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Post-Cold War Studies in Education (I)

Guest Editors:
Gita Steiner-Khamsi
Columbia University
Teachers College
and
William deJong-Lambert
City University of New York
Bronx Community College

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Christopher Simpson, ed., *Universities and Empire: Money and Politics in the Social Sciences During the Cold War* (New York: New Press, 1998).

2. Two examples are Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); and Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

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U.S. Social and Educational Research During the Cold War

An Interview with Harold J. Noah by Gita Steiner-Khamsi

When exactly during the cold war did the U.S. fascination with the educational system of the Soviet Union begin?

I don't think it was so much the cold war as Sputnik that did it. The launch of Sputnik was a severe shock to the United States' self-image, perhaps almost as much of a shock as 9/11. Just as Americans couldn't conceive that there would be a massive physical attack on their well-being, their view of themselves as preeminent in technology and secure in their homeland was devastated by the successful launch of Sputnik.

There's another important similarity between the two events. As with 9/11, the perceived threat to the U.S. posed by Sputnik was hyped to serve political ends. Then, as now, the United States Congress and the White House showed their mastery of expediency. An event falls into their lap and they know how to use it politically. Sputnik was hyped as a huge political and media event. On 4 October 1957 the Soviet Union beat the United States in

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The interview with Professor Noah was conducted in South Africa on 4 March 2006.

the race to create the earth's first artificial satellite by launching Sputnik 1 into low earth orbit. The device was about the size of a basketball and carried virtually no payload. All it did was to circle the earth every 98 minutes, emitting a continuous beep-beep-beep as it crossed the heavens. Sputnik 2 followed on 3 November 1957, this time carrying a dog, Laika. Although the United States "caught up" with the Soviet Union shortly thereafter with the launch of Explorer 1 on 31 January 1958, government and mass media combined to send the message that America's security was at stake. For sure we were all going to be wiped out, bombed from on high. It was crazy and got out of hand, as today's war on terror has also gotten out of hand and is going in exactly the wrong direction.

Don Adams (president of the Comparative Education Society in 1965) has commented on the U.S. fascination with the Soviet educational system in the video *Comparatively Speaking* (Adams 2006). He was absolutely right when he remarked that it was somehow hyped and ridiculous. The money came pouring in for Soviet studies at U.S. universities because the big question was: How did the Soviet Union ever manage to do this? Visible to everyone who looked up in the evening skies was that fast-moving shining dot, gleaming in the heavens, proof that the Soviet Union had indeed managed to put one over on us. Surely, behind it must be a fantastically superior Soviet system of general and technical education. This was the way the politicians and the media commentators framed the event. Before the end of 1958 the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) had been passed into law and NASA had been established. The NDEA was instituted primarily to stimulate the advancement of education in science, mathematics, and modern foreign languages, but it has provided aid in other areas, including technical education, area studies, geography, English as a second language, counseling and guidance, school libraries and librarianship, and educational media centers. In addition, the Act provided institutions of higher education with 90 percent of capital funds for low-interest loans to students. NDEA also gave federal support for improvement and change in elementary and secondary education. Its avowed purpose was to keep the United States ahead of the Soviet Union through education, viewed now as a vital tool to help the country win the cold war. Comparative and international studies of all kinds benefited from the federal government's largesse. Soviet studies particularly benefited.

How did you personally become involved in Soviet or Russian studies?

Already as a young man I wanted to learn Russian. In 1946 I graduated from the London School of Economics with a bachelor's degree in economics and

political science. I had no Russian then, but knew German and French. I had heard some spoken Russian in the war propaganda films that came from Russia. I realized that it was a beautiful, rich, complex language. Its strange alphabet was a challenge and a puzzle, and I love intellectual challenges and puzzles. I had read Russian poetry in translation. Then I was given a copy of *The Oxford Book of Russian Verse*. In the introduction, the editor, Maurice Baring, asserted: "To appreciate Pushkin it is necessary to learn Russian." That did it for me. I began my studies of Russian at an adult evening college in London—even acted in one or two plays we put on in Russian. Also, one of my friends edited a technical journal, and I translated articles (on rubber and plastics technology!) from Soviet sources for publication in her journal. At this time I was employed as a very junior member of the Research Department of the British Labour Party, writing on labor market policy and the restructuring of the electricity industry. After a couple of years I got bored with doing "research for hire" and decided to go into education and try to do something directly useful for humanity. I received a fellowship tenable at King's College, University of London, to study for a secondary school teaching diploma. Nicholas Hans, a first-rate exponent of comparative education, was teaching there. In an earlier life Hans had been a school inspector in Odessa, Ukraine. His book *Comparative Education* was about to appear in print. When I told Hans that I knew Russian and was somewhat familiar with Russian pedagogical literature, he took an interest in me, and I got hooked on comparative education.

After completing my diploma course, I taught economics for eleven years in a secondary grammar school in London. During the summer vacations I built up an academic travel business in Britain and on the Continent. It served mainly American academics and other professionals who wanted to meet counterparts in Europe. Meanwhile I tried to interest Alec Nove, a noted scholar in Russian studies at that time at the London School of Economics, in taking me on as a doctoral student. I said I wanted to do a dissertation on the training of Intourist agents in the Soviet Union. I thought the topic was tailor-made for me, allowing me to combine a knowledge of Russian with an interest in education and training, and experience in the travel industry. Nove was not interested. By 1960 I had moved to New York, enrolled at Teachers College, and started work on a dissertation that turned into the book *Financing Soviet Schools*. A few years later, Nove moved to Glasgow to accept a professorship. He was editing the journal *Soviet Studies* (continued by *Europe-Asia Studies*); after I had sent him a copy of my dissertation and he had published an article of mine on "The Unproductive Work of Soviet Teachers," he wrote me a very nice letter saying, "I should have taken you on."

At that time, we had an iron rule in the Department of Philosophy and

Social Sciences (now the Department of International and Transcultural Studies) not to hire our own graduates. But my adviser, George Z.F. Bereday, insisted that the rule be ignored. Bereday referred to this in his introductory remarks to my published dissertation:

> Professor Noah combines training in economics and specialization in Russian studies and language with knowledge of education learned in his native England as well as in the United States. It is a great delight to add that he is the first of this editor's Ph.D. candidates and the only advisee of the presently serving faculty to attain the distinction of a professorial appointment in the department that trained him. (Bereday 1966, p. viii)

I was also able to keep up with broader Soviet studies as a research associate at Columbia's Russian Institute. In addition, we also established a Center for Russian Education (later transformed into the Center for Education in Industrialized Countries) as part of Teachers College's Institute of International Studies.

What did Soviet studies in U.S. academe entail, and where did scholars in that field stand politically?

I came to New York in 1960 during the heyday of the cold war and completed my dissertation in 1964 at Teachers College. George Bereday had come to Teachers College in 1956. He was replacing George Counts, who retired in 1954. I barely knew of Bereday when I came to New York, but I knew of the Russian Institute at Columbia University. The Institute was mostly composed of historians, but also included an economist (Alexander Ehrlich) and a lawyer (John N. Hazard). Bereday spoke fluent Polish and good Russian, as did Ehrlich. Hazard taught comparative law, with a specialty in Soviet law and constitution.

Bereday took a very cautious attitude toward the Soviet system. This marked a decided break with the view that George Counts and many of his colleagues at Teachers College had taken. They were broadly sympathetic to Soviet announced aspirations and achievements. They believed that their "progressive" education theories fitted well with their socialist beliefs. Bereday had been born and raised in Poland, fleeing that country only after the defeat of 1939. He was intuitively hostile to Russian nationalist ambitions and highly skeptical about Soviet claims to have created a new Soviet type of citizen and a superior type of society. His skepticism and critical view of the Soviet system was in the main shared by the colleagues in the Russian Institute, whether they were historians, economists, lawyers, or political scientists. Personally, I was reasonably sympathetic toward some socialist ideas, but

judged that Lenin, Stalin, and Stalin's successors had diverted Russia onto a wrong track.

It is worthwhile keeping in mind that even after its period of vigorous growth in the 1960s, Soviet studies was a very small field within U.S. academe. However, insofar as we were able to influence attitudes in the United States toward the Soviet system and the Soviet educational system in particular, virtually all of us were anxious to restrain the political hype. We sought to provide some counterweight to those in the United States who asserted that we had much to learn from the Soviet educational system. We knew that published Soviet statistics were far from trustworthy and that the truth about Soviet schools, higher educational institutions, technical training, and adult education was not necessarily to be found in Soviet publications.

Most of those who were writing somewhat uncritically about the Soviet educational system were journalists. For example, the bestseller *What Ivan Knows That Johnny Doesn't* (Trace 1961) was written for a popular audience. It was no surprise that there were so many journalistic accounts of Soviet education: it was good business. On the other hand, academic books on the Soviet Union were quite scarce. I remember I had to review one such book and I tore it apart. In retrospect, I feel I was undeservedly cruel to the author, but the book was truly terrible, with many factual errors. In an attempt to conclude on a mildly positive note I recall ending my review with the following words: "In a sea without fish, even a crab is a fish." Much of the writing that hyped Soviet education was indeed extremely superficial and based on very limited knowledge of the Soviet education system. In that context the book I reviewed was not out of the ordinary.

What was the role of the Comparative Education Society (later renamed Comparative and International Education Society) in advancing Soviet studies in education?

As I mentioned before, there were very few solid studies on the Soviet educational system. Most of what was written were journalistic accounts. In its early days, the Comparative Education Society promoted study tours, not only to the Soviet Union but to other parts of the world. Other associations and even universities organized study tours to the Soviet Union in the later 1950s and on into the 1960s. For example, the Institute of Education, London University offered study tours (primarily to its own students) to study many different countries, including the Soviet Union. In the United States, proceeds from these study tours were important sources of revenue for the infant Comparative Education Society. Gerald Read, professor at Kent State

University, cofounder and treasurer of the Society, was especially skillful in operating the tours. Individuals would register for a course at Kent State University, which was then run as a study tour. Kent State's credits could be transferred to another institution. A percentage generated from the study tours would go to the Comparative Education Society. Perhaps the most ambitious study tour was the one to the Soviet Union in August–September 1958. Sixty-nine educators and comparative education researchers spent a month in Moscow, Leningrad (St. Petersburg), Kiev, and Tashkent. The group visited schools and met with Soviet educators and government officials. *The Changing Soviet School*, by George Bereday, William Brickman, and Gerald Read (1960) was based on the reports of participants in this study tour.

I read in the journal Vergleichende Pädagogik *of the Comparative Education Society of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) a devastating critique of the study tour, the book* The Changing Soviet School *(Bereday, Brickman, and Read 1960), and the Comparative Education Society. The deputy editor-in-chief of the GDR journal, Werner Kienitz, wrote: "This book vividly illustrates, however, the prejudices, wrong interpretations, and fabrications of bourgeois American comparativists; the book was, for good reasons, criticized by Soviet scholars. In general, anticommunist tendencies are clearly discernible in the activities of this Society as well as its intimate relation with the imperialist-neocolonialist cultural foreign policy of the U.S.A." (Kienitz 1967, p. 103).*

I am familiar with the Soviet critique of U.S. comparative education. I would need to read the book again to see which statements made in the book were particularly biased against Soviet education. For sure, both sides had prejudices against the other educational system. The Soviet comparativists who were charged by their government to study Western educational systems were certainly biased in their accounts. For example, Zoya Malkova from the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of the USSR regularly visited the United States. She and George Bereday got on very well, and I also met her a number of times. She frequently wrote on Western education in Soviet comparative education journals. She published texts that we considered as vicious and false about Western education as the Soviet Union may have considered the Western accounts of Soviet education. At one time I translated her harsh review of *The Changing Soviet School*, originally published in the newspaper for teachers *Uchitel'skaia gazeta* [Teachers' Gazette] for the *Comparative Education Review* (Malkova 1961). William Brickman replied to her attacks in the same issue (Brickman 1961).[2]

Other Soviet educational researchers who were regularly sent to the United States to collect information were Ivan Grivkov, Vladimir A. Veikshan, and Nikolai K. Goncharov. Gerald Read had regular contact with these colleagues, who helped him to organize the study tour. Goncharov was a renowned scholar in the Soviet Union (see Yesipov and Goncharov 1947). He was president of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of the USSR. He came to the United States in the early 1970s and I hosted him. One day, we took him to visit the shopping malls in New Jersey. He got a severe case of culture shock. The abundance of consumer goods available for purchase, the size of the shopping carts that customers were wheeling through the checkout stations, out to the parking lots, and loading into their cars all made clear to him that everything he might have believed about the immiseration and deprivation of the American working class just couldn't be true. Those big parking lots in New Jersey were full of cars driven by rather sloppily dressed people, who could not all be the "elite." Rather, these were the masses of New Jersey, and they could obviously afford to buy a lot of things.

The scholars in the Soviet Union were in a difficult position. Their assignment was to visit the United States, collect first-hand information, and bring it back. Yet there were rewards for good behavior in the USSR. If they wrote along the party line, they were rewarded. Their solution was not unexpected. On their return, they made two types of reports: one for the public or the Teachers' Gazette and another one for the higher-ups. The one for the higher-ups was the truth.

How was the emergence of development studies in education related to the cold war?

U.S. government (i.e., the taxpayers') money was readily available for two purposes. One was to study the enemy: How had the Soviet Union been able to do this (Sputnik) to us? There must be something they do right. We need to learn what it is, maybe even copy some of their educational and training strategies and tactics. But there was also the other issue: What about the ordinary people of Africa, Latin America, and the Far East; what could we do that might inoculate them against the socialist virus? The Russians were active proselytizing in these countries, so were the Chinese who were even building railroads in Africa. The question became, how might we counteract Maoist and socialist influence in, say, Tanzania, and elsewhere? So the money had two dimensions. It furthered the academic study of foreign societies and their educational systems. It also gave a boost to development studies, in education and in other dimensions of development.

There was also talk about "winning the hearts and minds" of the people in the so-called nonaligned countries.

Yes, a very significant role in achieving that goal was played by the Peace Corps. Many students in International Educational Development at Teachers College were former Peace Corps volunteers. Most of the public funding for development and areas studies was made available through the 1958 National Defense Education Act. That funding lasted for more than a decade.

How strongly were government offices involved in the study of Soviet education, in particular, the Department of Defense and the CIA.?

The word "defense" in the National Defense Education Act is actually a misnomer. It was placed there so the legislation would sail through Congress. The money was exclusively administered by the Office of Education. There used to be a vibrant section in the Office of Education in Washington, DC, that produced pamphlets and monographs on education abroad. That section was in existence prior to the Sputnik shock. Obviously, it was a service to people in the State Department who were going abroad and it included all kinds of country information including information on the educational system. There was little if any collaboration between comparative education researchers in the United States and the CIA even though the CIA tried to win the cooperation of scholars. For example, they had a book program where one could select up to ten books and have them sent to the USSR. This program was first announced as a program initiated by U.S. publishers, but once it was realized that the funding came from the CIA many scholars refused to collaborate.[3]

Did the preoccupation with Soviet education have an impact on the field of comparative and international education, with regard to both theory and methods reflections?

No, not really. For a while, *Comparative Education Review* published articles on Soviet education and reviews of books written in socialist countries. But that interest was short-lived within the field of comparative and international education. Instead, separate journals and book series were established such as the journal *Soviet Education* (now called *Russian Education and Society*). The journal has existed since late 1958, published by M.E. Sharpe; I still serve as the chair of the editorial board. In comparative and international education, the study of Japan replaced Sovietology very rapidly in the early 1980s, and it was accompanied by the same hype as with Soviet studies. The fascination with Soviet education did not have an impact on theoretical or methodological debates in comparative and international education, but it helped improve access to money for research. Both comparative and development studies certainly profited from the infusion of funds.

Did U.S. scholars and students have any idea what the image of the United States was in the Soviet Union, in particular, the image of the U.S. as imperialist and racist?

Yes, sure. That image was largely conveyed in magazines, mainly by *Time Magazine* and *U.S. News and World Report*. In fact several newspapers and magazines had regular rubrics reporting on what "the enemy" had to say about us. There was a lot of attention paid to the Soviets, as there is much attention paid to the Arab world nowadays. Of course, as far as ordinary people in the United States are concerned, their knowledge of other countries was then and still is quite scanty. It would seem that only when the U.S. has declared a particular country to be an enemy are the press, TV, and radio willing to devote space to informing their audiences about that country. Even the most elementary knowledge about our next-door neighbors escapes most Americans. The average American will come up short when asked how many provinces there are in Canada, or who is the current president of Mexico—let alone being able to gauge the view of the United States held by most Canadians or Mexicans.

Notes

1. Background information from the interviewer: Malkova criticizes the book's authors for having the material collected during the study tour "to suit their own purposes which are clearly in the spirit of the cold war" (Malkova 1961, p. 69). She directs her criticism especially toward two of the three editors (Bereday and Brickman) who, in her view, "already enjoy doubtful eminence as authors of slanderous articles about the Soviet school" (ibid., p. 69). In contrast, she finds those chapters written by Gerald Read and Ina Schlesinger more balanced even though "coming from bourgeois conditions, of course, they do not understand everything correctly" (ibid., p. 71). Her most severe attack, however, is directed against William Brickman's historical account of Soviet education, prompting his reply.

2. Interviewer's comment: The book-mailing project (in the literature at times also referred to as the "Marshall Plan for the mind") was run by George C. Minden, president of the International Literary Center, and funded by the CIA. The book mailings began in July 1956 and ended in 1993. The books were sponsored by a cover cultural organization or publisher in the United States in an attempt to conceal the funding source. More than 300,000 books and magazines were shipped annually to professionals and intellectuals working for socialist countries in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, making the overall total more than 10 million (see Martin 2006).

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GITA STEINER-KHAMSI

The Development Turn in Comparative Education

George Z.F. Bereday, perhaps better known for his scholarship than for his eloquence and wit, tells of an incident that occurred during the 1958 USSR study tour of the U.S. Comparative Education Society:

> They [Soviet government officials] have a habit of taking passports away from tourists. I am a refugee from Communism, and when they took mine away, I followed the passport with my eyes out of the room. They noticed this and on the last day of my visit, they brought back nine passports, but mine was not among them. They looked at me and said, "We will put you in the Soviet university." My eyes opened wide and they had a big laugh, and then they pulled out my passport. An apoplectic kind of joke. Which goes to prove that the definition of a foreign country is where everything is funny except the jokes. (Bereday 1959, p. 46)

The mere thought of trading his professorship at Teachers College, Columbia University in New York, for a position at a Soviet university was to Bereday, an immigrant from Poland to England and then the United States, both ridiculous and abhorrent. As I will point out in this article, it would have been, however, equally unappealing to Soviet comparative education researchers to swap their academic positions with researchers in the United States. There was no doubt among Marxist-Leninist researchers that "bourgeois comparative education," epitomized by the U.S. Comparative

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