

Lessons Learned for Global Education Collaboration:  
Practical Knowledge Acquired from the  
US/USSR Textbook Study Project

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The US/USSR Textbook Study Project was a joint research effort by teams of scholars in the United States and the Soviet Union. They investigated what American and Soviet students learn about each other from their history and geography textbooks.

The US/USSR Textbook Study Project began in 1977 and stopped in 1989. The Project was a child of the Cold War. Its goals, content, and procedures were greatly influenced by "détente"; it completed its tasks during "glasnost" and "perestroika" when the work was less contentious and less significant.

The Project was authorized by the "Program of Exchanges between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. for 1977-79," signed by representatives of the two governments in Washington, D.C. on October 22, 1976. Thus, the Project was launched as part of a formal agreement between the governments of the United States and the Soviet Union. Because it was created to serve the purposes of the two governments, it would inevitably be affected by their political relationships.

Normally, American scholars and their professional organizations do not want or expect government to regulate their links to scholars and educational/cultural organizations in other nations. Americans travel freely to most nations of the world, making whatever agreements they want with any individual or organization abroad that seems appropriate to them. But "normal" is not a word people often used in describing US/Soviet relations. Access to Soviet scholars was difficult and tightly controlled throughout most of the period since the 1917 October Revolution. Intervention by the American government was necessary to conduct private business in the USSR. Thus, in the past, American scholars and artists reluctantly accepted restrictions on their freedom in the Soviet Union, constraints they would not have tolerated elsewhere.

The Project had only marginal success in changing textbook content, but its impact was not limited to textbooks. Furthermore, the Project may have contributed marginally to a process of political change that has made such projects unnecessary.

The Project can be observed at two levels. First, it is useful to explore how the Project organized its investigation and what was accomplished. Secondly, the Project can serve as a metaphor for the changing relationships between the two societies. The

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Project brought two, different, academic cultures together to perform a task that had been initiated by their governments. To achieve Project goals, American and Soviet scholars had to adjust to one another's different academic styles while, at the same time, responding to the changes in their nations' political relationships. This chapter treats both levels of analysis.

### The US/USSR Textbook Study Project: A Brief Description

The Project was authorized on October 22, 1976; but another year would pass before any noticeable activity began. In part, the delay occurred because the U.S. government had to find one or more private organizations interested in and capable of implementing the agreement. Most of the cultural and educational exchanges between the United States and the USSR were managed privately by Americans and by government agency in the Soviet Union. In spring, 1977, the U.S. Department of State invited two educational organizations -- the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) -- to assume responsibility for the Project. NCSS is the largest professional association of American social studies teachers; its members use history and geography textbooks. CCSSO consists of the 50 commissioners or state superintendents of public instruction in all of the states; its members decide which textbooks will be used in each state.

In December, 1977, four Americans, two representing NCSS and two from CCSSO, spent two weeks in the Soviet Union meeting with officials in the USSR Ministry of Education and visiting schools, research institutes, universities, teacher colleges, and textbook publishing houses. In February, 1978, three Soviet specialists, representing the Ministry of Education traveled for two weeks in the United States visiting American counterpart organizations. The exchange of visits enabled the two sides to become familiar with the development, production, and use of school textbooks in each country and to agree on the focus of the study, the procedures to be employed, a work schedule, and final products. These were the main points of agreement:

1. *The study would focus on school history and geography textbooks used in the two nations.*

Both nations teach history and geography in school, albeit in different ways; the textbooks for some of these courses contain information about the other nation.

2. *The study would focus on the information each textbook contained about the other country and about the relationships between the two countries.*



No effort would be made to influence what each country said about its own history or the history of other nations. Thus, American experts would direct their attention to information Soviet books offered about the United States and US-Soviet relations, while Soviet experts would concentrate on the information found in American texts about the Soviet Union and US-Soviet relations.

3. *The distribution of individual textbook reviews would be limited to project participants and to respective authors and publishers of the textbooks. No effort would be made to disseminate broadly the reviews of individual textbooks. The final report, containing the general conclusions and textbook recommendations, would be published in English and in Russian and would be distributed widely in both countries.*
4. *Each national team would be free to criticize the textbooks of the other country in whatever way it judged to be most appropriate. Each side would take such criticisms into account when preparing recommendations for the improvement of textbooks in its own country.*

Within these broad understandings, each side was free to organize the preparation of textbook reviews in whatever way it chose. The Ministry of Education created a "textbook commission" and urged the American representatives to do the same. The Americans refused, fearing that the term "commission" implied some kind of official or governmental status they did not have or want; throughout the Project the Americans made clear to their Soviet colleagues that they did not speak for the American government and had no authority to force American textbook publishers to do anything. In order to increase its credibility, however, NCSS and CCSSO invited two additional organizational sponsors: the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (AAASS) and the Association of American Publishers (AAP). The former consists of American scholars with academic interests in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe; the latter is a trade association of American publishers. These four associations (NCSS, CCSSO, AAASS and AAP) appointed representatives to an eight-member advisory committee; another nine people were asked to serve as members of a "reader panel." Taken together with a "Project director," they referred to themselves variously as the American "team," "delegation," "working group," etc., but never as the American "Commission." Their members included historians, geographers, social scientists, teachers, state superintendents, textbook editors, and teacher educators. The Soviet Commission had a similar number of people with like backgrounds.

The two sides exchanged textbooks by early summer, 1978. The textbooks were those used in the following courses:

*United States*

- Grade 7. World Geography/World Studies
- 8. American History
- 9/10. World Geography
- 10. World History
- 11. American History

*USSR\**

- Grade 6. Geography of the Continents
- 8. World History;  
History of the USSR
- 9. Economic Geography of Foreign Countries;  
History of the USSR;  
World History
- 10. History of the USSR;  
World History

These courses were selected because information about the other nation and US-Soviet relations was usually a part of the courses. They also provided a rough comparison across grade levels, although the manner in which the courses were organized was quite different. For example, the Soviet Union had a national curriculum; the content of courses was determined at that time by the Ministry of Education; Ministry officials selected authors to write textbooks around a pre-determined course of study. The government publishing house, "Prosveshchenie" [Enlightenment], then produced the approved textbooks for every school in the nation, albeit in as many as 53 different languages to match the language of instruction in each sector of the nation. The republics and regions could add courses -- e.g., History of Estonia, Geography of Georgia -- but all had to teach the prescribed curriculum.

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\*The list of courses and grade level assignments are those that existed when the Project began. In 1985 the USSR adopted new curricula which were in the process of being implemented at the end of the project. One feature of the new curricula was to add a year of school -- i.e., start pupils at age six rather than age seven and extend schooling an extra year. Thus, with regard to the history and geography curriculum, what had been taught at grade seven would later be taught at grade eight. Changes in the syllabus for each course were also introduced, but not in ways that affected the Project. Indeed, all of the textbooks examined during the course of the Project were those that matched the curriculum prior to the 1985 reform.

Soviet courses were also organized into the class schedule in ways different from that practiced in the United States. A particular course, e.g., History of the USSR, did not meet each day; therefore, a Soviet student might take two or three history and geography courses during the same semester while an American student would likely have only one history or geography course each year. A Soviet student studied history and geography each year from grade four; no similar requirements exist for American students. While a few American students might take one history or social science course each year from grade four through grade 12, most do not. Nearly every American student will study American history at least once and many twice from grade eight through grade 12, but many avoid courses in world history and/or geography.

Soviet courses also built sequentially upon one another. For example, the tenth-grade World History picked up where the ninth-grade World History stopped, chronologically, around 1939. In contrast, American courses in world history and American history attempt to cover the entire history of the world or the United States respectively, as neither textbook authors nor teachers can be confident of what American students have covered in previous grades.

There was only one official book for each Soviet course, whereas there was a bewildering array of textbooks for each American course, as many as 40 titles in print for popular courses such as eleventh-grade American history. The Ministry of Education provided two copies of each of its required books. The American team identified five frequently used books for each of the selected American courses, bringing a total of 25 books, and sent two copies of each title to the Ministry of Education. In addition, each side sent the other side course syllabi, teacher guides, and other materials as appropriate.

As each side received the textbooks provided by the other nation, it applied its own criteria and procedures for conducting the content analyses. Both American and Soviet reviewers attempted to identify factual errors, biased treatments, glaring omissions of information, and distorted interpretations.

In February, 1979, American representatives delivered copies of their analyses of Soviet textbooks to the Ministry of Education and received some Soviet reviews of American books in return. Although the Soviet reviews were not complete, the Americans were given a general summary of problems the Soviet readers had discovered. Detailed critiques of individual American textbooks were provided later in the year.

The same meeting was also used to plan a Moscow conference scheduled for June, 1979 that would bring together all of the

members of the American team with members of the Soviet Textbook Commission. The June conference was intended to serve two purposes: 1) to report and discuss the results of textbook reviews and 2) to present information on certain topics that the textbook reviewers believed were treated deficiently in the textbooks. The American and Soviet representatives agreed that the Soviet Commission would present information on five topics from Soviet history and geography; the American delegation would present information about five topics from U.S. history and geography. It was agreed that these topics would be discussed thoroughly; they might also become the basis for the recommendations to be included in the final report. These were the topics selected for the June conference:

*To be presented by Soviet scholars:*

1. Great October Socialist Revolution and Its Historical Significance
2. Problems of Economic Regions and Regional Development in the USSR
3. Eastern Front in World War II
4. Soviet Foreign Policy toward the United States in the 1970's
5. Contemporary Social/Political Development of the USSR (1970's)

*To be presented by American scholars:*

1. The American Revolution and Its Historical Significance
2. Regional Development in the United States
3. War in the Pacific in World War II
4. American Foreign Policy toward the USSR in the 1970's
5. Contemporary Social/Political Development of the United States (1970's)

*June 1979 Conference*

This conference proved to be the first and only time that all members of the American team and Soviet Commission met. All other meetings were limited to their representatives.

The conference began with each side reporting the results of its reviews of the textbooks of the other country. While it is not possible to report all of the criticisms, a sample of the critiques will give a flavor of what was found.

*Soviet Criticisms of American Textbooks.* After acknowledging that American textbooks are attractive and well-designed, containing many useful pedagogical suggestions, Soviet geographers advanced many objections to what the books contained. First, they stated that American geographies are hardly "geographies" at all; they are "social studies" books burdened with superficial splashes of economics, sociology, anthropology, and political science blended with geography. The geography information provided by American textbooks is very elementary; they report simple factual information and avoid rigorous analyses. Moreover, the information is often wrong or out of date. Cities and rivers are mislocated and sometimes mislabeled; key sectors of the economy are overlooked; certain regions are treated as they were 30 years ago; statistical "facts" are often incorrect. Even worse, a kind of simple-minded geographic determinism pervades most of the textbooks. For example, the USSR is said to be suspicious of other nations because of its "isolation" from the rest of the world; and the German army was defeated by "General Winter," rather than by courageous Soviet soldiers.

Soviet historians also found much to criticize in American textbooks. They were offended by explanations regarding the origins and development of Russia; American books gave undue attention to the role of the Vikings and to Peter the Great's policies of Westernization. They were annoyed both by the relative lack of attention devoted to the October 1917 Revolution and by the way it was characterized. Whereas Soviet historians presented the October Revolution as a popular uprising led by the Bolsheviks, American textbooks treated the Bolshevik victory as a kind of coup d'etat by a band of criminals. One textbook was particularly offensive because it raised the question: "Was Lenin a German Agent?" While the lesson's conclusion was that Lenin was not an agent for Germany, although he accepted German support, the Soviet historians were annoyed the question even appeared in the textbook.

Textbook authors and editors confused and misused terms such as Russia, Soviet Union, and the USSR; they referred to Russians when they meant the Soviet people; they used Communists when they meant the Soviet government. Worse still, they invariably misused Lenin's name, referring to him as "Nikolai" rather than "Vladimir Ilyich" as he is known in the USSR.

Soviet historians also believed the treatment accorded to the role of the Communist party in Soviet society, to the process of collectivization of agriculture in the 1920's and 1930's, and to

the incorporation of the Baltic republics into the USSR were severely distorted for propaganda purposes.\* They were outraged that American textbooks would present German fascism and Soviet communism as merely two varieties of totalitarianism. Too little attention was given to the pain and hardship the Soviet people suffered during World War II and too little credit given to the success of the Soviet army in breaking the back of the German military. The causes of the "Cold War" and events that occurred in Berlin in 1961, Hungary in 1956, and Czechoslovakia in 1968 were distorted so as to make it appear that the Soviet Union had an uncontrollable desire for world domination. These were some of the problems that members of the Soviet Textbook Commission found with American textbooks.

*American Criticisms of Soviet Textbooks.* After acknowledging that Soviet students undoubtedly have an opportunity to learn a great deal about the United States from their textbooks, the American reviewers found much to criticize. One problem was ideological bias; every topic had to somehow fit a Marxist-Leninist interpretation, contributing to some strange interpretations as, for example, explaining the American Revolutionary War as one caused by "bitter class struggle." A second problem was inadequate coverage of important features of American life and society, e.g., role of religion, political parties, reform movements such as populism, family life, leisure, and the arts. A third issue was unbalanced treatment. Considerable attention was given to unattractive features of American life: crime, racism, hedonism, unemployment, and poverty. Emphasis upon these problems contributed to propaganda such as that found in the tenth-grade world history book: "It is not surprising that a typical trait of American society, which is founded on social inequality, should be violence and terror." The American historians did not object to unpleasant features being included, but they thought the unpleasant aspects should be balanced with more attractive elements of American society; nor should textbooks imply that poverty, crime, alcoholism, assault, and racism are unique to the United States.

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\*These were the opinions Soviet historians expressed in 1979. Today, Russian official, public, and scholarly opinion is much closer to what Soviet reviewers found and criticized in American textbooks. One is left to speculate about the real, as opposed to stated, opinion of Soviet historians in 1979 on these topics.



A fourth problem was placing undue emphasis upon a particular event for propaganda purposes. For example, one textbook, commenting on the policy of white settlers toward American Indians during the westward migration, asserted that smallpox-infected blankets were given to Indians so they would be exterminated through disease. "Thus," asserted the author, "by the 19th century the American military was already using methods of monstrous bacteriological warfare." A fifth problem was omission of key details; for example, during a brief description of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the author did not mention that the Soviet Union had placed offensive missiles in Cuba that posed a military threat to the United States.

A sixth problem was the way the United States was characterized as a wartime ally. According to Soviet textbooks, the United States was inconsistent in providing lend-lease war material during the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union; it opened a second front in Europe only after it was obvious that the Soviet army had the German army on the run; and the United States used atomic weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, not to end the Pacific war quickly, but to threaten the Soviet Union with nuclear weapons during post-war negotiations.

A seventh problem was including out-of-date information in the textbooks. This was especially noticeable in the descriptions accorded to the position of Black people in the United States; it was as if there had been no civil rights movement, no affirmative action legislation, no abolition of Jim Crow laws, no voter registration legislation, and no election of Black men and women to public office. These were some of the problems members of the American team had with Soviet textbooks.

#### *Conference Proceedings*

Originally, the conference had been planned for five days; by the time the Americans had reached Moscow in June, the conference had been reduced to three working days. In February, when the conference had been planned, the Americans urged that the formal background papers be brief -- no more than three, typed pages. By sharing the papers in advance of the meeting and by restricting the time available for the writer to summarize his paper, this seemed to guarantee time for debate. The Soviet Commission did prepare brief background papers in advance of the meeting, but they also prepared much longer papers to be read during the sessions; one paper required a full hour to be read.

The head of the Soviet delegation insisted that each paper be delivered in full; so much time and effort had been devoted to their preparation, he argued, it was unfair to deny the Soviet scholars the opportunity to present their ideas. The Americans proposed that since they had the written paper, the Soviet writer could merely comment on a few highlights. Some compromise was

made, but the effect was the same: the conference consisted mainly of formal presentations with little opportunity for debate. The Americans, who were largely bored during the sessions, sought opportunities to engage individual Soviet scholars in debate outside the sessions. From the Soviet side, the act of presenting the paper, more than engaging ideas in debate, seemed to be the preeminent purpose of the meeting.

The leaders of the Soviet Textbook Commission suggested that the next scheduled meeting, planned for the USA in March, 1980 consider another round of ten topics similar to those presented in June; the Americans argued that such an exercise was fruitless and proposed a different format for the March conference. The next session would focus on securing approval to a joint draft of the final report. Each side would be responsible for writing particular parts of the report, indicating the conclusions they had reached on the basis of their analysis of textbooks as well as their recommendations for textbook improvements. These drafts would be shared prior to the conference and discussed and approved at the meeting. This approach was accepted by the Soviet delegation.

Alas, the March, 1980 conference did not take place. In December, 1979, Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan and President Jimmy Carter placed a freeze on most cultural and educational programs with the Soviet Union. The textbook project was affected in two ways: The American government refused to admit a large delegation of Soviet Textbook Commission members who wanted to attend the March conference; it would not permit government funds to be used to pay for the internal travel of the Soviet delegation. The Cold War was heating up again, and it was not in the interests of the American government to let the Project proceed normally at the same time it was placing sanctions on other programs.

In accordance with their June, 1979 agreement, the American and Soviet teams exchanged drafts of the final report. The American project director proposed a meeting in Moscow or in a Western European country where representatives of the two textbook teams could meet and approve the final report. The Ministry of Education refused; its position was: We hosted your delegation in Moscow; you must host our delegation in the United States before the project can be concluded. Its reluctance to agree to an alternative way to conclude the Project is easy to understand. Until very recently, opportunities to travel abroad were rare for most Soviet academics. Undoubtedly, some of the Soviet scholars who participated in the Project and who produced textbook reviews did so on the assumption that a trip to the United States would be their reward. Moreover, being invited abroad signaled that one's work was known and appreciated outside the USSR. Losing the opportunity to select a group of Soviet scholars and educators who were invited to participate in an American

conference was also a blow to the Ministry's prestige. Undoubtedly, American government officials knew this too; this was why sanctions were imposed.

With little hope that the stalemate between the two governments would end soon, in spring, 1981, the American side published what it termed an "interim report," drawing upon the drafts that had been exchanged by the American and Soviet teams at the beginning of 1980. The interim report was distributed to American funders, sponsors, and textbook publishers; a copy was also sent to the Ministry of Education.

The Project was able to resume activities in 1986, following the conclusion of a new cultural exchange agreement between the US and USSR that was signed in Geneva, Switzerland in November, 1985. In May, 1986 the American Project director met with Ministry of Education officials and the Soviet Project director in Moscow. They agreed to restart the Project by first reviewing new textbooks that had appeared since the previous review and to complete a final report based upon earlier drafts and the new findings.

#### *June, 1987 Conference*

Representatives from the Soviet Textbook Commission and the American team met at the Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin on November 8-12, 1987. The long-awaited meeting in the United States finally occurred. This conference was smaller than the prior one in Moscow: eight American and nine Soviet participants. Despite a two-year improvement in diplomatic relations between the United States and the USSR, the funds required to support a larger meeting were not available to the American hosts.

The conference focused on three broad topics: 1) current scholarship in history and geography in both nations and the impact of such scholarship on school textbooks; 2) changes in history and geography textbooks since the June, 1979 conference; and 3) methods of teaching history and geography in American and Soviet schools.

The sessions devoted to recent history and geography scholarship and the impact of such scholarship on textbooks proved to be the most interesting of the conference. The American historians explained that as a result of increased specialization within their discipline, more attention to social history at the expense of political history, and less consensus about what was important to teach, history had lost its appeal for many Americans. Soviet historians explained changes occurring in Soviet scholarship. They commented that much of what they had written in the past could no longer be justified by new evidence; they had also been too dogmatic in their approach, unwilling to consider Western

historiography, and insufficiently critical of previous Soviet scholarship. They also reported research on such topics as the role of religion in the United States, the "progressive movement," the role of American political parties, and other topics that had previously been ignored by Soviet textbooks.

The American participants were excited about the effects "perestroika" and "glasnost" seemed to be having on Soviet history and geography; they were also surprised by the intellectual differences displayed among the Soviet scholars. They disagreed publicly with one another, unlike their previous practice. Both American and Soviet scholars pointed to the lag that existed between findings based upon academic scholarship and textbook content. Clearly scholarship was not the only factor that determined textbook treatments.

The participants reported the changes that had occurred in reviewed textbooks during the preceding eight years. In general, the results were disappointing. Some factual errors had been corrected, but the overall tone of the textbooks had not improved much, if at all; indeed, in one case -- a Soviet geography textbook -- the reviewer reported that the current book was more inflammatory than its earlier edition. All agreed that the process of improving textbooks had been retarded by the deterioration of relationships between the two countries in the period 1979-1985. Soviet historians and geographers predicted that the new Soviet curricula, approved in 1985 and the new syllabi based upon the new curricula would lead in time to greatly improved textbooks. However, better textbooks were not in evidence at Wingspread.

The participants also devoted some time to discussing methods of teaching history and geography. With regard to teaching methods, both American and Soviet participants agreed that Soviet authors, teachers, and teacher educators had much to learn from the Americans. The Soviet instructional approach called for drilling students on the knowledge contained in the textbooks in order that the students could remember and reproduce it accurately. In contrast, the Americans assumed that learning should be interesting, even enjoyable, and that the purpose of study was to encourage thinking and knowledge use rather than its memorization. The teaching techniques employed in the two countries seemed appropriate to what each judged to be the purposes of instruction.

Some time was devoted to whether the work of the Textbook Project was nearing an end and what, if anything, should be done to build upon its work. The Soviet representatives hoped the work could be continued and suggested some ways it might be expanded, until they learned that new American sponsors would likely be necessary if the Project changed focus. It was also agreed to drop an earlier plan to publish a final project report in two languages

for distribution in both countries. The estimated cost for such a publication was prohibitively expensive. Finally, the two sides agreed to the following tasks:

- 1) Each side would publish the results of the textbook study in its own country in the best way it could.
- 2) The next seminar would be held in Moscow and would include authors and editors of geography and history textbooks.
- 3) The Americans and possibly the Soviet Commission would publish edited, translated excerpts from the textbooks of the other side for use in their schools.
- 4) Each side promised to write and submit articles on history and geography teaching to be published in journals of the other nation.

Of these agreed-upon tasks, only the first two were completed.

In winter, 1988, "perestroika" reached the Ministry of Education. It was abolished, its functions folded into a new organization called the State Committee for Public Education. Furthermore, the Academy for Pedagogical Sciences came under attack and was threatened with dissolution. In May, 1988, school history exams were canceled because the textbooks were so poor it was unreasonable to examine students over their contents. Throughout 1988, the situation was very confused, at least to the American team; it was unclear whether the Soviet Textbook Commission would continue to exist and what organization, if any, would be responsible for its support.

In January, 1989, three Americans traveled to Moscow to meet members of the Soviet Textbook Commission. The purpose of the visit was to arrange for a June conference in Moscow for textbook authors and editors. As a result of the January visit, a weakened Academy of Pedagogical Sciences agreed to be the official host for the conference; the State Committee for Public Education reluctantly agreed to cover conference expenses. Inertia, more than organizational enthusiasm in either country, seemed to power the Project at this stage.

The June, 1989 conference was the last event for a Project that had spanned twelve years. In contrast to the Moscow conference that had taken place exactly a decade earlier, the Soviet representatives were less concerned with what the American books stated about the USSR; they were more sensitive and divided about what Soviet textbooks should include about the history of the USSR. The promised new eleventh-grade (formerly tenth-grade) textbook on History of the USSR had not yet appeared; Soviet teachers were expected to teach the course without textbooks.



Reform was clearly in the air, and the Soviet delegation was deeply divided over what route it would or should take. No longer did it seem so important to the Soviet Commission that Americans know what Soviet scholars thought American books should include about the USSR. Soviet historians, geographers, teacher educators, and textbook authors were less confident about the basic facts and interpretations of their own history. It is ironic that at the very time that barriers to the outside world were coming down, Soviet scholars appeared to be turning inward.

The new intellectual freedom brought opportunities to take greater charge of one's own academic interests. Unlike previous times, individual members of the Soviet Textbook Commission proposed ideas for future exchanges; Soviet authors and publishers proposed joint publications; editors offered to publish articles written by representatives from the other side; American editors responded by suggesting exchanges of manuscripts for textbooks prior to publication to receive editorial advice. While it was obvious that many of the ideas would never be realized and that some monopolies, such as presses, had not disappeared, it was equally apparent that the mechanism of "governmental commission" had been overtaken by events and was no longer needed.

While they were in Moscow, some members of the American team attended meetings of VNIK (Temporary Research Commission on the Schools). This Commission had been established early in 1988 to study the status of schooling in the USSR and to offer recommendations for dramatic changes. It consisted of approximately 200 prominent psychologists, sociologists, educational researchers, and innovative teachers. Although one of the vice-presidents of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences supported its work, VNIK was feared -- even detested -- by many in the Academy for Pedagogical Sciences. The Americans found themselves in the strange position of meeting with the Soviet educational establishment during the day, those who had written or edited textbooks and were now divided about if and how they should be changed, and conferring with VNIK at night, people who were certain the existing textbooks had to be removed from schools, who had new ideas about the role of textbooks in Soviet schools, and who were eager to unseat some of the people who were associated with the Textbook Commission.

At the close of the June conference, the American and Soviet heads of the Textbook Project declared their work was finished. Given all that was occurring and might take place in the future, the best tactic for the Project was to declare that its work was done and get out of the way.

The Textbook Project "Underground"

The preceding description refers to most of the major events that occurred during the life of the Project, but it does little to give the reader a flavor of what occurred and why. To a degree, the Project mirrors the official relationship that existed between the U.S. and USSR over the same period. The Project also illustrates how academic scholars organize their work and relate their activities to public policy.

The following pages contain responses to a short list of questions one might ask about the US/USSR Textbook Study Project:

- . Why establish a comparative study of textbooks?
- . Why were such cumbersome procedures employed in the study?
- . Who was in charge?
- . How was the Project affected by differences in academic culture?

*Why establish a comparative study of textbooks?* Textbooks are important because they contain the information each society has approved for transmission to its children and youth. History and geography textbooks contain the story adults want children to believe about themselves and others. Textbooks are the most easily controlled element of schooling. Where teachers depend upon textbooks and when students must pass examinations based upon textbook content, textbooks set the agenda for what is taught and learned in school about the world. Those who want to know -- or affect -- what children believe should start with textbooks.

Textbooks were not produced and employed identically in the United States and the USSR. The Soviet Union depended upon a centralized curriculum with one approved book for each course; the task of the teacher has been to help students acquire the knowledge contained in the textbook. In the United States, the curriculum varies somewhat among states. Until now, there have been no national standards or tests. Teachers are free to choose among textbooks and to add other resources if they can afford them. The job of the teacher is to promote interest in the course, to encourage independent thinking, and to foster applications of knowledge. Despite these differences in approach, the role played by textbooks is similar.

The US/USSR Textbook Study Project was made possible by the policy of détente. Prior to that time, it was not in the interests of either the American or the Soviet government to encourage scholars to examine their textbooks. When governments

believe they are preparing for war, they want as virulent propaganda in the books as the publishers will employ and the public will stand. Détente declared that the two governments would continue to compete, but they would do their best to avoid military confrontation. Each government concluded, for somewhat different reasons, that its best strategy was to dampen war hysteria. Neither the American nor the Soviet government wished to be pushed into a war it did not want.

In part, the moratorium on Project activities between December, 1979 and November, 1985 occurred precisely because the American government wished to abandon détente, at least temporarily. First, President Carter's reaction to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and later President Reagan's effort to rebuild American defenses required promoting the specter of a powerful, aggressive Soviet Union. The Textbook Project became dysfunctional for American government policy. In addition, the Project afforded little political advantage for the Reagan administration because it had been established during the Carter administration, which was being attacked for being "weak on Communism." When diplomatic conditions changed after 1985, it was relatively easy to permit those who operated the Project to re-start it because it no longer posed a policy threat. However, it was soon apparent that the Project's appeal to funders and sponsors had waned. With the Cold War drawing to a close, the relationships between American and Soviet scholars and their academic organizations were approaching a status similar to that Americans enjoy with colleagues in other nations. The Project lost its justification as an instrument to dampen war hysteria.

At least two additional motives influenced Project participants: scholarship and academic tourism. For some, the Project was an exceptional opportunity to study history and geography instruction in the other nation. Historians and geographers used the Project as a means to establish contact with professional colleagues. While the opening of academic exchanges in 1958 had provided limited opportunities for American and Soviet scholars to meet, the Project created a special venue for a different kind of academic exchange. For an American scholar who did not know Russian and who was not a specialist in Soviet history, the opportunity to learn more about the Soviet Union and to meet Soviet colleagues was nearly unprecedented. The advantages for Soviet scholars for whom travel abroad was a rare privilege were even greater. To present a paper at an international meeting, especially one in the United States, was to acquire a particular kind of academic legitimacy in the USSR. The importance of external, scholarly validation became even more important as "perestroika" undermined official ideology.

Academic tourism was also important. There is little doubt that a few of the American and Soviet participants viewed the Project as a no-cost tour abroad. The Project provided a means of travel

to a nation some might never visit again, to see cities they had only read about. Without impugning the motives of Soviet scholars, the Project offered an extraordinary opportunity for them to acquire consumer goods for family and friends that were unobtainable at home. Each trip devoted approximately one week to serious meetings, the second week to attending cultural events, visiting cities, and shopping. While it is tempting to be critical of such non-academic purposes, it is significant that state commissioners of education and textbook editors from the United States had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see the Soviet Union as professionals and not merely as tourists. It is also important that those responsible for Soviet textbooks had the opportunity to experience American culture directly.

*Why were such cumbersome procedures employed in the study?* Some procedures were used to protect the Project from potential critics. The four sponsoring American organizations were needed to provide legitimacy in the United States. NCSS provided credibility with teachers, CCSSO with the state departments of education; AAASS gave the Project stature with American scholars who teach and publish books and articles about the Soviet Union; AAP made the Project legitimate with the textbook publishers. On June 7, 1979, Representative John M. Ashbrook attacked the Project in the Congressional Record. Among other things, he said, "I hope Professor Mehlinger [the American Project director] will make public any such revised textbook drafts, so we can all see just how far some American intellectuals are willing to prostitute themselves for the sake of detente." Such criticisms, although rare, could have escalated and been harmful if the Project had not made certain that it had the support of key constituencies.

The procedures employed were also necessary to gain cooperation from key groups. For example, the American publishers were promised that if their books were reviewed, no one beyond the American team would receive the actual reviews except for the respective editor and textbook author. Furthermore, in the final report to be published and given general circulation, specific books would not be identified with each criticism. This was a most unusual practice in American scholarship, one that surprised the Soviet Textbook Commission. However, it was unlikely that the American publishers would have voluntarily permitted their books to be reviewed if they had not been given such an assurance. One publisher pointed out that it would be as great a market disadvantage for his book to be chosen as the best book by the Soviet Commission as it would be being cited the worst book; in either case he would be ridiculed by his competition. Since the purpose of the study was to change books, when appropriate, not merely criticize them, it was important for the publishers to participate freely without facing a major sales risk.

The procedures were also designed so that neither side could be easily embarrassed by the other. Exchanging documents in both Russian and English, working through interpreters, exchanging drafts in advance of meetings, agreeing to the precise wording of protocols: These and other steps were taken in order to allow adequate time to study each document that might appear eventually in print in order that neither side would appear foolish at home. The Americans, in particular, were aware that they were not merely representing themselves; they were also representing four professional associations as well as the United States, however they might try to avoid that impression.

It is also likely that the Project employed bureaucratic procedures for reviewing textbooks because rather formal bureaucratic means are used to develop them. While publication procedures vary across the two countries, both follow steps that ensure that the final product will be largely free from "error" and impervious to criticism.

The procedures were also used to give the appearance that something was happening when it was not. Despite the stated Project goal of correcting errors and biased interpretations in textbooks, the members of the American and Soviet teams could do little directly to change textbooks. In the United States, opinions about the market influence editorial judgement; if the American public wants inflammatory statements about the USSR in its textbooks, this is what publishers will provide, regardless of criticism by American academics. In the Soviet Union, the Communist Party, as interpreted by officials in the Ministry of Education, decided what textbooks would say. Prevented from making changes in textbooks directly, the Project participants were limited to writing reports, publishing articles, and giving speeches based on the findings. One example of appearing to do something while avoiding action was the June, 1979 conference. The two sides had agreed to focus on ten topics over a five-day period. Later, the time allowed for meetings was reduced to three days; as many as three topics were presented in one session. Furthermore, each Soviet presenter wanted to use all of the allotted time, allowing no time for rebuttal or discussion. The appearance is that each topic was discussed; in reality, they were mainly only presented. The use of protocols following each meeting was also a way of appearing to act without truly doing something. A protocol leaves a record of what took place, but a protocol is not a contract or a formal agreement; it is merely a statement of intention. Many of the commitments contained in the protocols could not be realized. In retrospect, neither side had much vested interest in the implementation of the final results of the study, for somewhat different reasons.

*Who was in charge?* It is not easy to know who was in charge of the Project. The American and Soviet directors were apparently in command; certainly they spoke publicly on behalf of the



Project, but each reported to others. The Soviet director had to satisfy the Ministry of Education in the first years and later the State Committee for Public Education and the Presidium of the Academy for Pedagogical Sciences. The American director had more authority than any other single American, but he was accountable to the four sponsoring organizations. While they were not oppressive in their demands, he was obliged to consult with them, especially through their representatives on the Advisory Committee.

A more subtle control was exercised through the budget. Because the American team had to raise its own funds -- the four sponsoring organizations had no resources for the Project -- the American team was able to do what it could afford to do and what its funders would support. The lack of adequate funding was one factor that led the American director to drop the idea of a joint report to be published in both Russian and English. Furthermore, one reason the June, 1989 meeting focused on textbook editors and authors was because the American director had few funds to support international travel, and the American publishers agreed to pay the airfare for their representatives.

The Soviet Textbook Commission also operated under budget constraints, especially during the last two years after the Ministry of Education was abolished. In January, 1989, the American director was invited to join the Soviet representatives at a meeting with a member of the State Committee for Public Education to plead for funds to host the June, 1989 meeting in Moscow. The funds provided were less than adequate and provided grudgingly.

To what degree was the Project controlled by government officials controlling diplomatic relations between the two countries? The author cannot comment for the Soviet side; his views are limited to his direct experience with American officials. It may be important to note that the Project was initially proposed by Soviet diplomats during the negotiations for the renewal of the cultural and educational exchanges in 1976. At that time, American negotiators were cool to the idea but did not see any easy way to turn down the overture. They thought the American side could appear foolish; errors would be found in American textbooks and American publishers would refuse to acknowledge the errors or correct the textbooks, thereby embarrassing the American side. Some members of the American Embassy staff in Moscow were especially cautious, fearing that naive American educators would be outwitted by canny Soviet scholars more accustomed to operating in a politicized atmosphere. As the Project unfolded, both American officials in the State Department in Washington and Embassy staff in Washington warmed to the project and became firm supporters.

But the invasion of Afghanistan in December, 1979 coupled with the arrival of a new administration that was extremely suspicious, at least publicly, of the Soviet Union, undermined the credibility the Project had earned with the foreign service staff who had to conform to policies set by the politically-appointed heads of departments and key agencies. In the United States, the Project became a victim of political partisanship as well as diplomatic policy from 1981-1986.

In the Soviet Union, the most obvious politics affecting the Project was a result of the decline in status of everything associated with the educational establishment, especially the Ministry of Education and to a lesser degree, the Academy for Pedagogical Sciences. In addition, as revisionism in Soviet history developed rapidly after 1987, Soviet history and geography textbooks were attacked by Soviet revisionist scholars as vestiges of the old order. Once, Soviet textbook authors knew that their books conformed to the main ideas of Soviet scholarship as recognized by official government agencies. Now, with intellectual ideas in flux, authors, editors, and teachers found themselves standing on ground that was shifting beneath their feet.

*How was the Project affected by differences in academic culture?* Each side was forced to recognize and accommodate to unfamiliar academic styles. For example, Soviet academic meetings tend to be more formal than American ones. Opening and closing ceremonies, formal receptions with toasting, formal signing of protocols, even the formal way meetings were conducted were different from that experienced by the Americans. The Americans accommodated to these formal practices when they were in the USSR and at times appeared to enjoy them; however, whenever possible, the Americans tried to lure the Soviet participants into less formal arrangements. In general, Americans disliked the long speeches and preferred debate. Americans also disagreed with one another, although not as frequently as they might have done if Soviet members had not been present. There was very little apparent disagreement among members of the Soviet team until 1987 when conflict within the Soviet academic community spilled over into the Textbook Commission.

The Americans offered other occasions for Soviet representatives to share their ideas. In 1979 and 1987, Soviet representatives presented programs at the annual meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies; they were invited also to send representatives to conventions of the AAASS and to the American Historical Association, but none appeared. An article by a member of the Soviet Commission, detailing criticisms of American textbooks, was published in a 1981 issue of Social Education, NCSS' official journal. No similar invitations to write articles for Soviet journals or to speak at Soviet

conferences were extended to Americans by the Soviet Textbook Commission.

The content and style of discourse also differed between the two sides. While the Americans sometimes were witness to the kind of bombastic, table-pounding presentation that was once a trademark of Soviet diplomats, this was not their customary style and was exhibited by only the oldest members of the Soviet Commission. Indeed, outside of the formal meetings, the conversations tended to be extremely cordial, friendly, and low-key. Yet, there was little effort by individual Soviet Commission members to invite Americans to their homes or to be with them except at official functions.

In general, the language employed was much the same. Both spoke frankly, while politely; both sides tended to depend heavily upon the jargon of their fields which often left the interpreters confused and seeking help. Since only a fraction of the American and Soviet team members had an excellent command of the other's language, interpreters were critical to the progress of meetings. No one knows what information was lost and nuances missed because they failed to be translated adequately.

In the beginning of the Project, the spokespersons tended to be cautious when presenting their ideas. These meetings were more like bargaining sessions between buyers and sellers. When the Project restarted in 1986, the mood was different.

Representatives spoke candidly, eager to resolve differences quickly and less likely to treat suspiciously each new idea advanced by the other side.

### Lessons Learned for Global Education Collaboration

Drawing upon the preceding description, readers will make their own judgements about lessons to be learned from the US/USSR Textbook Study Project that can be applied to current efforts in global education. Some of these lessons might be organized under the three topics discussed below.

1. How can one best structure and maintain multinational collaboration in education? The Textbook Project adopted a very clumsy structure, but one that was necessary for the period in which the Project was launched. Times are different today, but structural problems remain.

On the Russian side there does not appear to be private organizations that can perform tasks such as those done by the Americans; the Americans will do everything possible to avoid giving government authority over

their work. Thus, the mismatch between private authority and initiative on the American side and public authority on the Russian side continues and does not seem likely to end.

There are consequences to such arrangements. On the American side the strength of the effort and its ultimate impact cannot be expected to extend far beyond the participants. The greater the coalition of American participants, the greater the impact -- all other factors being equal. Yet, building a strong coalition on the American side can be exhausting and sometimes consumes more time than can be justified. Responsibility also means finding the money to pay for Project work. On the American side, it was easier to identify possible funders when relations were strained between the two governments. With the end of the Cold War, the assumptions by most American funders for educational projects appear to be that Russia should get as much but no more attention than other countries -- which means very little support at all.

If the effort for collaboration for global education is to be maintained, some attention should be devoted to creating organizational structures and relationships that can survive over time.

2. What role do textbooks play in instruction and how can one overcome their deficiencies? The US/USSR Textbook Study Project assumed, probably correctly, that textbooks are very influential in establishing the instructional agenda. Those associated with the Project also assumed, somewhat naively, that they could have a powerful impact on the content of textbooks. In retrospect, it is clear that the Project had little direct effect on textbook content; its indirect effects are difficult to judge. In the United States, at least, powerful groups help shape public opinion about textbook content; public opinion affects the operation of the textbook market; and the market, more than any other factor, determines what textbook publishers will produce.

However, if one recognizes that the goal is to affect instruction, not textbooks, new opportunities appear. For example, one of the most valuable by-products of the Textbook Project was translated excerpts from Soviet textbooks. American teachers liked having paragraphs from Soviet textbooks on topics such as World War II, US/Soviet relations, etc. to share with students so that they could compare what Soviet students were learning with material from American

textbooks. Several years ago, a book edited by Don Robinson called As Others See Us was used by many American social studies teachers. It contained extracts from textbooks of other countries on topics treated in American textbooks -- e.g., a Mexican history textbook version of the Mexican-American War.

A new geography project, sponsored by the Association of American Geographers and by the Institute of Geography in the Russian Academy of Sciences and Moscow State University, is developing materials on geography that can be added to on-going courses rather than replace existing textbooks. And in September, Channel One, an American news show designed for secondary school students and piped into schools by video, will be shown in a select number of English language schools in Moscow. Again, the point is to supplement existing materials, not replace them.

Finally, it is possible to influence instruction by going directly to teachers and attempting to influence their views. The American teachers were delighted to meet Soviet participants at professional meetings and an article by one of the Soviet participants was published in Social Education. No such opportunities were afforded the American participants. With regard to global education, it should be possible to publish articles in each other's journals and schedule sessions at key professional meetings in each other's country.

3. What is the relationship between global education and multiple perspectives based upon culture, nationality, and ethnicity? Perhaps, the most obvious finding of the Textbook Project was that the textbooks of the two nations often treated identical topics quite differently; this difference could usually be explained as a result of national, ideological, or disciplinary bias. For Americans, the most obvious bias in Soviet textbooks resulted from their commitment to Marxism-Leninism; while a clear-cut ideological bias was less apparent in American books, it was no less present. Typically, individualism, pragmatism, and positivism were philosophical perspectives permeating American texts.

Global education brings new perspectives that should be explored in both nations. Yet, other perspectives, arising from age, gender, racial, ethnic, and cultural differences within each national state, deserve attention. Thus, how can global education be advanced during a time that Cold War rigidities can be ignored while multiple internal perspectives, long repressed,



must now be recognized and incorporated in both national and global perspectives?

These are some of the questions, as well as some of the "lessons," we might gain from a review of the US/USSR Textbook Study Project.

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Note: This paper drew substantially from another by the author entitled "School Textbooks: Weapons for the Cold War" in EDUCATION AND SOCIETY IN RUSSIA AND THE SOVIET UNION, to be published by Macmillan Press in London, 1992.