

Chapter 55

Global Education in the Russian Federation

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the history of international activities and global education in the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation. Although readers might expect that Russia has over the centuries had a significant impact on global matters, just the opposite has been the case. Rather than impressing its mark on the world, Russia has generally been a country that was affected by global developments and has had to react to its demands and influences. One of the barriers to Russia's assuming a more proactive role today is Russian suspicion toward globalization and the intentions of Western countries within a global framework. In addition, Russians fear that too hasty an introduction of globalization might help tear their multi-ethnic nation apart. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that unless Russia stabilizes its domestic cultural interactions and unless direct benefits for Russia can be discerned from a more global orientation, its involvement in global education will remain quite restrained.

INTRODUCTION

“Russia is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma”—this oft-quoted shibboleth attributed to Winston Churchill testifies to the hesitancy and vexation with which politicians, academics, and members of the general public at times approach their relationship with Russia and its people. The sentiment is widespread. Many students of Russian have probably had to read essays about the “mysterious Russian soul,” and travel guidebooks rarely fail to include a mention of the subject. In all fairness, the Russian soul is also quite popular a

topic of conversation among Russians themselves, and it is probably no great surprise that one of the masterpieces of Russian literature, written by Nikolai Gogol in 1842, would be entitled *Dead Souls*.

In its entire history, Russia has predominantly been the recipient of innovation and new ideas rather than their supplier, and despite Bolshevik dreams of a world state under Russian leadership, the Soviets, too, imported rather than exported learning and ideas and reacted as best they could to international developments instead of assuming a leadership role (with the exception of their

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relations with their Eastern European satellites). Today, Russia is still trying to catch up with other countries instead of helping set a global agenda. At the same time, Russians are passionate about impressing their own seal upon globalization and global education by modifying it to fit Russian needs and be responsive to Russian issues. Three unofficial but powerful guidelines for global education seem to have emerged as a result of the above attitudes:

1. Globalization is accepted in Russia if it clearly benefits the country and its people. Globalization is not to be engaged in for its own sake or the benefit (real or imagined) of others.
2. Globalization is acceptable only if strict limits are placed upon it to ensure that Russian culture and identity are not in peril.
3. Global education is seen as inseparable from multicultural education in the context of a multi-ethnic Russian state.

To understand Russian attitudes toward globalization in general and to assess the efforts of the last 20 years to globalize education as well as the limited success such efforts have had, it becomes necessary to acknowledge that Russia's position between East and West has created a national identity different from the identities of Western European countries. It is also necessary to understand how strongly the past still drives the decisions made in the present for the future. As a result, discussing globalization and global education in Russia today can be accomplished only if the history of international elements in Russian education is discussed first. This chapter will begin with a history of international relations in Russian education, examine global education in the Soviet Union, and finally look at global educational initiatives in the Russian Federation. In each case, reference will be made to the three tenets laid out above.

INTERNATIONAL ELEMENTS IN RUSSIAN EDUCATION FROM PETER THE GREAT TO THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

In imperial Russia, three major attitudes toward the internationalization of education prevailed:

1. A well-developed educational system was needed to provide Russians with the knowledge and skills to be internationally competitive.
2. Western systems of education were seen as superior and often adopted without considerations for Russian needs.
3. Political, social, and philosophical ideas from the West eventually came to be seen as potential or real threats to the power of the ruling classes.

Until the ascent to the Russian throne of Peter I. (the Great, 1682-1725), Russia for centuries had existed in relative isolation from the rest of Europe. Formal education had not played an important role, and what had developed differed significantly from the rest of Europe owing to the Byzantine roots of the Orthodox Church, one of the major education providers. European influence, although extant, had been quite limited. Peter, however, feared that if the Russian military and administration were not reformed based on Western models, Russia would become vulnerable to attacks from outside. To accomplish these reforms, a formal education system was needed, and decision makers were convinced that their most advantageous route was to borrow Western European models (Hans, 1963; McClelland, 1979).

When Peter embarked on his massive campaign of modernization in military, economic, social, and educational matters, he faced significant resistance from the nobility (Acton, 1986). However, Peter was determined to overcome Russia's backwardness by introducing Western models and forms of

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