

STUDYING TEACHING AND LEARNING

Trends in Soviet and
American Research

Edited by
B. Robert Tabachnick
Thomas S. Popkewitz
Beatrice Beach Szekely

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PREFACE

As part of the Soviet-American cultural exchange program, seven American scholars in the field of education were asked to reflect on significant issues and accomplishments of research on teaching, especially research that relates teaching to learning. The Ministry of Education of the USSR invited distinguished Soviet scholars to perform a similar task. The U.S. and Soviet papers became the subject of discussions during a week-long seminar held in Moscow at the USSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences in December 1978.

These papers illuminate the way in which American and Soviet educational research is guided by national traditions of scholarship and national conceptions of social interaction, and the roles that educational institutions play within each society. The themes of these papers also give focus to problems and theories of pedagogy which are of common interest in both countries.

Scholars in the United States and the Soviet Union operate from characteristically different assumptions regarding:

- 1 whether pluralism or consensus should guide the work of a research community;
- 2 whether research and development should be essentially the same or separate (though related) enterprises;
- 3 whether educational research should be concerned primarily with how to apply or implement a desired model of classroom behavior, or whether research should seek primarily to illuminate or help us understand classroom practice.

Both groups of scholars shared an interest in problems of individualizing instruction, motivating learning, developing problem-solving abilities, and understanding the socialization of both teaching professionals and pupils. Subtle differences existed, however, in the meanings which were associated with each of these concepts.

The two sections of this book illustrate the different approaches taken in each research community. An introductory chapter by two of the editors, T. S. Popkewitz and B. R. Tabachnick, explores the relationship of a world view—such as that of dialectical materialism shared by our Soviet colleagues, or liberal, pluralistic perspectives shared by the Americans—to national traditions of scholarship, which shape research. At the beginning of the Soviet section is a chapter by the

third editor, Dr. Beatrice Beach Szekely, describing Soviet educational research: basic premises and organization, attainments, and current priorities.

Prior to 1978, Soviet-American comparative studies in education discussed formal institutions and programs in the two countries. This most recent seminar goes beyond earlier macro analyses by providing a more detailed examination of the substance of educational research about teaching and learning. The Soviet schools of didactics research and educational psychology are world renowned, and outstanding representatives of these two schools of Soviet research participated in the seminar. The American contributors are all actively engaged in research on teaching.

The Soviet-American cultural exchange program in education dates back 20 years, to the 1958 signing of the agreement that established exchange programs between the Soviet Union and the United States in the areas of culture, education, science, and technology. Since then, many delegations of Soviet and American educationists have visited each other's countries, guest lecturers and visiting scholars have been exchanged, and exchange programs have been established for graduate study and postdoctoral research. The exchange of official delegations in the field of education provides the background for the 1978 seminar on educational research whose proceedings make up this book.

The earliest delegations sent to have a look at the educational systems of the United States and the Soviet Union engaged primarily in short-term visits whose purpose was to become acquainted with Soviet institutions. Itineraries included exemplary schools, higher education institutions, and educational research centers. In the lingering spirit of the Cold War, both sides sought to determine how their American or Russian counterparts used education to contribute to national security and economic growth. The successful orbiting of the Soviet artificial earth satellite Sputnik, of course, was the primary event that aroused curiosity, envy, and great anxiety in the United States about how the Russians trained manpower for aerospace technology, defense, and industry. The early American exchange delegations in education looked for, and reported on, such subjects as systemic descriptions of Soviet education, the politics of Soviet education, and the critical subject of manpower training.¹

The proceedings of the 1978 seminar reflect changes in the climate of cultural exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union in the last two decades. Scholars are looking beyond the formal provision of education related to competition in the international arms race and have begun to look at the educational knowledge which informs teaching in the two countries. In the United States, psychologists have long known of the existence of the brilliant school of Soviet educational

psychology founded in the 1920s and 30s by Lev Vygotsky and developed after his death in 1934 by his students. Since the 1960s, several anthologies of articles (in English translation) by the Soviet followers of this school have made known current applications of Vygotsky's work to Soviet schooling and the study of intellectual development.² Soviet pedagogy continues today to draw heavily from the Vygotsky school of educational psychology and learning theory, and Soviet educational research in the area of teaching and learning prompted the organization of our seminar.

With the renewal in 1973 of the original cultural exchange agreement, education was designated as the first field in which joint seminars were to be held between American and Soviet scholars.³ This provision for bilateral seminars took the exchange program a giant step forward, beyond the exchange of official delegations on academic tours, to the exchange of substantive ideas and information. In 1976, two seminars were held on higher education.⁴ Following the successes of these meetings, in 1977 a seminar was organized on the education of teachers. The 1977 seminar was organized by, and held at the Washington headquarters of, the Council for International Exchange of Scholars (CIES), the contract agency that administers the guest lecturer and foreign scholar programs funded by the Fulbright-Hays Act.* As this report on the education exchange program goes to press, the future of the exchange is in question because of the new, severe tension in Soviet-American relations caused by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Naturally, one can only hope that recent strides in the sharing of information between the two countries in such fields as education will not be lost.

Soviet input to the proceedings of the 1977 seminar on teacher education focused upon descriptions of teacher training institutions and curricula in the Soviet Union. The delegation was composed of four rectors of pedagogical (or teacher training) institutes and headed by the first deputy USSR minister of education, F. G. Panachin, and the Ukrainian SSR minister of education, A. M. Marinich. The American delegates, by contrast, included university professors of curriculum and instruction, researchers in such areas as rural education and bilingualism, and specialists in Soviet education. In their

*The activities of CIES in the exchange of lecturers and scholars and joint seminars should not be confused with those of IREX (International Research and Exchange Board), which funds American graduate study and postdoctoral research in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe. (See, Gerald H. Read, "The International Communication Agency, a New Governmental Agency for Exchange of People and Ideas," Slavic and European Education Review 1 (1978): 57-58.)

papers and discussion, they grappled with such issues as the social and political conditions that influence the development of school curricula and teacher training, the internal dynamics of the teacher education process, and the challenges posed to education in the United States by the increasing recognition of cultural pluralism. Several of the American participants came away from the meetings seeking an opportunity to engage Soviet colleagues in discussions about educational research for teacher training and schooling in the Soviet Union. It was from these meetings that the 1978 seminar in Moscow resulted.

The papers presented at the Moscow seminar reflected the different perspectives on research of the two communities. The American papers represented a wide spectrum of American educational thought, ranging from discussions of specific research on teaching behaviors and teacher education, to that of contrasting paradigms of educational research in the United States. In reading through the American papers, one finds divergent views about what are the salient questions to guide research, the assumptions that underlie inquiry, and purposes of such an enterprise.

The Soviet papers, in contrast, provide a more consensual view of the purposes, procedures, and assumptions of educational research. The organizing committee at the Academy of Pedagogical Science broke the field down to the three major subdisciplines of educational research that study teaching and learning, and enlisted outstanding scholars from the academy's institutes specializing in those areas to outline their current research. These subdisciplines were: didactics or instructional theory, educational psychology, and specialized teaching methods for the grade levels and subjects in the school curriculum.* In this book, we include three Soviet papers which were not given in the seminar in Moscow. The Soviet authors focus upon instructional theory, educational psychology, and teaching methodology, representing the official school of research that dominates in the USSR.

At a first reading, the Soviet papers reproduced in this volume, which like the American papers were prepared expressly for the seminar, read differently than those by the Americans. Questions about educational issues and the nature of theory are not raised, but assumed as a result of 50 years of discussions about the role of pedagogical sciences in the development of the Soviet Union. Being unable to speak for a single research "school" in the United States, the American papers represent the pluralistic nature of research in America.

*The American papers were translated into Russian by Israel Agranov, a recent emigre to the United States from the Soviet Union.

Exchanges such as these greatly advance the field of knowledge in comparative education studies between the United States and the Soviet Union. Rather than a group of comparativists per se, who present to each other second-hand what their compatriot scholars do at home and how education functions in their respective societies, the December 1978 seminar brought research practitioners of the two countries face-to-face to share their common interests. Intense, three-day immersion in each other's national approaches to research could only provide an initial acquaintance, but more seminars and publication of their proceedings—along with further exchanges of lecturers and visiting scholars—will advance such sharing of knowledge between the two countries. In working for the cultural exchange program in the future, we hope that comparative education will increasingly serve to expedite direct interchange and understanding.

B. R. T.
T. S. P.
B. B. S.

NOTES

1. Reports of such travel were followed up by publication of many books and articles. On the very first exchange visit, see Soviet Commitment to Education, Report of the First Official U.S. Education Mission to the U.S.S.R. (Washington, D.C., 1959) (reprinted, New York, Greenwood Press, 1969). Classic works on Soviet education published shortly thereafter include: The Politics of Soviet Education ed. George Z. F. Bereday and Jaan Ponnar (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1960); and Nicholas DeWitt, Education and Professional Employment in the U.S.S.R. (Washington: National Science Foundation, 1961). See also Nellie Apanasewicz and Seymour M. Rosen, Soviet Education: A Bibliography of English-Language Materials (Washington: HEW, 1964); and Nellie Apanasewicz, Education in the U.S.S.R.: An Annotated Bibliography of English-Language Materials, 1965-1973 (Washington: HEW, 1971).

2. See A Handbook of Contemporary Soviet Psychology, ed. Michael Cole and Irving Maltzman (New York: Basic Books, 1969); and Soviet Developmental Psychology, ed. Michael Cole (White Plains, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1977); see also Some Views on Soviet Psychology, ed. Raymond A. Bauer (Washington: American Psychological Association, 1962).

3. Yale Richmond, "US-USSR Exchanges: Some Recent Developments," Slavic and European Education Review 2 (1977), p. 34.

4. Seymour M. Rosen, "Reflections on a Seminar Trip to the USSR," Slavic and European Education Review 2 (1977), pp. 39-42.

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PART I

THE STUDY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING:
SOME AMERICAN VIEWS

1

SOVIET AND AMERICAN PEDAGOGICAL RESEARCH: DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES IN THE TWO COUNTRIES

Thomas S. Popkewitz
B. Robert Tabachnick

In recent years, in both the Soviet Union and the United States, there has been an increasingly intense comparative interest in research about teaching and learning. Americans have long been curious and (and, in the years following the Soviet Revolution, involved in) the vast Soviet effort to use schools as a vehicle for changing a prebendal, aristocratic consciousness into a socialist, industrial world view. Soviet academic interest in U.S. pedagogical scholarship reflects, in part, the new Soviet educational emphasis on individual differences in learning.

There is an ideological aspect to the interest in research on teaching and learning in the two scholarly communities. Some American and Soviet scholars tend to look at the educational context of the other country to study how basic social, political, and economic assumptions are filtered into pedagogical theory, and inform, not only purposes and directions of school, but also the conceptions of learning, teaching, and profession which dominate classroom activities. What is particularly interesting about this ideological concern is that rarely does either of the two scholarly communities apply the same critical analytic stance used to look outside national boundaries to examine the conduct of institutions within its own country.

This introductory chapter focuses upon some social and philosophical assumptions about pedagogical research which underlie the U.S. and Soviet papers presented in this volume. We view the discussions of pedagogical research as part of communities of discourse that have patterns of ideas and conduct which are socially and historically derived and which contain social values. To talk of American or Soviet research about teaching and learning presupposes certain epistemological and social assumptions about the purposes of schools in each society, and the role of the educational researcher in a social and cultural context. In each of the two countries, for example, there is talk about problem solving, individualization, and learning. These

words seem similar, but that similarity exists only superficially. The words reflect different sets of norms, beliefs, and practices that fashion and shape the outlook of science in each country and underlie the content of the research. As with such essays, however, we can only outline certain general patterns that seem salient for comparative understanding. It is our hope that future comparative research will give attention to the details of pedagogical research as scientific communities, illuminating the norms, patterns, behaviors, and priorities that exist within the larger social and cultural context in which that research takes place.

The essay is organized in the following way: First, we will discuss some aspects of the organization of pedagogical research in the two countries and the problem of making categorical distinctions, such as centralized versus decentralized research. Second, ideological characteristics of the research communities will be explored. Our assumption is that ideology is an essential aspect of all research and the problem is to understand how it exists and influences research communities. A third section gives attention to particular dimensions of scientific communities; that is, the role of disagreement and conflict about ideas within each community and how that influences the practice of research. The fourth section focuses upon the particular curricular approaches and methodologies that guide the Soviet research. Our quest in each case is to go beyond official definitions and myths about the two societies and their research communities by inquiring directly into the assumptions, implications, and consequences of practice.

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN SCHOOLING: THE SOVIET AND AMERICAN ORGANIZATION OF INQUIRY

There is an old adage which, for our purposes, can be stated thus: What we see on the surface as clear and simple is never in practice that clear or that simple. The appropriateness of this adage becomes apparent when we consider the formal organization of educational research on teaching and learning in the two countries.

The United States appears to have a decentralized school and research system, whereas the Soviets seem centralized and hierarchical. In part, these differences are traceable to different historical patterns. State and local autonomy is a major slogan in America, one that exists not only for school matters, but for other social and political affairs. Americans tend to fear (or often be apprehensive about) government encroachment into what are seen as local and private spheres. At the time of the American revolution, this fear of centralized government led the authors of the Constitution to give the federal government limited and explicit powers, and to reserve the remainder