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The articles in this journal are indexed/abstracted in *Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)*, *Educational Research Abstracts Online*, *International Bibliography of Periodical Literature on the Humanities and Social Sciences (IBZ)*, *Sociology of Education Abstracts*, and *Wilson Education Index*.

European Education

Issues and Studies

Vol. 38, No. 4

Post-Cold War Studies in Education (II)

Guest Editors:

William deJong-Lambert
City University of New York
Bronx Community College
and

Gita Steiner-Khamsi
Teachers College
Columbia University

European Education

WINTER 2006-7/VOL. 38, NO. 4

Post-Cold War Studies in Education (II)

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European Education, vol. 38, no. 4, Winter 2006-7, pp. 8-22.
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 ISSN 1056-4934/2007 \$9.50 + 0.00.
 DOI 10.2753/EUE1056-4934380401

GITA STEINER-KHAMSI

An Interview with Beatrice Beach Szekely

The responses I am offering to your questions are based on reflection and recollection, accompanied by a brief revisit to *Studying Teaching and Learning* and one or two other things I wrote many years ago, not on reading and research. Autobiographical musings are, I confess, more easily indulged in than recalling who wrote what about Soviet education and U.S. comparative and international education, when, and what was said, many years ago.

How did you become personally involved in Russian/Soviet studies of education?

My Sovietological autobiography is likely a modest but textbook example in the history of cold war area studies in the United States. I will belabor the earliest bits because I think they are historically

Beatrice Beach Szekely, Ph.D., was active in comparative education in the 1970s and 1980s, specializing in the Soviet Union. She was editor of the journal *Soviet Education* (1970-1989). Her participation in Soviet-American Fulbright seminars on education in 1977 and 1978 led to joint editorship, with Thomas S. Popkewitz and B. Robert Tabachnik, of *Teaching and Learning, Trends in Soviet and American Research* (1981) and editorship of annotated translations of works by leading figures in Soviet educational research such as L.V. Zankov and V.V. Dayvdov. She recently retired as associate director of Cornell Abroad.

illustrative and then move on as quickly as I can, knowing you'll skim for your own interests.

My story began one bright October morning in the fall of my senior year of high school in Rye, New York, when Miss Day, my American history teacher, laid down the *New York Times* on her desk and told our class why the launching of Sputnik, the first Soviet artificial earth satellite, the day before was an event of profound importance.

I listened closely because four years earlier in my eighth-grade American history class she had prefaced remarks about *Brown v. Board of Education* with the same assurance that the Supreme Court decision would prove an event of extraordinary importance. In even the short intervening four years, my classmates and I had learned that civil rights and school desegregation were compelling issues for our generation. "Two-Gun Day," as we referred to our dedicated spinster teacher, didn't fool around; we respected her. She presented Sputnik as a second, highly important theme for our teenage generation to grapple with. The presumed superiority of Soviet education that was soon touted in the media brought the superpowers arms race right into our suburban classroom.

I immediately wrote an "extra credit" report on Soviet education using newspapers and popular magazines, probably *Life*; I don't remember what I said. It could not have been very distinguished or different from what hundreds or even thousands of American pupils were thinking and writing at that time. My interest was certainly enforced by the anticommunism I was exposed to in my own home, so pervasive in all the media of the day. At my school, we debated cold-war politics hotly within a small group of keen students. I was part of an honors chemistry class that was quickly assembled as Rye High School's contribution to improving the math and science education of American youth so our country could catch up with the presumed superiority of the Soviets in advanced technology. We debated, for example, Edward Teller's position on the development of the hydrogen bomb. All things Russian seemed sinister at that time of "the Red Scare"; the USSR seemed very far away, a huge, intriguing enigma (to get near to quoting Churchill, who had surely set the tone of the time).

At Mount Holyoke College I took up history, out of its intrinsic attraction, and Russian history and language in order to try to find out more about that unknown and highly important country and culture that was so important to our country. I was solidly in the middle of the Russian area studies generation; a Russian-language house was established for us at the college. I attended a summer school that must have had some National Defense Education Act (NDEA) funding in its establishment. That was in the summer of 1961; the Berlin Wall went up that August, another auspicious sign that we were studying something of strategic importance to the world we knew.

Of course, I fell in love with Russian culture in my cold war education, in no small part through the affection and regard I soon came to feel for my Russian teachers. A history of the three generations of Russian emigrants who taught young Americans Russian language, history, and culture after World War II remains to be written. These were men and women who left Russia after the Revolution and Civil War, after World War II, and in the 1970s and 1980s when Russian Jews were allowed to emigrate. My teachers came from the first two groups, representatives of the aristocracy and the professional middle classes. They were fascinating, a first encounter for me with adults from another culture. The excellent teachers among them were highly invested with the goal of passing on what they valued about their homeland to young foreigners like myself.

Young Americans were trained in language for careers in the military, intelligence, higher education, research, and the professions through such programs as those I was fortunate to participate in. Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Shostakovich, Stravinsky, Anna Akhmatova, *borscht*, and a bit of vodka became the much-loved vehicles by which I learned the language and culture we were meant to understand and by which instrumentation we were meant to contribute to our country's winning the battle in the cold war. Time prohibits taking up discussion of the outcome, but the return on the investment in our education was surely a factor.

My own education in comparative education began at Teachers College in the spring of 1966 in a course I took with Harold J. Noah and Max Eckstein, but since you are interested in its inter-

play with international education let me first digress and mention that by coincidence, or maybe not so, I was witness to the beginnings of the tie-in of area studies and international development efforts in education at the College.

In 1964 and 1965 I worked as a secretary on a work-study master's degree program in the teaching of history within the then Department of English and Foreign Languages (if I have the department name correct), and provided clerical and administrative support to the students and faculty in teaching English as a second language. That means I worked with Afghan students who had come to Teachers College on Frances Shoemaker's Ford-funded project, one of whom I was later told became head of the Afghan government and was shot by the Russians during their ill-fated war there. The Afghans, it was common knowledge among students and staff at the college, were far more intent on using their diplomas to gain high-ranking positions in the central Afghan government than to teach English in far-flung provinces of their country. I also provided administrative support to Professor Gerald Dykstra's Ford-funded work in Peru and Nigeria, which produced English-teaching materials using stories from the indigenous cultures as the medium (a novel idea at the time). And we worked with many of the early Peace Corps returnees seeking graduate degrees to continue international careers in education.

Here I am answering your first question with a digression that alludes to your last question [on how the cold war affected U.S. and Soviet involvement in the third world]. I hope any confusion will be justified. These programs I was associated with, however briefly and at however low a professional level, were clear examples of the U.S. government and nonprofit sector providing funding for programs aimed at U.S. foreign policy objectives regarding the so-called nonaligned nations. The American students I talked with then who had been in the Peace Corps had, like those of us studying Russia within the confines of U.S.-based classrooms and libraries, fallen in love with their host country cultures and identified closely with the struggles of, for example, the Ethiopian people. As I moved into an acquaintance with comparative education, I remember thinking I could work on the Soviet Union in compara-

tive education. And I remember feeling a slightly nasty tinge of snobbery that the theory and disciplinary base of comparative education was somehow superior intellectually to development studies.

Comparative education, for me, held promise of a way to pull together what had been a set of disparate interests to date: history, Russian, and education. Harold and Max's introductory class was a lot of fun; I found them akin to Flanders and Swan, the English nightclub and television team much in vogue at the time. And I found what they had to say about the interplay of education with society and the body politic compelling. The class was full of students seeking certification, working teachers, returned Peace Corps volunteers, and few doctoral students in various fields. (I remember Art Garfunkel, with his blond Afro, who was doing math education at the time, sitting a few rows behind me.) We read on social class and education in the United Kingdom in that class, and on race and education in South Africa. What I read about Russia I have no idea today, but I liked the notion of synthesis that comparative education afforded.

What clinched an interest in comparative education was a year's travel made possible by a legacy from my grandmother, who had just died and left me some money. On receiving my M.A. from Teachers College, rather than taking a job back in Westchester County teaching history and Russian, I took off for a *Wanderjahr* around the world. First, I studied Russian with Soviet émigrés in Munich and went on two lengthy study tours to Russia and East Europe; this was before one could actually matriculate as an American foreign student to study in Russia. Then I traveled east and visited Teachers College contacts at schools and universities in countries such as Thailand, India, Hong Kong, and Australia, ending at the East-West Center in Hawaii. I came back to New York and—under George Bereday's tutelage and as a research assistant in the Ford-funded Center for Education in the Industrial Nation—began a Ph.D. program. In 1970, Harold took me on board as co-editor of *Soviet Education*; never did I dream that this was the start of a twenty-year venture. Highlights of my doctoral studies were history of education courses with Robbie McClintock, and

Russian area studies courses with Zbigniew Brzezinski (politics), Robert McGuire (literature), Loren Graham (history of science), and Fr. Schmemmann (religious thought).

Doing a Ph.D. on Russian education proved terribly difficult, although I was at the best place in the world to do so. The topic of Soviet education was vastly overwritten and understudied throughout the cold war. Everyone and his brother or sister would jump in with an article or book on some aspect of Soviet education from Sputnik on, hoping to become an expert overnight with very little background. Just about everything that was written started with nothing more than a macrolevel, systemic description and went on to lightweight analysis. Exceptions were in the area of the economics of education, namely Harold Noah's doctoral study and Nicholas DeWitte's magisterial monograph on manpower in the Soviet Union commissioned by the National Science Foundation. The only solid history of Soviet education was Oskar Anweiler's in German, and its narrative was typically German for the time, topical narrative without, in my humble opinion, sufficient analytic interpretation. My dissertation on the establishment of the USSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences was close to a disaster; I was not allowed in the archives of the Academy's library in Moscow and tried desperately, using mainly secondary materials, to rely on what dear Harold, who cheerfully and patiently saw me through the enterprise, referred to as "conjecture."

I actually came to know the field of Soviet education well—almost intimately, I can say immodestly—later during my long term and close reading of the Soviet education and political press for the monthly issues of *Soviet Education* through 1989. Looking back, I regret deeply that I didn't simply spend six months in the middle of my doctoral studies locked up in the Teachers College and Butler libraries reading the primary sources for the history of Russian pedagogy and education that were lacking in the secondary scholarship to date. What my dissertation did give me was a framework, a unique knowledge of the history and institutional structure of Soviet educational research. That framework enabled me to study and publish what I came to see as the best of Soviet educational writing in issues of the journal.

What was the focus of your research and professional activities?

In the almost two decades of issues of *Soviet Education* that I edited (including the six with Harold Noah as my senior) I believe you will find representation of two types of writing. The first is a selection of the politically compelled and intellectually lightweight stuff that Soviet writers had to produce on a wide range of topics. One example might be Lenin as the inspiration of preschool pedagogy. The second type of Soviet educational writing is that which is simply good, stripping away any political or ideological overlay. In the early days of my editorship I, frankly, couldn't tell the difference very well at all. But after my dissertation research, I knew who had written what and came to recognize particular names and research institutes within the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences and elsewhere that represented the best of Russian research. Sticking to the same example, I can again mention preschool pedagogy, which was, and I presume remains, a subfield of Russian pedagogy of some strength. Other subfields I can mention are the teaching of geography or mathematics.

Along the way, in my first decade or so of editing, I began to notice the emergence of increased publication on developmental teaching, which claims the center of attention below. I was moving from the foundation of reading in history and the social sciences that my area studies and comparative education coursework and dissertation research had afforded to an increasing and intensifying interest in Soviet pedagogy, getting at the heart of educational research. I also became very interested in publishing whole books or excerpts of books and set about buying from the catalogues of Soviet publishers available in the United States, eventually amassing a library of several hundred volumes in Russian and a supporting collection in English and German.

While I was developing a parallel interest in Soviet pedagogical research, I maintained a strong interest in the development of educational policy and politics in the Soviet Union and chronicled various waves of educational reform throughout the post-Khrushchev period. This, honestly, was not very difficult because it was a period of political stagnation; there were no radical changes

until glasnost kicked in. But it was intricate and interesting. What I learned from following Soviet educational policy changes in the 1970s and 1980s was the paramount importance of demographics. The Soviet Ministry of Education was allowed by the political leadership to open up secondary education to more of the age cohort when the supply of young people entering the labor market was sufficient for other youth to remain enrolled in education. As is known, under Khrushchev the contraction of the number of youth entering the job force motivated a curtailment of the secondary education intake and a maximization of vocational training for the then scarce resource of the nation's youth, under the guise of what the government called polytechnic education reforms. As the children of the bulge in the birth rate after World War II came of age, labor supply shortfalls eased, and more children were allowed to stay in school. Demographic pressures in post-Soviet Russia, given its public health problems and zero-population growth, will continue to be the major factor determining the Russian educational provision for the foreseeable future. Of that we may be sure.

If only we could have stripped discussions of unnecessarily ideologically and politically motivated verbiage decades ago, comparisons of education in the United States and Soviet Union might have looked quite different. It was important and fun to understand what we might fall back on calling the philosophical and social foundations of Soviet and American education for comparative purposes, but the hard facts of feeding trained manpower to the labor force really tell the story. At the end of my career in Sovietology, it was no surprise that Murray Feshbach's superb and lifelong efforts on Soviet demographics and public health came to the forefront in American Sovietology. He was quoted on the subject just this week in the *New York Times* (C.J. Chivers, "Russians, Busy Making Shrouds, Are Asked to Make Babies," *New York Times*, 14 May 2006).

Who initiated the study visit of 1978? What was its purpose; who participated (how where they selected)? What was the program and the outcome?

For the 1978 seminar, I have the following documents:

Summary program, 4 pages

- Russian and English full program, 10 pages
- Szekely contribution to U.S. delegation report, 7 pages
- Szekely report on both the 1977 and 1978 seminars, 5 pages
- Popkewitz reflections on the 1978 seminar, 5 pages
- Romberg, impression of Soviet math pedagogy, 13 pages
- Shulman, research report referencing seminar, 3 pages
- Article (not sourced but likely from *Narodnoe obrazovanie* [Public Education] on the 1978 seminar, 5 pages
- Article from *Matematika v shkole* [School Mathematics], 9 pages
- 1979 critique of cultural exchange seminars from the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, about 5 pages
- For the 1977 teacher education seminar, about 5 pages of program, scheduling, and a participant list.
- B. Robert Tabachnik, Thomas S. Popkewitz, and Beatrice Beach Szekely, ed., *Studying Teaching and Learning: Trends in Soviet and American Research* (New York: Praeger Special Studies, 1981). *Initiation*: referencing pp. vii-xii, "Preface."

The seminar was organized under the auspices of the Council for International Exchange of Scholars (Washington, DC) as the contract agency of the U.S. Department of State for the Fulbright Program. It took place in December 1978 in three cities: Moscow, Leningrad, and Tallin. The three days of meetings at the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences were central and provided the papers published in the above book, with additional papers selected by the editors of *Soviet Education* and solicited from the authors.

It followed a 1977 Fulbright seminar on teacher education in Washington, participated in on the Russia side by senior educational administrators (ministerial rank) and rectors of teacher training institutions in the USSR. The three editors of the above volume, George Z.F. Bereday of Teachers College, and additional individuals participated on the U.S. side.

Both seminars were made possible by the 1973 renewal of the cultural exchange agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The idea for the focus on educational research content, the ideas

driving education, rather than overwhelmingly descriptive presentations of "how we do it in . . ." came from conversations with Tabachnik and Popkewitz during and after the 1977 seminar.

Participants included prominent Soviet researchers, selected through the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, as this was the host institution in Moscow.

N.A. Mechinskaia was a senior educational psychologist; I remember being very pleased to meet her; she was an exemplar of the type of Soviet researcher who worked from the earlier postwar period within the severe restraints placed on Soviet psychology during the purges.

I was going to publish A.K. Markova's book *The Teaching of Language* in English translation with an introduction for M.E. Sharpe (in 1979) and was excited to be meeting this important exponent of the "third generation" of Soviet educational psychology.

These two women, for me, offered an intergenerational comparison within Soviet educational research; Mechinskaia was very tied to the institution of schooling as developed through the five-year plans in the 1940s and 1950s; Markova was full of questions, creativity, and an interest in change.

I don't remember exactly how the U.S. delegates were chosen; Tom Popkewitz [a prominent scholar in comparative education at the University of Wisconsin, Madison] would probably know as he and Bob Tabachnik represented the U.S. educational research community during the seminar planning. Our team was made up of their Wisconsin colleagues Tom Romberg and Gary Wehlage, in addition to Arno Bellack from Teachers College, Lee Shulman, then at Michigan State, and Bruce Biddle from the University of Missouri. What was striking was that on both "sides" we were dealing with serious scholars who received no rewards for good behavior to the Soviets, as was often the case when travel was involved outside the Soviet Union.

The seminar reports make clear that we did not get the selection of Soviet research fields we would have liked in the research participants. But I believe that we had more of an honest exchange of academic colleagues than had ever taken place before.

What were the reactions, on both sides?

Soviet reviewers of the conference in the two articles I cite above [in *Narodnoe obrazovanie* and *Matematika v shkole*] were more fair than they had ever been before. In his review in *Narodnoe obrazovanie*, Dr. Monakhov, chair of the Soviet organizing committee and deputy director of the Research Institute for Curriculum and Teaching Methods at the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, gave an overwhelmingly ideological slant to his opinion, writing about how Soviet research had the advantage of being based in dialectical materialism, and so forth, but he pointed out the “nonconfrontational, businesslike, and friendly” atmosphere of the seminar, which was of “mutual benefit and interest.” Overall, the superiority of Marxist pedagogical theory and Soviet educational practice, Monakhov upheld, was demonstrated by the seminar. Scanning his piece today, I would conclude these twenty-eight years later that the Soviets presented themselves as a competing team, still locked in cold war competition, but one interested in cooperation and mutual self-interest. This was big step forward in the Soviet-American exchange on education.

As to reaction on the American side, I can only cite the 1979 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article summarizing the limited but positive outcomes of cultural exchange seminars. I don’t know what was reported in, for example, American Educational Research Association (AERA) publications. The 1978 seminar fell far short of an ideal in terms of setting up agreed-upon subjects and really presenting them. But we made do with what we got, which was far better than anything previously.

How was the 1978 seminar different from the first Comparative and International Education Society [CIES]–sponsored visit?

I haven’t revisited Bereday, Brickman, and Read,* but I can say one or two things.

**The Changing Soviet School: The Comparative Education Society Field Study in the USSR*, ed. George Z.F. Bereday, William W. Brickman, and Gerald H. Read (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960).—Eds.

That first seminar was undertaken at a time when any “peek behind the Iron Curtain,” to use a phrase I often heard, was considered thrilling, unusual, and perhaps capable of helping to find out what secret things the Soviets were doing to produce cosmonauts and their space vehicles.

Many contemporary descriptions declared the Soviet school system’s superiority, especially in math and science education (e.g., *What Ivan Knows That Johnny Doesn’t* [by Arthur S. Trace (New York: Random House, 1961)]). I think the Bereday, Brickman, and Read trip was a first trip by comparative specialists who were supposed to weigh the Soviet system’s strengths and weaknesses.

Can you discuss the roles of the CIES and the Soviet Comparative Education Society in organizing both seminars?

I would have to revisit early issues of the *Comparative Education Review* to comment on the 1958 or 1959 visits; there was no official CIES role for the 1978 seminar, nor for the 1977 one, except that George Bereday was a keynote speaker [in 1977] and several of us were CIES members.

Could you address the equality of interest in education in each other’s countries? Which aspects of education in each other’s countries interested us most?

This is an interesting question and one you might want to ask other U.S. participants. A more careful perusal of *Studying Teaching and Learning* might lead me to describe a few exceptions, but it seems to me that all the papers were totally grounded in the home country’s research traditions and contexts. Questions were asked in the discussion periods after paper deliveries.

To start the proceedings, there was an almost total lack of awareness of what others were doing. Except for what I had published in *Soviet Education* and a few books on Soviet educational psychology, little was available in English as primary source material on Soviet education. American secondary sources, since the start of

the cold war, were basically snapshots of Soviet educational practice to see how the competition was "doing it." I hate to overplay the role of *Soviet Education* as the sole English-language vehicle for learning firsthand about Soviet research. To be sure, few American researchers had read it, and undoubtedly, Americans were finding ways to read about work by Russian counterparts, but the pickings were slim.

I spoke at the 1977 seminar with [Robert] Tabachnik and [Thomas] Popkewitz about my growing interest in Soviet developmental teaching. This is the notion, grown out of L.S. Vygotsky's psychology, that effective teaching can precede cognitive development. I recall dimly that we were dissatisfied with the teacher education papers at the Washington meetings; they asked me what I might know about something substantial with intellectual meat on it in Soviet educational research. And I mentioned the work of authors such as A.K. Markova and L.V. Zankov, leading exponents of the resurgence taking place in developmental teaching research, which had been out of fashion after the suppression of Soviet child psychology in the late 1930s. These new people were taking advantage of greater intellectual freedom in Russia in the Brezhnev era when, as long as one paid lip service to a Marxist-Leninist frame of reference, sincere or otherwise, it had become easier to strike out in new directions. Tabachnik and Popkewitz had read about work in Russia and were positioned by their own work at the center of American research. Together, we came up with the idea for a seminar on teaching and learning research; they wrote the proposal for the seminar with some input from me. CIES and the Academy in Moscow liked the idea, and we were off. Stephen Toulmin had just published a magnificent article, "The Mozart of Psychology," in *The New York Review of Books*. Lee Shulman and I read it on the plane to Moscow. The time was ripe for exploring with receptive colleagues.

So "we" were certainly interested in "them." The Soviets were undoubtedly interested in us as well. Regrettably, their papers did not hit right at the topics we would have liked, but we came close and conversation was frank and more open than ever before.

What lessons would you say you learned from each other?

I haven't anything to say about this because my role was really to expedite the exchange of ideas; other U.S. participants might better be positioned to respond. A fresh reading of the seminar papers might be helpful too.

Was there a cold war among the two academic communities?

Yes, I would have to say so if one means that writing about the other country was motivated by and written in a context of competition. Which country was doing the better job educating its children and young adults was the primary question. In retrospect, we had little idea in this country of the overall picture of Soviet education; knowledge was restricted to snapshots of successes in particular settings or to portrayals of totalitarianism's worst excesses in other settings.

I read a lot of drivel written about American education over a thirty-year span of reading the Soviet education press, periodicals and books. Some of it was undoubtedly true, criticisms of inequalities in the U.S. education provision being the outstanding example. Most of what was written was based on ignorance or incomplete information. Education followed the political arena; as the cold war waned on the military and economic front, so did competition between the education systems. This was reflected in the calmed rhetoric of writing about education in each other's country. That atmosphere made our seminar possible.

Socialist apologists in the United States and Europe found much to admire in Soviet pedagogy and educational practice but exhibited great bias and blinders. So too did we in the United States, of any political persuasion, in writing about Soviet education.

How did the cold war affect U.S. and Soviet involvement in the "third world"?

I don't like using the term third world because of its inaccuracies and stereotypes, but I will adhere to your usage in answering the question. I presume you mean with regard to education.

U.S. competition with the Soviet Union between our two education systems extended to the attempts by both countries to influence the development of education in the third world.

You likely know the history of the Patrice Lumumba People's Friendship University, founded to educate cadres for the professional classes of countries that the USSR was courting. These students were seriously segregated and not invited into Russian or Soviet universities—at least not until the late 1980s when I left the field. I have in my mind's eye an unforgettable vision of two African students on a very cold and snowy night in Moscow in March when I was there doing thesis research in 1971. They were trying to get in the door of the Metropole Hotel and were turned out; they were blind drunk and as miserable as any young men could be, no hats and no boots. They were not enjoying the "friendship of the peoples."

But there you are: I myself am displaying my ideological blinders, seeing them as an American eager to find the problems in Russian education. Many physicians, scientists, and engineers were trained in Moscow at the Patrice Lumumba University (now People's Friendship University of Russia) who could not have otherwise earned higher degrees. I just happen to think the young men I saw would have been happier elsewhere that night.

European Education, vol. 38, no. 4, Winter 2006–7, pp. 23–43.

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ISSN 1056-4934/2007 \$9.50 + 0.00.

DOI 10.2753/EUE 1056-4934380402

ALEXANDER KARP

The Cold War in the Soviet School

A Case Study of Mathematics Education

This article is devoted to certain aspects of the cold war reflected in the teaching of mathematics in the Soviet Union. I will deal specifically with direct manifestations of the cold war, not with the teaching of mathematics during the cold war in general. My aim is not to present a comprehensive examination of school programs in mathematics offered during the period in question; nor is it necessarily to demonstrate how these programs reflected the ambition to win the arms race. I am interested in examining direct expressions of ideology, including how the teaching of mathematics was used (or intended to be used) to convey to students on the one hand an image of the enemy and on the other a sense of national superiority.

The characterization of certain phenomena as manifestations of the spirit of the cold war and aggression toward other countries remains a complicated matter in Russia. Contemporary Russian textbooks (Durmanova 2003) note that the long-accepted defini-

Alexander Karp is associate professor of mathematics education, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, and the author of a series of textbooks and problem books that are widely used in Russian schools, as well as numerous books and journal articles on problem solving, gifted education and the history of mathematics education. He is managing editor of *International Journal for the History of Mathematics Education*.