys.

The head of the school is the principal. Principals generally are women. (As a result of the deaths of enlisted men serving in World War II, known as the Great Patriotic War, women assumed roles previously relegated to men.) The principal has a somewhat different role when compared to an American counterpart. First, she is responsible for some teaching, though not more than 12 hours a week. Second, she is expected to be a "master teacher," able to do well what she instructs. The principal maintains a tight rein on school activities, regularly observing classes, evaluating the conduct of the class and the efficacy of the course, and reporting to the authorities. Though a principal may criticize and reprimand, her actions still are subject to the collective wisdom of the teachers’ council, a select group of teachers at the respective school.

The principal attends to school visitors; she also is responsible for the care and treatment of recalcitrant children (or even parents). In rural areas, she has a similar status to that of village elder and is involved in assorted community issues, in addition to her duties as principal.
A school has at least two vice-principals, each with different responsibilities. One vice-principal is mainly responsible for assuring that the curriculum is adhered to; the second attends to the primary grades and organizes extracurricular activities, such as chess, puppetry, and dancing. Special schools often have a vice-principal in charge of the school's specialty, such as the vice-principal in English. Vice-principals also teach, but their class load is less than that of a regular teacher and not more than 12 class hours per week.

The equivalent of the American custodian is the tehnichka, whose duties are the general maintenance of the school. She also may supervise the cloakroom, when such an attendant is considered necessary. To aid her, the children themselves are called on regularly to perform small duties and cleanup work. For example, youngsters tape the double windows at the onslaught of winter and distribute food, china, and cutlery at lunchtime. For these efforts, the child earns a quarterly grade based on his or her socially useful work.

Similar to the Parent Teacher Association, an evening meeting of teachers and parents is held at least once a quarter. Topics include current discipline or academic problems, and parents help resolve these issues. School or class projects and academic successes also are discussed. Attendance at these meetings is barely short of obligatory.

Each class also has a committee comprised of active parents who arrange trips and other activities. All of the various parent committees convene to arrange the graduation party, and members often assist homeroom
teachers. The "collective" authority is the school council, a group of teachers and parents who resolve school-related issues and establish school regulations. The concept of the school council is an outcome of perestroika.

The atmosphere in a Russian classroom reflects the personality and talents of the teacher. Conduct is more restricted in the sense that some rules are observed that Americans consider formal. The pupils rise when the teacher enters the room and seat themselves only when so instructed. They also rise when they are called on and generally do not speak without permission. In general, class size is about 35 students, who dutifully show respect to their teacher.

Classroom posture does not include slouching, and hands are raised with the elbow in contact with the desk. Some experimental schools offer a more relaxed atmosphere similar to that of American schools. On the other hand, the teacher's attitude toward the children, especially outside the classroom, is not one of severity and repression, but rather that of a benevolent dictator. As previously discussed, the homeroom teacher system used in the secondary schools builds a close association between at least one teacher, the class mom, and her students. This bond often lasts well beyond the school years.

One tenet of Russian pedagogy is that the busy child is doubly blessed: Time spent in studying or practicing is time unavailable for unproductive mischief. In grade 1, homework is minimal, but the child in grade 2 spends approximately one hour per day on homework. The youngster in grade 9 spends a minimum of three to four hours daily completing homework assignments.
Law and order are maintained not by threat of bodily punishment, which is officially outlawed, but by other strategies. One such tactic is the use of the group: antisocial behavior and poor grades are equivalent to letting the team down. The “team” here denotes a number of groups, including the family. The group code of ethics includes the loathing a tattletale provokes (The taunt is “yabeda!”). Pupils generally support one other, reporting only on someone who is morally wrong. Thus the situation is two-edged: mutual support concerning desirable aims is reinforced, but so is support for undesirable aims. Collusion is the bane of the teacher’s existence.

The teacher is not alone in maintaining discipline and safeguarding the academic backsliders from falling over the edge. After exhausting the psychology inherent to class groups, the teacher draws on school honor to make her point. The teacher also reports to the parents and enlists their cooperation. Most defiant students are managed by one of these means. In extreme cases, expulsion from school occurs; and those with severe discipline problems are referred to boarding schools.

After Grade 9

Completion of grade 9 presents educational options. The student can stay at school and further his or her education, attend specialized schools, attend alternative schools, or enter a technical school. The general curriculum has two parts: the basic curriculum that is standard for all the schools and the tailored curriculum
that meets the purpose and design of the school. The basic curriculum comprises 32 to 38 hours of weekly instruction as follows: mathematics (algebra, geometry, and trigonometry), physics, the native tongue, literature, general and modern history, and natural sciences. Students further select courses from their particular field of study: mathematics, humanities, sciences (biology and chemistry), geography, and linguistics. Completion of secondary education earns the graduate the Certificate of Completed General Secondary Education Award.

The gymnasium is a specialized school associated with the former upper classes, and tuition is charged. The gymnasium includes grades 1 to 11. The curriculum includes the core courses plus specific subjects, including Latin or Greek, aesthetics, a variety of foreign languages, and interpersonal communication. Based on a student’s strengths, additional courses are studied.

New to grades 10 and 11 is the lyceum. This system offers advanced courses in many areas: mathematics, physics, economics, biology, linguistics, art, history, law, pedagogy, languages, etc. Leading principles include smaller class size, individualization of education, orientation toward students’ original work as the main component of academic process, and cooperative programs that involve theoretical study and practice. The motto of Humanities Lyceum #15, located in Pskov, Russia, is “We create the condition. You study” (Project Harmony 2001). Lyceums require significant tuition fees; creating something from nothing is more difficult than converting an existing framework.
Boarding schools provide the standard curriculum or specialized training and a residence for students. Orphans, neglected children, and students with discipline problems are educated in these schools. Also, children with special talents who cannot afford after-school programs attend these and receive certification in sports, ballet, or music. Contacts with home and the outside world are maintained as much as possible. Some children spend their Sundays at home; and frequent trips to museums, factories, or soccer games are arranged to immerse the children in the real world. The boarding schools employ teachers and upbringers who are responsible for the physical and moral progress of the children in their care.

Special schools emphasize developing special abilities, correcting or coping with special inabilities, or dealing with special situations. There are schools for “difficult” children and for students who are mentally challenged. These schools offer the regular curriculum or subjects suitable to the strengths and needs of the learner.

Specialized language schools introduce a foreign language in the first or second grades, four lessons per week, and extend the instruction throughout the student’s education. Admission is competitive and based on entrance examination scores. The curriculum has been revolutionized by including international exchange programs (USA Freedom Support Act), programs sponsored by various organizations (Peace Corps Teaching English as a Second Language in Russian), and programs that support or aid the specialized language schools (American Embassy English Language Programs). In grade 7, such
courses as geography and literature are taught in the foreign language. Moscow alone has more than 100 foreign language schools. British English, rather than American English, is the most popular language studied. This most prestigious education offers high-quality instruction and facilitates university admission.

A result of perestroika is the creation of military schools that train future army and navy officers. The most famous is Suvorov's School for the Army, named after Alexander Suvorov (1730-1800), who commanded the Russian troops against the Turks and the French in the Italian and Swiss campaigns. Open to both genders after matriculation from grade 9, military schools are gaining popularity.

Under Communism, the Soviet Union developed a comprehensive system of education that emphasized technical and vocational training. Today, following grade 9, one can pursue an academic secondary focus with vocational, technical, or professional education options. The operative words are srednii and spesialnie. The former denotes academic instruction through the equivalent of grade 10 and 11, or until the high school diploma has been earned. The latter offers additional training in a particular field of work. Texnikums provide highly skilled technical or clerical training, such as electronic technology, engineering, food processing, and finance. Ychilishes offer lower-level training in nursing and medical technology. The curriculum scope and sequence vary from two to four years.

A third category of vocational school is the trade school. With an emphasis on carpentry or plumbing, the
student is engaged as an apprentice, and wages are paid accordingly. The length of the program varies from a number of months to several years, depending on the trade. Officially, one may advance from the texnikum or ychilishe to the university, but in practice most graduates pursue their employment.

Evening and correspondence schools are common. The texnikum and ychilishe offer evening and second-shift divisions; also available are correspondence schools. Greater contact with pupils is evident when compared to American correspondence schools. Likewise, universities offer many evening and correspondence courses, and 50% of the students earn their degrees in this manner. Completion of the program takes longer, and students are granted one day off per week with an extra month of vacation. In general, the Russians view this as a less desirable way to earn one’s college education.

If a student aspires to be a teacher, she attends the pedagogical college (the new term for this site). There are two options for teacher education: elementary, grades 1-4, and secondary, grades 5-9. The elementary teacher is responsible for one group of children all day, every day, in all subjects except music, art, and physical education. Her contact-hour load is 24 hours per week, or four lessons per day, six days a week.

Secondary teachers are trained at pedagogical universities as subject specialists. Their training includes one to two areas of specialization and takes four to five years to complete. They teach in their areas a minimum of 18 class hours per week, earning extra income by teaching more hours. In addition to instructing, teachers are required to visit students at home, attend nu-
merous teacher and parent-teacher meetings, and lead interest groups during after-school hours.

The social status of teachers is better than in the United States. Parents and students highly respect teachers. However, low salaries discourage people from entering the profession, and many administrators hire retirees to meet the demand for teachers (substitute teaching is not a practice). Educators do belong to a trade union, and strikes have been considered.

Most full-time students at the college level are paid to attend school, though inadequately due to inflation. The amounts received are based on four criteria: the academic field (physicists are paid more than historians), the year of study (fifth-year students receive more than first-year students), academic progress (the higher the achiever, the more the money), and serving as attendance taker (a student elected to take roll at large lecture classes). Larger stipends, frequently bearing the name of distinguished persons, are granted to those who are academically talented. The higher stipends for science or technical majors encourage students to enroll in those fields.

Higher Education

In the Soviet era, the state provided generous funding for the higher education system. Access to free higher education prevailed, and the system accelerated economic development, especially in the sciences and technologies. Nobel-prize-winners and well-trained graduates flourished.
Centralized control also meant that higher education institutions (HEIs) directly served the needs of the government. The curriculum was centrally determined and standardized. Teaching of the humanities and social sciences was subject to party censorship. Enrollment targets based on professional specialization were set. Employment was guaranteed through a centrally required system of job placement for graduates. “The government served both as a provider and a consumer of education” (Bain 2003, p. 6).

Perestroika, coupled with liberalization of prices and privatization, changed this dramatically. As the fiscal base for Russian higher education declined, reform increased. Glasnost (publicity, openness, open voice) encouraged freedom of speech, and university faculty began pursuing their own ideas in teaching and research. Students became more committed to learning and more aware of the global requirements for success: computer literacy, knowledge of one or more foreign languages, and job opportunities. Programs diversified, providing enhanced opportunities to choose specializations that matched needs and abilities. Higher education revenue required a variety of sources: the general taxpayer, parents, students, donors, and purchasers of university goods and services (Bain 2003). Institutional autonomy and self-government were realized.

The 1996 Law on Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education covers three types of HEIs: universities, academies, and institutes. Universities offer a broad spectrum of subjects in the sciences and the humanities and conduct fundamental and applied research. Mos-
cow State University is the most prestigious institution; and St. Petersburg State University, the oldest, ranks second with a strong academic tradition. Academies specialize in two or three aspects of a single subject and collaborate with a particular industry. Examples are the Russian Academy of Agriculture and the Russian Academy of Health Sciences. Institutes are housed within a university or academy for the purpose of conducting research and scientific undertakings.

A high school diploma does not guarantee access to higher education. Another criterion remains: to pass the competitive entrance examinations. These are administered during June and August, and the content is based on the applicant's future specialty plus written Russian language composition. As the number of potential students far exceeds the number of higher education openings, private tutors frequently are hired to help students jump this hurdle.

With the establishment of the market economy and the emergence of the first private HEIs, several public universities started charging tuition in 1991. By 2000, tuition-charged admissions almost equaled admissions with full state support, and today tuition is the second major source of revenue after state allocations (Bain 2003). Stipends are allocated to high-achieving students.

Once accepted to the HEI, the course of study usually lasts five years (medicine requires six). Russian students specialize upon entrance, and their college courses are preselected. Electives are optional and rarely chosen. During the first two years, students are required to study a second language; in the third year, they must demon-
strate competence by passing an examination. A student may change his major, but this seldom occurs as credits in one subject generally are not applicable to another.

Research at the undergraduate level is encouraged. Student membership in research organizations begins in the second year of study. Regular meetings are held, and research is conducted under the guidance of faculty members. In addition, annual competitions are held, and the Russian Academy of Sciences publishes the distinguished papers.

Writing the diploma thesis is a research requirement in one's major field. The content demonstrates understanding of the field and applying investigative tools. This project is significant, and students in technical and scientific subjects often are excused from their final semester to focus solely on the research and writing.

Instructors assign grades periodically so that the student has some indication of his or her performance. However, final subject grades are recorded only at the end of the semester and are based on the final examination scores. It is quite possible for a student to do passing work all along and then fail the final exam and the course.

There are several grading systems. One has four levels: excellent, good, satisfactory, and poor. Poor is equivalent to failing. Another system uses only two ratings, credit and no credit. Grades are important to the students: poor grades can reduce one's stipend or result in expulsion. Cheating is not uncommon and is regarded more as a game than as a sin. The authorities attempt to circumvent this through the use of oral exams that, in turn, give total power to the examiner.
Diplomas are awarded after satisfactory completion of all requirements. Extraordinary students earn a "diploma with excellent"; the majority of diplomas simply testify to the student's having taken and passed courses within a certain major. In addition to the diploma, the graduate receives a transcript. Different from the American transcript, the document lists only the major courses taken and the respective performance. These typically are presented to potential employers, rather than sent from the university. Securing employment is now a do-it-yourself affair involving employment offices or influential connections.

The pursuit of graduate work usually occurs after the hopeful student has worked several years. Then the candidate applies and takes yet another examination. Graduate work in Russia enjoys a different status from that in America: Fewer are chosen for the honor, and the honor is vastly greater. Graduate work also merits a stipend. Others pay fees from their own or parents' resources. Education loans do not exist.

All graduate degrees require the approval of the Higher Qualification Commission of the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education. Both graduate degrees, the candidate degree and the doctor's degree, require the writing and public defense of a thesis, or dissertation. Graduate students earning the candidate degree normally spend three or four years doing so. During the first two years, they must pass three tests: foreign language, philosophy, and the specialty area. These tests are not viewed as hurdles; and once they are passed, the thesis requirement begins.
The candidate degree is the lesser of the two degrees and parallels the doctor of philosophy in American education. The doctorate degree is more prestigious, taking years to achieve, and is awarded only to those who have performed significantly in their field. Application is required, no course work is necessary, and the dissertation represents the major contribution. Up to one year, with full pay, is allotted for writing the thesis; and the "student" usually advises and supervises candidate degree applicants working under his or her direction. When completed, the degree recipient earns the title "doctor of science" and is eligible for hire as an appointed professor or as an "honorific" who supervises candidate degree students at research institutions.

The Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation assumes the roles of quality control, accreditation, and the formation of national policy for the entire higher education sector. A variety of ministries and departments oversee the HEIs.

At the university level, the rector (president) is elected by a conference of faculty, staff, and student representatives, but the ultimate approval is by the minister of education. The rector is charged by the academic senate to run the university as a whole, including the major financial and personnel decisions. The academic senate is the major governing body for the university, and the rector serves as its ex-officio chair. The senate consists of all the deans and select professors, plus representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education and the trade union.

The university is divided into departments, each headed by a dean. Russian universities are not comprised
of colleges, as in the United States. Typical departments are the historical department, chemistry department, and philological department (Moscow University has 14 departments). Each department appoints an academic council of its own. Departments are divided into specialties, or programs, run by a "chief," who is usually a professor in rank.

The professor is the highest academic appointment, and professors have earned the doctor of science degree. The title "academician" is awarded to professors for outstanding research contributions. Next in position is the "docent," who has earned the candidate of science degree. Class instructors are of two ranks: the master teacher and the assistant. The former primarily lectures, and the latter oversees laboratory courses and examinations and occasionally lectures for the master teacher. The title "instructor" denotes those who have not earned their candidate degree; they are responsible for monitoring quiz sections and teaching ancillary courses.

Is higher education better today when compared to the Soviet era? Many contextual factors are in flux, creating challenges for the institutions, faculty, and students. On the other hand, the current system draws on the insights of a variety of people. Furthermore, the new autonomous nature of higher education promotes scholarship and enhances graduate employability and service to the community, thus improving the socialization of students and ensuring the sustainability of the institution. Overall, higher education is better today than during the Soviet era.
Cross-Cultural Differences

Cooperative opportunities between Americans and Russians have grown since perestroika. The U.S. Information Agency allocates funds for Russian and American faculty to work together on course development. The English Language Office in the American Embassy in Moscow supports English teacher associations in Russia and organizes conferences and professional development programs on regional and national levels. The office coordinates an electronic network for English language teaching professionals. Such English language programs as the Visitors Program in Teaching English as a Foreign Language and American Studies, the Freedom Support Act, the Junior Faculty Development Program, the Fulbright Program, Peace Links, and the National Foundation Program expand horizons and provide resources for faculty to develop new courses or to enhance existing courses through collaborative faculty relationships. Inherent in all these opportunities is cultural understanding.

Culture is a system of learned beliefs, values, and behaviors generally shared by members of a social group.
It comprises attributes learned and observed by individuals within a society since birth and shared with other members throughout life: habits, knowledge, art, morals, law, customs, etc. Culture is highly complex; it encompasses many categories, constructs, features, and parameters.

Kourova (2001) distinguished 24 cultural differences that can be incorporated into the multicultural curriculum. Her cultural model is that of an iceberg, demonstrating that the various factors are interrelated, yet each has a specific role in cross-cultural communication. The cultural iceberg has two subdivisions: the visible and invisible parts. The visible, smaller section is comprised of tangible, behavioral elements: customs, food, etiquette, dress, gestures, work habits, academics, language, and literature. The larger, invisible portion encompasses intangible rudiments: values, philosophies, norms, goals, personal space, time, attitudes, and beliefs.

Values are so important that “without much dispute people would agree that values lie at the core of life and human action” (Barrett 1961, p. 1). Values vary considerably between the United States and Russia. In the United States, self-reliance and independence (both financial and emotional) are highly valued. In general, American youth leave home between the ages of 18 and 21. If they do reside with their parents, finances usually are not shared. “Even if they are not truly self-reliant, most Americans believe they must at least appear to be so. In order to be in the mainstream of American life, to have power, and/or respect, individuals must be seen as self-reliant” (Datesman et al. 1997, p. 24). American
institutions support this value; for example, student loans are available with low or no interest, and credit cards are abundant. Even if the parents financially support their son or daughter’s college education, they usually expect reimbursement. Rich parents do not necessarily mean rich students.

In Russia dependence (both financial and emotional) is the norm. The system does not promote independence, even though many pursue the dream and underscore their independence in displayed behavior at home. Young adults (even as students) often live with their parents in apartments. Frequently, three generations reside together. If a student studies away from home, the parents, not student loans, provide financial support. Even with a university stipend, the amount is not sufficient for living expenses. In Russia, rich parents do mean rich students.

Freedom and individualism are prime American values. Individuals usually are free from group control and focus on their personal goals and aspirations and needs. American individualism is reflected in the use of singular, possessive pronouns, such as my family, my college, or my country.

In Russia collectivism is valued. Citizens associate themselves as part of a group, even though individualism is desired, and they honor group norms. Evidence of this is the institution of class moms and the bonding that occurs during the general schools program. Foremost for Russians is what is good for the group. Collectivism is reflected in the use of plural, possessive pronouns, such as our family, our college, and our country.
Examples of Cross-Cultural Differences

In order to further describe Russian values, Kourova and her colleagues (2004) surveyed 243 students from Rostov-on-Don, Penza, and Novocherkask. They were asked to list 10 values and to provide concrete examples. The following are some results with comparisons to the American perspectives.

Problem Solving. If Russians have a problem or complaint, they talk with relatives or friends. If Americans have problems, they make an appointment with their psychiatrist. Furthermore, Americans are projected as always “okay.” When Russians watch American movies, they view scenes where the brave American policeman is shot or assaulted by the criminal. The companion comforts the bleeding and bruised victim and inquires, “Are you okay?” The victim replies: “I am okay.”

Money. Russians borrow money from their relatives or friends. Americans borrow money from the bank.

Attitude Regarding One’s Country. In Russia, love of country is fundamental. Nature is revered and referred to in possessive terms: our birch trees. Patriotism is evident, yet Russians tend to belittle the government.

Americans venerate freedom and democracy and extend this view beyond its borders. Patriotism mirrors ethnocentrism, and Americans believe their country is superior. The American flag is universally displayed, and the national anthem sung at sporting events.

Academics. In Russia, the academic focus is formal, and general knowledge is emphasized. “Cheating” on written exams is common; therefore most university
exams are conducted orally. Professors are addressed by their first name followed by the patronymic, for example, Alla Valentinovna (not the husband’s name, Kourova). There is neither tenure nor a sabbatical process. Faculty members, regardless of their experience and honors, account for their research, teaching, and service activities every five years.

In America, the school atmosphere is informal. The focus is on pragmatics: do it and remember it. Skills, creativity, and interaction are stressed. Students study diligently for exams, and plagiarism is grounds for expulsion. Professors often are addressed by their first names only. Tenure and sabbaticals are the norm.

Language. Russian students view the English language as “crazy.” There are no eggs in eggplant and no ham in hamburger and neither an apple nor pine in a pineapple. Sweetmeats are candies, while sweetbreads, which are not sweet, are meat. No clothes are involved in salad dressing.

Paradoxes are prominent: quicksand works slowly; boxing rings are square; and a guinea pig neither is from Guinea nor is it a pig. One can make amends but not one amend. If “teachers taught,” why did not “preachers praught?” If a vegetarian eats vegetables, what does a humanitarian eat? People recite at a play and play at a recital. When the stars are out, they are visible, but when the lights are out, they are invisible.

Filling in a simple form in English is a challenge for Russian students. “First name, last name” looks common for speakers of English, but in Russian these are two different terms. The word “name” does not repeat
itself; there is no confusion. In official Russian documents, the "last name" always comes first.

Opportunity. A significant difference between Russia and the United States is opportunity. The chances for advancement and progress are far superior in the United States. No matter what the age, anyone can apply to a university, change careers, or relocate if they have the will and determination. Prowess in sports offers unlimited possibilities. Opportunities are improving in Russia. Intelligence contributes to career success; however, money and relations remain the main sources of advancement in Russian society.

Our culture shapes the way we view the world. The rules of our culture seem perfectly natural to us. We assume that the way we think and act is normal and correct and that any sane or civilized person would agree with us. People often begin to understand their own cultures only after they have begun interacting with someone from another culture.

Perestroika has influenced many changes. Higher education development has enabled increased communication and opportunities for faculty and students. Enhanced interaction has resulted in greater mobility of people and ideas, supported by an increased use of information and communications technology. So that the changes are perceived accurately, sensitivity to cross-cultural differences is of great consequence.
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ISBN 0-87367-908-3