

## CONFERENCES – KONGRESSE – CONGRÈS

*Teaching about Soviet Education*  
*Fifth Annual Conference on Comparative Education,*  
*New York, April 1958*

Although Americans began to write about Soviet education shortly after the Revolution of 1917, their interest in the school system of the U.S.S.R. grew rapidly as a result of the rise of Sputnik in October, 1957. The number of speeches and articles on the Soviet school began to increase. The publication of *Education in the U.S.S.R.*, along with the controversy about its authorship, made many persons conscious of the importance of educational developments in the land of Lenin and Khrushchev.

Experts in comparative education soon expressed concern as to the accuracy of the data on Soviet education presented in the professional and popular writings. It was recognition of the need for objective information based on primary and reliable information that suggested the theme of the Fifth Annual Conference on Comparative Education at New York University: "Teaching about Soviet Education".

This conference, which took place on April 25, 1958, attracted some sixty persons representing six states and the District of Columbia. As in the case of the earlier conferences <sup>1)</sup>, the Department of History and Philosophy of Education (N.Y.U.), the Division of Advanced Study of the School of Education (N.Y.U.), and the Comparative Education Society joined to sponsor the gathering.

The Conference was opened by Professor George E. Axtelle, New York University, who also discussed the importance of the theme. He then introduced the present writer as Chairman.

The general problem of ensuring reliable facts on what is going on in the Soviet school was discussed in the leading paper, which was prepared by Professor Thomas Woody of the University of Pennsylvania, and which, because of ill health of the author, was read by his student and colleague, Professor Saul Sack.

Other speakers analyzed a graduate course, "The Dynamics of Soviet Power", which involved several areas of subject matter, or lectured on the economy, politics, international relations, culture, and education. In such a course students were enabled to obtain a view of Soviet education within its socio-political context.

Further subjects treated in the course of the Conference were:

The teaching of Soviet education as part of a general course in comparative education and a demonstration of how information about the educational system of the U.S.S.R. may be made part of different types of courses offered in schools of education. The writer of this report discussed briefly the special course on the history and current status of Soviet education which he had introduced at New York University in the spring of 1958.

Professor Ivan D. London of Brooklyn College presented a paper which called forth the greatest interest and comment. He had little trouble, by virtue of his careful critique of recent books on Soviet education, in convincing the participants

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<sup>1)</sup> WILLIAM W. BRICKMAN, "New York University's Fourth Annual Conference on Comparative Education, New York, April 1957". *International Review of Education*, III/4, 1958, pp. 503-505; and "New York University's Third Annual Conference on Comparative Education, New York, April 1956". *Ibid.*, III/1, 1957, pp. 110-112.

that too many educators and scholars have been taking the current literature for granted. Dr. London urged the conference to examine critically the documentation of all the new books before accepting their content. He especially deplored the failure of authors to make use of the Soviet methodological journals, such as *Mathematics in the School* and *Physics in the School*.

A spirited discussion period followed the presentation of the papers. There were also brief accounts of the Comparative Education Society's trip in 1957 to the school of several countries in South America, as well as of the plans of the forthcoming seminar by the C.E.S. in August, 1958, in the Soviet Union. In addition, there were statements of appreciation of the work done by Professor George Z. F. Bereday, Teachers College, Columbia University, as editor of the Society's official periodical, the *Comparative Education Review*.

The members of the conference, who were connected with universities and several educational agencies, seemed to agree that professional comparative educators must be particularly careful to present objective, accurate, and up-to-date information and analyses in their teaching and writing. It was felt that the conference and its follow-up would be instrumental in improving the level of understanding by American educators and citizens of the nature of Soviet education in relation to the past and present.

The proceedings of this conference have been published as a supplement in the November 8, 1958, issue of *School and Society*, 1834 Broadway, New York 23, New York, U.S.A. Copies may be ordered from the Subscription Department of that journal.

WILLIAM W. BRICKMAN, New York

*The Unesco Regional Seminar on Educational Reform  
in South and East Asia, New Delhi, August/September 1958*

This seminar, which was held at New Delhi from the 25th August to the 6th September, 1958, under the joint auspices of Unesco and the Government of India, and which, I understand, is the forerunner of other seminars of a similar nature to be held in other regions of the world, can be said to have made a very significant contribution to the reconstruction of education in the region of South and East Asia. It is impossible, within the compass of such a brief review, to refer to all the achievements of the seminar. Readers of this review will needs have to wait for the more elaborate report of the seminar to be published by Unesco to get a fuller picture of all the problems in the field of education facing the countries in this region, of the important issues with which the seminar was faced and of the recommendations made by it. In this brief review I can only present what seem to me to have been the highlights of this meeting of the representatives of thirteen countries of the South and East Asia region.

It was not surprising to find that almost all these countries are faced with more or less the same problems: there are great shortages of properly qualified teachers, of adequate school buildings, of the right kind of books and of the other material aids to teaching. Basically, the problem is an economic problem; nevertheless, as the seminar helped to demonstrate, gravity of many of these problems can be greatly mitigated by the adoption of measures which have been tried out somewhere with some success.

With regard to the shortage of properly qualified teachers, for example, several countries of this region are experimenting with schemes which aim at not only a quantitative expansion but also a qualitative improvement of the teaching personnel.