

**Report on the Bekasovo Planning Conference on Civic Education in Russia  
December 10-12, 2001**

**Russian Initiative of the Democracy Education Exchange Project  
Howard Mehlinger and Janet Vaillant, Co-directors**

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### **Introduction**

This is a report on the Bekasovo planning conference on civic education in Russia. The purpose of the conference was to plan activities for the Democracy Education Exchange Project (DEEP) Russian Initiative directed by Howard Mehlinger, Indiana University, and Janet Vaillant, Davis Center, Harvard University. Because the conference was a working discussion that was not tape-recorded, this report is based on materials compiled as working documents and on notes taken by Aleksander Uvarov and Janet Vaillant.

The Bekasovo conference was based on the assumption that much good work has been done in the areas of civic and law education in Russia, and that the challenge now is to disseminate the results to new people and places. The conference was intended as a discussion of these accomplishments and the barriers that prevent effective and wide dissemination of their results. After identifying accomplishments and barriers, the participants were asked to define promising next steps to further education in Russia and discuss what might be done effectively under the auspices of the DEEP Russian initiative. The organizers set the following outcomes as their goals:

1. Guidelines for a seminar at Indiana University that will support and plan an activity to extend the reach of existing civic/law programs in Russia. Participants in the Indiana seminar will be asked to suggest materials about civic education in Russia that will be translated into English and made available on the DEEP project web site.
2. A process and criteria for selecting participants for the Indiana seminar
3. Additional desirable secondary accomplishments:
  - Greater understanding among participants of possibilities for synergy through collaboration
  - Ideas for collaboration among projects and institutions
  - Ideas for effective collaboration among Russians and Americans, recognizing that civic education to support democracy and legal culture is a huge enterprise that can be accomplished only by Russians primarily with resources that exist in Russia
  - Understanding of promising and necessary next steps for Russian civic educators

### **Planning Conference Sessions**

The conference was held at the Bekasovo recreation facility, outside of Moscow, from Monday December 10 to Wednesday December 12. A variety of techniques was used to facilitate discussion and encourage participation. The facilitator was Janet Vaillant unless otherwise noted. The language of the conference was Russian. The first full working day was devoted to discussing accomplishments and barriers to the further development of civic education in Russia, and brainstorming about activities to overcome those barriers. The second day turned to what was possible and feasible for the Indiana seminar to offer that might help overcome some of these barriers. The list of participants in these discussions is attached in Appendix 1, the conference program in Appendix 2

### **Monday, December 10**

Participants traveled by bus to Bekasovo from Moscow. Before dinner there was a meeting to discuss logistics and for people to introduce themselves. Each person was asked to explain how and when he became interested in civic education. The evening was free for people to do as they wished.

**Tuesday, December 11**

### **Working Session 1: Goals and Expected Outcomes for the Conference**

The first working day began with a general introduction to the DEEP project. Written material about the purpose of the conference and expected outcomes had already been circulated to participants. This session offered everyone an opportunity to ask questions about the written material. In fact, there were few.

### **Working Session 2: Accomplishments of Existing Programs and Barriers to their Diffusion**

This session was divided into two parts. Participants were divided into prearranged groups for discussion and then reconvened to report back to the whole group. Participants discussed the accomplishments of their individual projects, identified barriers to their further development, and began to consider common problems and possible activities that would benefit the cause of civic education in Russia.

One group's reporter proposed that several different aspects of civic education need to be considered: the content and materials for specific courses, the school setting in which civic education takes place, the requirements of regional and federal curricula, and the research findings that identify the most valuable approaches.

A number of barriers to the advancement of civic education were identified:

1. Inertia among teachers
2. The weak philosophical and historical preparation of teachers
3. The lack of a shared professional vocabulary for discussing civic education
4. Lack of sustained support for teachers
5. Attachment to past ideas and methods
6. Lack of cooperation among colleagues working in civic education
7. Poor communication about accomplishments of others
8. Lack of clear definition about what civic education is and how to evaluate it
9. Isolation of projects from one another in the absence of a general overview that would enable projects to build on the accomplishments of others
10. Difficulty in changing the culture of the school or the ways schools are organized
11. Absence of preconditions for qualitative change – even educators themselves have a weak capacity for cooperation, dialogue and problem solving
12. Isolation of teacher training programs and pedagogical colleges and universities from school innovations and accomplishments in civic education at the school level
13. Lack of systematic coordination between local, regional and federal levels
14. Absence of public support for new approaches to civic education in schools

### **Working Session 3: Challenges for Russian Civic Education: A View from the Ministry**

Viktor A. Bolotov, First Deputy Minister of Education of the Russian Federation

Dr. Bolotov made a brief presentation followed by questions. As he had just been given added responsibilities for implementing the new policy for the “modernization” of Russian schools the week before the conference, he had to leave the conference after his presentation.

During his discussion, Bolotov pointed out that a single school course by itself will not and cannot carry out the task of civic education. The challenge of civic education can be met only by considering the entire structure of school life. Development of specific courses is just a small fraction of the solution. Many courses have been developed over the last ten years, and their authors are struggling to receive 1 or 2 hours per week assigned to their new course in the federal curriculum. These individuals should think about how

to include the components of civic education in already existing, traditional courses so that they infuse the academic program as a whole. As an example, he cited a historical education project that has been recently submitted to the Ministry by a group of historians that makes no mention of the issues surrounding civic education. The authors of this course and those interested in civic education need to collaborate.

Bolotov called on the participants to take part in a productive discussion of the new proposals for history curricula and other documents before they are officially approved. Representatives of the professional community need to take part in the development of alternative proposals. He favors making public discussion of important education initiatives mandatory. He pointed out that all programs related to civic education must be supported by the general public; they cannot be imposed by the Ministry of Education. This is what democracy requires.

Dr. Bolotov reminded his audience that there are many Russians who believe that the Russian education system is the best in the world and does not need to be reformed. Generally, these individuals favor traditional content in history, the basic curriculum of Soviet times and formal methods of teaching. He noted the recent controversy about how best to instill a sense of patriotism among young people. A conclusive solution to this issue should come from a group of qualified specialists in the areas of social science and education. Those in favor of new methods should work harder to engage the public in discussion of alternative ideas and solutions. Civic education has a great challenge ahead of it, made greater by the fact that Russia has not yet developed a specific terminology for discussing issues in that sphere.

In conclusion, Bolotov remarked that contemporary Russia has embarked on a slow and difficult journey of shifting priorities. It will require a lot of difficult work and much time before new ideas will find their place among conventional goals and solutions. He urged civic education experts to approach their work energetically, soundly and conscientiously and to work very hard to influence those changes.

#### **Working Session 4: Discussion: How can Existing Barriers to the Advancement of Civic Education be overcome?**

Each participant had an opportunity to suggest a promising next step for civic education in Russia. There was the opportunity to ask clarifying questions and then participants were asked to indicate their priorities among the activities. Each person had four votes.

The priorities for action were identified by the participants as follows:

Develop a network of regional centers for training civic education teams	7
Develop overall expectations of school graduates, rather than for a single subject, in terms of civic competency and methods of assessment	6
Work with pedagogical institutes preparing new teachers	6
Create a web site for civic education, information on all aspects	6
Develop common terminology, find conceptual clarity in order To determine the boundaries of civic education	5
Develop strategic planning committees, coordinate work	5
Develop aspects of civic education within the traditional disciplines	5
Establish public education campaign to boost support for civic education	4
Conduct external evaluation of all projects	3
Remove current standards that limit school autonomy, work on new standards	3
Research demand for civic education	2
Develop a data base for civic education	2
Seek consensus on minimal standards for civic education	2
Seek directive from ministry asserting importance of civic education	2
Develop comprehensive program for education reform with civic Education one of its components	2
Be open about shortcomings of own project and help each other	2
Create method to publish results of completed projects	2
Develop legal, normative foundation for civic education	2
Develop database of experts on civic education (Russian and international)	2
Create a common project to infuse civic education into traditional subjects	2
Develop coordinated research program	2
Use the method of social-cultural planning as basis for planning	2
Create summer school on civic education for students	1
Analyze existing models to create new atmosphere in pedagogical institutes/universities	1

### **Working Session 5: General Discussion led by Aleksander Tubel'skii**

The conference participants agreed that working solely on terminology in the area of civic education would not be productive. Language and terminology will be developed in the course of current projects and discussions. It is important that the professional community be aware of on-going projects and have access to its results. There is a need for a “white book” on civic education and/or a web site. Many teachers who need the information most do not have access to the internet, so a few questioned whether creation of a web site should take precedence over compiling and publishing information in written form. It was agreed that the development of the web site or “white book” would provide an overview of the situation and contribute to the development of a common professional language.

Participants identified a growing gap between the best practices in civic education at schools that are developing new projects and testing new materials and/or are in privileged urban locations, and the great majority of Russian schools. It is difficult to share information. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that there is no general strategy for civic education that would aid in the setting of achievable goals. There has been a tendency to develop civic education in isolated projects that are not related to one another, rather than as coordinated steps in a common strategy for reaching a goal that all share. This is a problem that the participants would like to work on. The structure of funding from outside, often international sources, encourages competition among projects for financial support and inhibits collaboration that might benefit all projects. Some thought that the Ministry needed to be more involved and coordinate a national strategy for introducing civic education. Others were wary of any centralized effort to guide school innovation.

It was pointed out that efforts to implement social reforms and the work of NGOs working in this area should be reflected in civic education and visa versa. Each group would benefit from more contact with the other. It was thought that politicians and others leading NGOs active in the civic sector are ignorant of the accomplishments of civic education in the schools. It was agreed that there needs to be a public education campaign to inform people about the need for civic education and its accomplishments. No one, however, expected help from the mass media.

A heated debate took place about the “competence” approach to civic education. This is a word that the most recent government task force and the Ministry are now using in documents about the next phase of Russian education reform, its modernization. The word is yet to be precisely defined, but refers to the idea that less emphasis should be placed on purely academic knowledge. School graduates should be able to apply what they learn to new situations and the realities of life in a democratic, law-governed market economy and to Russian realities. All agreed that exams that test factual knowledge only are inadequate. The problem is how to assess capabilities and competencies. More complicated assessment techniques are needed to evaluate school graduates. Some participants were wary, however, of urging that there be more testing. This might encourage the introduction of federal and regional standards at a time when existing assessment methods are inadequate. Under these conditions, the introduction of civic education standards would undermine what has been accomplished. It was pointed out that the most sophisticated programs of civic education emphasize the need to transform the whole school environment to model a democratic, law-governed society. These projects are already threatened by existing and proposed national standards. Therefore some hesitate to propose more rather than less assessment of school graduates.

### **Working Session 6: Proposed Actions**

Based on these discussions, there was a consensus that three activities were priorities for attention:

1. The definition and assessment of the “competencies” that school graduates should acquire.
2. Strategies for developing regional resource centers
3. Strategies for the infusion of more effective civic education into the institutions that train new teachers.

Three groups were formed and each participant was asked to join the one that most interested him or her. Each group was charged to develop a plan of action and report back to the whole.

### **Proposal from “Competency” Group**

The group defined the need for the following products:

- Socially significant indicators of deficient civic capacities and competence
- An approach for describing the results of civic education in terms of competence
- Requirements for a legal-organizational context that will support civic education
- Description of the levels of competence in civic education required for graduates at various educational levels
- Methods for integrating material that will teach mastery of civic qualities and competencies into regular subjects in the curriculum
- Methods for evaluating civic education competencies
- Understanding of possible risks in focusing on this approach
- Thesaurus: vocabulary for talking about these issues
- Larger leadership team in this area
- Projects for specific audiences: developers and evaluators of new materials, teachers, parents

### **Proposal from the Pedagogical Institutes and Universities Group**

The institutions that prepare new teachers need to redesign their own environments as a means of effective civic education. Some possible measures include giving students more choice in the organization of their own programs, teaching them to evaluate themselves and their peers, engaging them in dialogue, and discussion about their own experiences of being a student. Faculty can encourage students to engage in civic activity in the towns where the institutions are situated. The pedagogical institutions themselves need to create a diverse and open community so that the student teachers will gain the experience of living in a democratic community where their rights are respected. Courses for education managers should also model dialogue, discuss conflicts openly and thereby create an atmosphere that gives those managers the experience of a democratic place. The faculty can model ways to infuse civic education into traditional courses and themselves model desirable teaching methods. Changing the culture of a school has proved extremely difficult; changing the culture of an institute or university is an even greater challenge. Nonetheless those interested in introducing these changes in the pedagogical faculties need to study the experience gained in school projects and may be able to learn from them.

### **Proposal from the Resource Centers Group**

1. Inventory all existing civic education resource centers in Russia. Questions to cover:
  - Who established it?
  - What are its target groups?
  - How are its resources used?
  - What is its influence?
  - Which model(s) of civic education does it support, present?
2. Devise measures for organizing and institutionalizing centers based on contracts from users
3. Recognize multifaceted activities as necessary at centers and the wide scope of civic education
  - Administrative institutionalization
  - Research programs
  - Identifying financial resources
  - Work on descriptive language
  - Connection with similar centers in Russia or abroad – developing partners
4. Define content of training: project development, conflict resolution, critical thinking, etc.
5. Accept diversity of approach at each center

In the discussion that followed, it was noted that there are two kinds of resource centers. One is a place with people and materials; the other includes a network of experts and consultants. Often people need simple, basic help, because they are beginners in civic education. One problem is that some of the existing centers are really places to propagate the idea of a single author and only exist as long as there is outside

funding. Centers need to be open to all. Everyone should be free to use materials, computers, or whatever resources exist. The British Council has regional centers for language teaching that attract large numbers of users. Some have a civic education component.

The teachers who use the resource centers should decide what the centers should include and offer. There was a dissenting voice from a person who felt that such regional centers are expensive to maintain and usually devolve into the effort of a single person to get more money for his or her own work. In short, she doubted that effective collaboration among those with different approaches was possible.

### **Wednesday December 12**

#### **Working Session 7: Discussion of Goals for the Bloomington Conference led by Uvarov, Mehlinger and Vaillant**

It was agreed that given the short time span and relatively small budget for this project, effort to develop regional civic education centers was not appropriate. The group agreed that work on the new concept of competency is a top priority. It is important to define the attainments that make up competency and develop tools to assess them. The definition of what the term, “competency,” is to mean in the context of civic education must be provided by the Russians. It was agreed that one of the activities at Bloomington should be to learn how to assess attainments other than factual learning.

It was also agreed that participants for Bloomington should be chosen to represent both institutions that train teachers and civic education projects at the school level. This would ensure a mutually enriching exchange among them. Participants at the planning conference were asked to nominate candidates for Bloomington. There should be at least two candidates from each school or project if possible. English language is required and will be tested. The British Council will take on this task for a nominal fee.

#### **Working Session 8: Final Session**

Each person was asked to present an idea or personal opinion that he or she had developed during the meeting and wanted to bring to others’ attention. Many comments repeated and underlined substantive remarks, such as concern about the growing gap between civic education in innovative schools and the majority of regular schools. The conference had helped give many participants a better sense of what was going on around the country. Others focused on the conference itself. Several commented that they had never attended a meeting like this that enabled top-level professionals to discuss important issues with one another. Although some saw each other frequently, usually each was presenting his own work, or there were immediate, practical matters that took precedence over consideration of general problems and possible solutions. One also remarked on the tone of the conference and the lack of aggressiveness that he often found at other professional conferences. Other comments touched on the democratic nature of the conference that allowed every person a chance to speak. In this vein, the conference itself was called a model for civic education and a further step toward creating a community of professionals with common interests.

Several participants commented on the value of Russian as the working language of the conference. They emphasized that it increased the thoughtfulness and depth of their discussion, and enabled a free exchange of ideas. It created a level playing field for Russian specialists whose English skills were weak or non-existent. There is no necessary overlap between those doing innovative work in civic education and those with a strong command of English. Indeed, language and cultural barriers often pose problems for international projects, especially in civic education.

The results of participants’ written evaluations of the conference are reported in Appendix 3.

## Appendix 1

### Conference Participants

#### Name

1. Bashaev, Vyacheslav Vladimirovitch	Krasnoyarsk School #161
2. Bolotina, Tatyana Vladimirovna	Academy for Continuing Education For Teachers, Moscow
3. Bolotov, Viktor Aleksandrovich	Russian Ministry of Education, Chistie prудii
4. Fedotenko, Inna Leonidovna	Tula Pedagogical University, Tula
5. Frumin, Issac Davidovich	World Bank, Moscow, Moscow
6. Gutnikov, Arkadii Borisovich	Project "Living Law", St.Petersburg
7. Khasan, Boris Iosevich	Krasnoyarsk University, Krasnoyarsk
8. Kolker, Yakov Moiseich	Ryazan Pedagogical University, Ryazan
9. Kostikov, Sergei Mihailovich	Ryazan Pedagogical University, Ryazan
10. Lenskaya, Elena Anatol'evna	British Council, Moscow
11. Howard Mehlinger	Indiana University, Bloomington IN, USA
12. Pakhomov, Vladimir Petrovich	Institute of Continuing Education, Samara
13. Schwartz, Gabriella	Street Law Inc., Washington, DC USA
14. Semina, Lidiya Ivanovna	Open Society Institute, Moscow
15. Sokolova, Olga Venyaminovna	Sochi Multicultural College , Sochi
16. Spasskaya, Veronica Viktorovna	Russian Foundation for Legal Reform, Moscow
17. Tubel'skii, Alexander Naumovich	School of Self-Determination , Moscow
18. Uvarov, Alexander Urevich	University of the Russian Academy of Education , Moscow
19. Vaillant, Janet	Davis Center, Harvard University , Cambridge, MA USA
20. Volodina, Svetlana Igorevna	Russian Foundation for Legal Reform , Moscow

Appendix 2

## Appendix 2 Conference Program

### Monday, December 10

**5:30pm** Personal Introduction Roundtable, led by Janet Vaillant and Howard Mehlinger

**7:00-8:00pm** Dinner

Free time, sauna

### Tuesday, December 11

**9:00-9:30am** Breakfast

**9:30-10:00am** Explanation of project DEEP and goals of the Conference  
Janet Vaillant and Howard Mehlinger

**10:00-11:00am** Work in small groups

Task: Describe briefly <sup>1</sup> your work in the sphere of civic education, using the following questions as a guide:

What aspect of civic education is your work dedicated to?

What difficulties do you encounter in your work?

What could increase the productivity of your work?

- 11:00-11:30am** “Problems in Developing Civic Education: A View from the Ministry”  
Viktor Aleksandrovitch Bolotov, Russian Federation Deputy Minister of Education.
- 11:30-12:20pm** Reports from morning groups  
Discussion of commonalities
- 12:20-12:35pm** Break
- 12:20-2:20pm** Identification of promising next steps for overcoming difficulties:  
Brainstorming, discussion, and voting on priorities
- 2:20-3:00pm** Lunch.
- 3:00-5:00pm** General Discussion led by A.N. Tubel'skii.
- 5:00-5:30pm** Break
- 5:30-6:00pm** Work in small groups to propose specific activities to solve problems identified as priorities by participants
- 6:00-7:00pm** Group Presentations
- 7:00-8:00pm** Dinner

### Wednesday, December 12

- 9:00-9:30am** Breakfast
- 9:30-11:30am** Identification of activities for Bloomington Seminar, led Janet Vaillant and Howard Mehlinger
- 11:30-12:00pm** Break
- 12:00-1:30pm** Continuation of the Discussion about Bloomington seminar, including establishing the profile of desirable participants
- 1:30-2:00pm** Preparation for departure for the Bekasovo recreation facility
- 2:00-3:00pm** Lunch
- 3:30pm** Departure for Moscow

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<sup>1</sup> It is assumed that many participants are familiar with each other's work. Materials on some projects were circulated by e mail before the conference.