

The New York State – Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project
The Founding Project of iEARN

A Comparative Program Analysis of New York Schools
and their Interactions with their Russian and Chinese Counterparts

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our projects and relationships with many countries of the world are flourishing, and all this great work began thanks to the projects of Mr. Peter Copen and his Educational Fund. We are so grateful to have this wonderful initiative in our lives. (Olga Karp, Principal, Moscow International Gymnasia)

Lives of students were impacted from the total experience...in being able to communicate on personal and working levels...especially once exchanges began...our American students blossomed from the ability to study and work in the Soviet Union and Russia. Their experiences of living in families and attending schools were priceless. (Halina Danchenko, German and Russian Teacher, Brighton High School, New York)

Introduction

The project took place during the former Soviet Union, so you have to understand it was nothing but revolutionary. It was unusual for students in Moscow to get in contact with other students and foreigners to come over and visit us. I had the opportunity to connect with others and their way of life and it just felt so important at the time. It was my first opportunity to use the Internet and see technology like this. It was very unusual and exciting at the same time. (Roman Barsukov, Student, School 1129).

During a critical time, when tensions between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. had been building during the Cold War, Peter Copen – founder of iEARN – saw a need to connect youth from the two countries. With the assistance of the Academy of Sciences in Moscow, and the New York State Department of Education, a pilot program between 12 schools in each nation began: the New York State – Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project (NYS-MSTP). These school-to-school partnerships continued until 1990, when the name of the organization changed, eventually resulting in the modern iEARN. Today, iEARN is a network composed of over 20,000 schools in 118 countries attempting to harness the power of technology, enhance learning, and improve the quality of life on our planet.

Purpose

This study serves as an assessment of the NYS-MSTP, to evaluate the effects the program had on teachers, students and administrators during the years 1988-1993. The study focuses on four school districts (Cold Spring High School, Northport High School, Brighton High School, and Somers High School and Primrose Elementary School), and their Russian and Chinese counterparts. The second objective of this study is to examine sustainability issues the organization faced during the early years and the actions it took to meet those challenges; it also examines the sustainability issues the organization may face in the future as well. The study's

findings will be presented in World Conference in Cairo, Egypt to kick off celebrations for the 20th anniversary.

Methodology

The methodology used to obtain data for this comparative program analysis included a literature review, survey administration, participant-observation, and informal and formal interviews. On-site observation afforded the team an appropriate comparison between Russian and the United States, whose partnership launched the iEARN program. Informal and formal interviews were used to complement and enrich the observations, while surveys were used to bolster certain findings as well. Incorporating a variety of research methods ensured an accurate and intimate portrait of the New York State-Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project, as rich qualitative information is used to demonstrate the effect the project had on teachers, students, and administrators.

Survey Results

I remember how excited the students would get learning about a new culture. They would ask so many questions that simply could not be answered in time with letters. I would incorporate homework projects so they would have to research the answers in other ways, books, etc. Some students even found their closest Russian names and had wanted to be referred to by such during class discussion . . . it was a testament to me that language instruction should be taught at a much early age. (David Egan, Teacher, Cold Spring Harbor High School)

Overall, the survey administered as part of this project provided valuable information on teachers' and administrators' involvement in and feelings about the New York State – Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project. Nearly 20 years after the project began, respondents reported highly positive experiences about their interaction with their partner schools. Survey results also provided particular insight about the strengths and challenges of the project as well as demonstrating how the project expanded teaching opportunities and contributed to professional development.

Conclusions

It was so memorable to see Soviet and American kids form friendships - friendships that in my own high school years were impossible to form. (Anonymous)

My career came higher from teacher, to science work with teachers, to supporting computer work. I am now an expert on educational projects, a scientist and organizer of innovation work on project and information technology. (Nina Ulorna, Research Scientist)

The experience of the NYS-MSTP is a historical event that will not be forgotten among many of the teachers, students, and administrators' interviewed during this study. While there were a number of challenges in the program, including difficulties in adopting new technology and the difficulty in transitioning from the NYS-MSTP to iEARN, there are a number of strengths that both Russians and Americans recall fondly. This includes:

- A general consensus amongst teachers that the program played a huge role in their professional development and challenged them as teachers to think more creatively about how to engage with their students. Many teachers who recently participated in iEARN, express enthusiasm for their continued involvement in and for attending iEARN conferences.
- The telecommunications exchanges encouraged students to take an active, participatory role in social issues and the program brought to students' consciousness a global awareness of issues, fostering an understanding that there was more to life than their own lives at home. In addition, through the development of empathy for the other, students developed a sense of purpose and understanding, thus contributing to a more human society.
- Students and teachers alike attribute participation in the program of having the added benefit of creating new friendships, experiencing of new cultures for the first time, and the beneficial exposure to different educational systems.

Recommendations

Because the NYS-MSTP has been so well-received, it is essential that the work of iEARN continue. The evaluation proposes a series of recommendations that particularly focuses on iEARN's sustainability as well as strategies to successfully implement a memorable 20th anniversary. While iEARN-Russia's recommendations focus on steps that the organization should take as it re-structures, the recommendations for iEARN-USA have more to do with its strategic plan, detailing a series of long-term goals and objectives, that will serve the organization well. Such a strategic plan will be pivotal in not only carrying out a successful anniversary, but in securing the organization's place in the international education arena for years and years to come.

THE NEW YORK STATE – MOSCOW SCHOOLS TELECOMMUNICATIONS PROJECT

A Comparative Program Analysis of New York State Schools and their Interactions with their Russian and Chinese Counterparts

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Objectives of Study

2008 marks the twentieth anniversary of the International Education and Resource Network's (iEARN) inception as the New York State – Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project (NYS-MSTP) in 1988. To commemorate the upcoming event, the Capstone team conducted an in-depth comparative program analysis on the impact iEARN has had on participating administrators, teachers, students and parents in New York and its early collaborations with Russia and China during the organization's founding years: 1988-1993. The primary interest was to collect information that assesses the iEARN experience of teachers, students, administrators, and community members. Nearly 50 people were interviewed and/or completed a survey in both New York and in Russia, see Appendix A.

The purpose of this assessment is multi-layered: to demonstrate past impact while improving future practice of iEARN on the global community. The study will assist iEARN in evaluating the affects the organization had on the lives of those involved and assess how strongly the theme of global citizenry resonated for its participants. The study will also explore sustainability issues iEARN faced during the early years and the actions it took to meet those challenges.

Methodology

The methodology used to obtain data for this comparative program analysis included a literature review, survey administration, participant observation, individual and group interviews, and journalistic accounts. The literature review provided context for the time period during which the project took place. A survey was designed and administered to reach a broader audience than could be reached through personal interviews, and to provide quantitative data as well.

On-site observation afforded the team an appropriate comparison between Russia and the United States, whose partnership launched the iEARN program. Individual and group interviews were used to complement and enrich the observations, and reach those who may have retired from their professional careers and/or no longer located at school sites. The interviews provided

extremely rich information on how the program was viewed as a distinct project, the effect it had on careers and professional development, and the strengths and challenges encountered.

Incorporating a variety of research methods ensured an accurate and intimate portrait of the New York State-Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project, as rich qualitative information is used to demonstrate the effect the project had on teachers, students, and administrators.

Methods of Data Analysis

Data from the interviews were categorized into four distinct topic areas that appear in the Journalistic Accounts: Project Activities, Effects on Career, Strengths, and Challenges. These categories allowed for an effective critical analysis as these categories were the four most prominent themes of dialogue among the participants. Given the diversity of those interviewed, categorization was also a necessity so as to focus on the most significant facets of the NYS-MSTP.

The data analysis is focused in four areas: a comparison of the experiences between New York state teachers and the New York state students; a comparison of the experiences between Russian teachers and Russian students; a comparison of experiences between New York State students and Russian students; and a comparison of the NYS-MSTP in Russia and the current iEARN-Russia program operating in the schools today. Ultimately, the topic areas that appear in the Journalistic Accounts provided a framework to synthesize the survey and interview data within these four analyses as well.

Limitations of Study

Limitations to the study occurred as time became limited. The online survey ended the third week of March to ensure adequate time for data analysis. Also, time limitations were also experienced while conducting interviews, as interest exceeded time availability. Therefore, the team was not able to speak with all the teachers, students and administrators who expressed an interest in being involved with the project.

Concurrently, the study is based upon the teachers, students and administrators who were able to be located through emailing, calling, web searching, and through referrals from other interviewees; hence, limitations occurred in collecting a representative sample of those educators involved during the study period of 1988-1993.

Organization of Report

This report is organized into eight remaining sections: the history of iEARN, methodology, a literature review, survey findings, journalistic accounts, analysis, conclusions, and recommendations.

Chapter Two describes the history of iEARN, including how iEARN was found, as well as discussing critical background information. Chapter Three describes the research methods employed in this evaluation and explains how certain tools were created and applied. It also provides operational definitions for the report. Chapter Four is a literature review of education and NGO reform in Russia, a review of previous iEARN studies, and the importance of utilizing surveys in a research study. Chapter Five illustrates the survey results of the US and Russian teachers and administrators that were sampled for this study.

Chapter Six provides the journalistic accounts of four schools in New York and three schools in Russia. The journalistic accounts comment on the experience of the NYS-MSTP, the results of the program, the effects the project had on the career of participants, strengths and challenges of the project, and finally author's comments.

Chapter Seven provides an analysis of the journalistic accounts. Chapter Eight highlights the conclusions of the report. Chapter Nine outlines recommendations for the sustainability of iEARN-USA and iEARN-Russia, as well as includes recommendations for the upcoming twentieth anniversary of iEARN.

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORY OF iEARN

Vision and Purpose Statement

iEARN enables students and teachers to harness the power of technology to enhance learning and improve the quality of life on our planet; and to look forward, as a national and global community, to expanding the number of young people engaging in peaceful dialogue and collaborative action. The vision was accepted as part of the iEARN Constitution on July 12, 1994, which was then amended in February 2003: “The vision and purpose of iEARN is to enable young people to undertake projects designed to make a meaningful contribution to the health and welfare of the planet and its people.” (<http://www.earn.org/about/constitution.html>)

History of iEARN’s Founding

In 1985, Peter Copen’s father passed away, leaving his son with a strong desire to make a meaningful contribution in his father’s memory. He established the Copen Family Foundation (CFF) in 1988 in hopes of funding projects that encouraged humanity to experience each other as human beings and start attributing real characteristics to each other. This sentiment was a result of Copen’s experiences during the Cold War, which was drawing to an end at the start of the CFF. The Cold War had a tremendous affect on Copen, who worried about the real fear of nuclear war, and the possibility of the global destruction of the planet, which would adversely affect the lives of his children and grandchildren.

Even in the late 1980’s, there was great paranoia amongst the citizens of the United States, and this was reflected in how students viewed citizens of other countries. Copen felt an obligation to try to make a difference in the world, to diffuse the fear of the “other.” Hence, using the funds from the newly established CFF, Copen started iEARN (in the form of the New York State – Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project), with the vision of making the world a better place for his children’s generation and their grandchildren’s generation.

Copen says the original purpose of iEARN was to assist youth internally to make meaningful contributions in the world. Copen felt that by instilling a sense of being a global citizen at an early age, youth would work together and many man-made human sufferings would disappear

(Interview with Peter Copen, 10/24/2006). The idea for iEARN started with Peter's involvement with the Walkabout program. Mr. Copen started this alternative high school program prior to iEARN, and used this program as grounds of experimenting with technology and education. In the classes he taught, he would have his students conduct telephone interviews with students in other parts of the world, and have them write up a report about the experience. This experience expanded Copen's interest in using technology as a vehicle to changing attitudes and he left this program to start iEARN. He felt technology had the greatest means of reaching the broadest audience and he believed that students interacting through technology would change the world.

It was through attending a conference in Washington DC that Peter first made contacts with the Soviet Union. Copen met an administrator at the Soviet Academy of Science, and he introduced his project idea. The change in political orientation and enhanced social participation, coupled with a movement towards open economies, stimulated a renewed focus on education in the U.S.S.R. and Copen took this opportunity to introduce his project to the Soviet Academy of Science. After many talks, and together with the support already committed by the New York State Department of Education and the CFF, the New York State – Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project was launched in the fall of 1988.

The NYS-MSTP is Born

Peter Copen decided to launch a pilot program between New York and Moscow, by linking 12 schools in there with 12 schools in New York State by email, lumaphone, mail and physical exchanges of students and teachers. Hence was the birth of iEARN, hereby referred to as the NYS-MSTP¹. The primary purpose of the project was to assist youth in making meaningful contributions to the health and welfare of people and the planet through telecommunications and cultural exchanges. Participation in the network allowed teachers and students to engage in collaborative, student-centered projects with the intent to focus on universal values of peace, social justice, the environment, gender equity, and conflict resolution among others.

¹ There were originally 12 schools, however one more school was added in 1989. This resulted in some reports stating there were 13 schools, while others state 12 schools.

History of the Organization's Name Changes

iEARN initially started off as a pilot exchange program between two countries: the United States and the U.S.S.R. As the initial exchange between these two countries proved successful, Mr. Copen and Dr. Gragert (iEARN's first staff member, and current iEARN-USA Executive Director) were eager to expand the NYS-MSTP to other countries, beginning with China.

They realized that the organization needed a name change to encompass the other countries participating in the student telecommunication's exchanges. In mid-1990, the name was changed to I*EARN. Stemming from the desire to convey the message of "earning," which Copen felt was a powerful message (to earn learning, education, etc.), he added the "I" and the asterisk before "earn" to complete the message of "I" "ask" "to" "risk" to "earn." Each I*EARN Centre, totaling seven at the time, adopted this name immediately, worldwide.

However, confusion about the meaning of the organization's chosen name arose (Interview with Ed Gragert 3/2/07). Many did not understand why the asterisk was placed between the "I" and the "EARN." The message was lost on many, for the asterisk symbol, which in English sounds like "ask-to-risk" did not translate well into other languages.

Other members thought that having "earn" in the name might imply that it was to be an organization to teach business skills, rather to provide youth with opportunities to take action through technology. They felt that the true meaning of the program was lost in its name, when the full name of the organization was not written in full – International Education and Resource Network.

In 1995, I*EARN experienced further problems about its name with the creation of a web address: URLs. The asterisk, which meant nothing in email exchanges, meant something in computer coding for a web address, essentially disabling the organization from using the asterisk in its URL. Therefore, to meet this challenge and address previous complaints, I*EARN formally voted to remove the asterisk from its name, and became iEARN. The "I" was lowercased to allow for a globe to be placed over the "i," which would also serve as the

organization's new logo. iEARN has maintained this version of its name, and continues to use this logo to the present day.

iEARN in the Present

From 12 initial schools, iEARN now links over 20,000 schools and youth organizations. From only e-mail in 1988, students now utilize a wide range of connective technologies, including web-based forums, chats, video-conferencing, and blogs. iEARN is led by an Assembly composed of one representative from each Centre.

To address the growing need for providing more technical and educational support for teachers, iEARN now offers professional development programs for teachers. Currently, they offer face-to-face workshops and seminars, as well as online classes. The primary focus of the workshop, seminars and classes is to offer support for teachers whether it be in technology support, building skills needed to engage in collaborative projects, or learning curriculum development. The online courses started in November 2001, and teachers from 23 different countries have been trained. Today, the online courses are offered twice a year with eight courses to choose from and are nine weeks long. Since 2001, iEARN has trained nearly 900 teachers in nearly 80 countries (Interview with Lisa Jobson, 3/2/07).

Summary

In 1985, after the death of his father, Peter Copen saw a need to create a foundation that would support youth in making meaningful contributions to the world. During this time, tensions between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. had been building during the Cold War, and Copen saw a need to connect youth from the two countries. With the assistance of the Academy of Sciences in Moscow, and the New York State Board of Education, a pilot program between 12 schools in each nation began: the New York State – Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project. These partnerships continued until 1990, when the name of the organization changed, eventually resulting in the modern iEARN. iEARN is now a network of over 20,000 schools in over 118 countries attempting to harness the power of technology, enhance learning, and improve the quality of life on our planet. Next year iEARN will celebrate its 20th anniversary, and this project strives to collect the history of iEARN through contact with original participants, assess

the NYS-MSTP, and reflect upon the sustainability issues the organization faced and may face in the future.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Literature Review

Primary areas of interest were identified early in the study. A literature review of the historical context in which the NYS-MSTP took place was necessary to understand the dynamics of the Cold War, which was ending as the project began. Also utilized was a review of the previous evaluations of the project to evaluate other perspective of the project's strengths and weaknesses. Research was conducted into the education systems of both countries in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The project advisor, Dr. Jody Spiro, provided direction for the education literature review. A review of the literature was also used in the creation of the survey, and a review of case study literature informed the creation of the journalistic accounts. Finally, with the help of Dr. Spiro, sustainability assessment tools were utilized for the final recommendations, attached in Appendix B.

Survey

The aim of the survey was to see if teachers implemented the iEARN philosophy of social change and global citizenry, as well as how determine if participation affected their teaching style. Data was gathered through multiple-choice style questions and ranking scales, with multiple opportunities to include more detailed answers if desired. Respondents were able to select more than one option in a few multiple-choice questions, and therefore the results can show a rate that exceeds 100%. The survey is attached as Appendix C.

On-Site Observation

On-site observation took place for one week in January when a two-person evaluation team traveled to Moscow and St. Petersburg, Russia. The team collected survey and participant-observation data from one school in St. Petersburg and two schools in Moscow, Russia, as well as participated in interviews with teachers, administrators, and students. On-site observations are important because they provide a first hand view of what one may be researching. The natural setting offers a unique experience that is separated from someone else's descriptions (Merriam, 1998).

Participant-Observation

Participant-Observation Tool

For a study of this type, participant-observation was essential in obtaining as much qualitative data as possible. Such a research method involved a variety of activities to obtain data, including informal interviews, group meetings, direct observation, participation in the group, a review of documents and projects, as well as self-analysis. All of these methods were thus incorporated during the analysis of teacher, administrator, and student participation in the New York State – Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project in both New York and Russia.

Creating a participant-observation tool for this study was essential to capture how different teachers, administrators, and students were affected by the project, but also to observe differences in classroom design and the general school landscape as well. In posing questions such as ‘how would an iEARN classroom or school look differently in Moscow, especially compared to other schools in the city?’ it was necessary to pay close attention to detail, from the types of books in the classroom to the use of bulletin boards, in order to have a greater understanding of how iEARN participation may alter the classroom environment and in turn alter classroom learning.

The goal in creating this participant-observation tool was to create a protocol that could be used to further this study, if needed, with additional subjects in not only the United States and Russia, but other countries and schools as well. The classroom observation tool is attached as Appendix D. The tool is separated into three categories: school profile, organizational content, and collection of materials.

School Profile

The school profile section of the tool aims to obtain demographic information about the school, including school composition, activities offered to students, whether or not the school has a mission statement, among others factors. This section also includes an analysis of classroom design and arrangement and encourages the observer to notice walls, bulletin boards, furniture, and other equipments as utilized in the space. Finally, this section asks for overall observations of the school climate and the atmosphere of the classroom and certain spaces.

Organizational Content

The organizational content of the tool focuses on observing a classroom during instruction. It serves to foster a better understanding of how the teacher connects with the students and what type of learning strategies the teacher may use in the classroom. The focus on this section is to understand the connection between student and teacher; thus, it also includes looking at instructional materials and student work samples – to see how the teacher and student relate, regarding tasks, and motivation.

Collection of Materials

Finally, the last section of the tool asks the researcher to obtain as much printed material from the school as possible, including literature, student samples, and projects, as well as encourages the researcher to take pictures to help supplement some of the researcher's observations.

Interviews

For a full perspective on the NYS-MSTP, a variety of formal and informal interviews took place both in New York and Russia. These interviews included meeting with iEARN staff, teachers, students, and administrators. Interviews took place among those who participated in the NYS-MSTP, some of whom currently participate in iEARN, and others whom participated in both. See Appendix A for a full list of all interviewed.

Moscow and St. Petersburg, Russia

A significant percentage of the Russian teachers who participated in the NYS-MSTP no longer had working email addresses. Thus, interviews were arranged through the coordination of Olga Prokhorenko, current Co-Coordinator of iEARN-Russia, who structured the participants' time during their field study in Russia. Interviews took place throughout the third week in January with teachers, students, and administrators, relying on who was available at the time of the study.

New York, United States

This study was conducted using a snowball sample, with administrators, teachers, students and parents referring others to be interviewed. During the initial research stages iEARN-USA provided a list of names and schools from the organization's database. A significant percentage

of the information was no longer correct, as it dated back to the beginning of the project in 1988. Research began to determine which teachers were still at schools in New York, and to obtain corrected email addresses and details. Most of the research was completed through reviewing each school's website, and phone calls to the school offices.

Based on information gained by the Russia team, the primary focus for interviews centered on the Cold Spring Harbor and Northport High Schools.² These two schools partnered with Moscow schools that continue to participate in iEARN projects. A majority of the interviews were conducted over the telephone, due to the diverse and widespread geographic locations of the interviewees. Most teachers and administrators who participated in the NYS-MSTP have retired from their schools, and thus had only a rare opportunity to observe teachers' classroom spaces and teaching styles. Student participants from the project were referred by their former teachers and administrators.

Interview Protocol

Within the Participant-Observation tool, an interview protocol was created, see Appendix D. Such a protocol served as a guide to ask questions, with the understanding that other questions may be posed as well. The following is an excerpt from the participant-observation tool that guided interviews with teachers and administrators:

- How long have you been teaching?
- What do you think is the purpose of education?
- What is your teaching philosophy?
- Do you participate in iEARN?
- For how long have you participated in iEARN?
- If yes, are you aware of iEARN's mission or vision statement?
- Have there been any challenges associated with working with iEARN?
- Has working with iEARN enhanced or benefited your career in any way?
- What is your teaching management style?

² Teachers from two additional schools, Brighton High School and the Somers School District, were also interviewed and are included in the accounts below.

- What motivates your students?
- How important is it to you to teach your students about becoming a global citizen?
- What are some strategies that you use that work towards this goal?
- How do you use technology in your classroom?

In addition, the following five questions were used to pose to students who either participated in the NYS-MSTP or currently participate in iEARN today. These questions included:

- What do you think of the NYS-MSTP (or iEARN projects)?
- What do you do now (what is your profession)?
- Did the project change the way you look at the world? The USA?
- Can you recall something memorable, strange, or fascinating related to your experience?
- How did the participation in the project affect your life (or studies) today?

Journalistic Accounts

When the project began, an impact assessment of the New York State – Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project was sought. After some discussion with the iEARN-USA staff, it became important to look at other types of research that would be more relevant to their needs. As a result, attention shifted to capturing more qualitative data about the NYS-MSTP. To really flesh out the history of the program, with rich and personal information, journalistic accounts (a type of case study) were chosen as the most promising tool to capture the information.

Journalistic accounts are used in a variety of different types of research as they attempt to get an in-depth look at a specific event, person, or place and thus provide a multi-layered analysis. As opposed to case studies, which allow for many different perspectives (Tellis, 1997), journalistic accounts offer a more objective perspective of the NYS-MSTP. This will in turn provide a comparative canvas of the three countries discussed in this study for others to review.

These journalistic accounts are composed of interviews, data analysis, and observations. Thirty-nine (39) people were interviewed over the course of the study, and many anecdotes were collected. An informal content analysis was also incorporated throughout the evaluation to better

understand the materials and projects that students and teachers were involved. These materials include projects such as “Pumsy Tales,” “Insights,” and “Cities Near the Sea.”

There are several different types of journalistic case studies that a researcher can utilize, but for the purpose of this project, a “collective” or group of studies is used (Stake, 1995). Because of the nature of our research, and the fact that there are a number of programs and schools from at least three different countries, this was deemed the best approach.

Sustainability Measurement Tools

The second objective of this study is to examine sustainability issues the organization faced during the early years and the actions it took to meet those challenges; it also examines the sustainability issues the organization may face in the future as well. Consequently, the following two tools were used to assess iEARN sustainability.

1999 NGO Sustainability Index

The 1999 NGO Sustainability Index states that there are seven different dimensions that need to be analyzed in the index: legal environment, organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, public image, service provision and the organization’s infrastructure. While those dimensions generally describe the sustainability of the NGO sector in general terms and in a given country, the Index also serves as a useful tool and guide to understanding the viability of a specific organization.

Sustainability Assessment

The sustainability assessment questionnaire aims to evaluate seventeen sustainability elements in an organization on a status rating of 5-1, 5 being “strongly agree” and 1 being “strongly disagree.” The elements examine funding, strategies of organization, partner participation and opposition. The assessment can be found in Appendix B .

Operational Definitions

Copen Family Fund (the “CFF”): Founded by Peter Copen in 1988, the Fund provided approximately \$150,000 per year for the NYS-MSTP. This included the exchange trips, equipment, and a full-time staff member.

Email: During this study time period from 1989 to 1994, students typically wrote messages in the language of their partner school. Messages were written, typed, and sent by a representative of the class.

Exchange Programs: Travel programs when teachers and students from one partner school would visit another for a period of time lasting from one to four weeks. The Project exchange programs were funded by the Copen Family Fund.

iEARN: the establishment of iEARN and the NYS-MSTP overlapped in the early 1990s. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, iEARN is referred to as the organization from 1994 on, including the original seven countries involved in the expanded NYS-MSTP, that formed country Centres. iEARN-USA and iEARN-Russia refers to the specific country Centres.

Lumaphone: The Lumaphone was sold by Mitsubishi Electric of America. The phones could transmit an image in 3-5 seconds and could have a parallel printer attached for printing out images, also a TV could be hooked up to the unit for conference room meetings to display a larger image. A photo is attached in Appendix E.

New York State – Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project (the “NYS-MSTP”): The original program was three prongs: school to school interactions, student to student exchanges and teacher to teacher trainings (technology training). Beginning in 1988, the NYS-MSTP was initially an exchange between New York State and the U.S.S.R. The program expanded in the early 1990s to China, Israel, Australia, Spain, Canada, Argentina, and the Netherlands, and is active in 118 countries as of 2007.

Partner School: Initially, the selected schools from New York State and Moscow were partnered by representatives from the Copen Family Fund, the New York State Education Department, and the Soviet Academy of Sciences. As the project expanded, partners were sought for the Chinese collaboration by the Chinese Center for Math and Science. Contrary to current iEARN practice, partners worked with only one other school.

| New York State | Russia/China |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Northport High School | Moscow School 1129 |
| Cold Spring Harbor High School | Moscow School 4 |
| Brighton High School | Moscow School 67/679 |
| Tamarack High School | Moscow School 429 and 1509 |
| Somers School District | Beijing Elementary and High School |

Projects: The activities shared between partners schools (and referenced in this study) such as:

| Project | Description |
|---------------------------|--|
| The Contemporary | A current events magazine started by Cold Spring Harbor High School, with a topic for each issue selected collaboratively among the participating schools. |
| Canned Food Drive | Northport High School started a drive to bring canned goods to Moscow to distribute during their exchange visit. |
| Cities Near the Sea* | A collaborative and modern project that includes 12 schools, including the Epigraph School, St. Petersburg Russia. Countries include China, the Netherlands, Uzbekistan, Slovenia, United Arab of Emirates, Poland, and Russia. The project includes themes of ecological monitoring, identifying occupations that involve the sea, art projects, and celebrating famous monuments near the sea as well. |
| Deforestation Law Project | A deforestation treaty created together among Russian and American students in 1989. Students collaborated and shared proposals during a NYS-MSTP conference held at |

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| | the Hague, Netherlands. |
| From Russia, To Japan with Love* | A weeklong project that the Epigraph School in St. Petersburg Russia participated, with variations from other schools in other countries. The week includes activities that celebrate Japanese culture. An exhibition of the works of children was shared during the iEARN Japan conference in July 2003. |
| Pumsy Tales | A popular publishing project that Russian and American students participated in during the NYS-MSTP. Pumsy is a cute and shy fairy-tale dragon that lacks self-confidence because he does not breathe enough fire. Children are inspired to write poems and stories about their friend Pumsy. |
| Teddy Bear Project or Exchange* | Schools from various countries are paired together and exchange a teddy bear or another stuffed animal. The bear is given a diary that is logged both in written and email form, detailing the animal's adventures. A modern iEARN project, the goal is to demonstrate cultural differences and self-expression. |

An asterisk (*) notes that the project is one currently active in the iEARN network.

Russia: The Soviet Union collapsed during the time period of the study, creating the need for a single term for that country. For these purposes of this study, Russia refers to schools and students within the former Soviet Union. When speaking about past experiences, many of those interviewed spoke of the Soviet Union interchangeably with Russia, which is retained to record their thoughts as provided.

Telecommunications: Technological exchanges that include lumaphone interactions, emails, and conference calls between partner schools.

Video Conferencing: Video conferencing has as the capability for one-way or two-way communication. In one way, the caller can see the individual(s) and can interact via the telephone. With two-way capability, both parties can see and hear each other. It is often referred to as visual collaboration. Schools can obtain partners for video conferencing events through the iEARN website.

Methodological Weaknesses and Constraints

Sample Size

As with all research, there are several methodological errors that could affect our data. The first is our small sample size. Though attempts were made to reach as many people who participated in the original NYS-MSTP as possible, only 66 individuals were reached. Of those 66, 27 completed the survey and 39 interviews were conducted. Though the sample size is small, it is still useful, as the goal of the project was to obtain as much qualitative information as possible, which was missing in prior, more quantitative studies of the project.

Bias

Another methodological error could be bias of the participants. The participants could have seen giving the program a good review to benefit them in some way. Furthermore, this was not a random nor was it an anonymous sampling. Perhaps individuals answered differently, knowing that their name would be attached to their answers. (Note: to circumvent this bias, an anonymous option was made available for the survey).

Human Error

Also, the program *Survey Monkey* (Refer to Chapter Five: Survey Results) was used to insert survey data. That is, after collecting all the paper surveys, the team entered their results in the *Survey Monkey* program so that the data would be collected in one place. This could have resulted in human error through transfer of the data, but any errors should be minor.

Retrospective Error

Finally, there is the simple fact that this research is being done almost 20 years after people participated in the program. Their memories are not as crisp and fresh as they were, and many

details could be lost through time. People also have a tendency to look back on events differently, often with nostalgia, and this can affect a participant's feeling towards an event. Also, with time you may lose a critical sample of people to death or the simple inability to obtain current contact information.

Language Barrier

During the on-site observation in St. Petersburg, Russia, a student translator was used to convey information on behalf of some of the teachers. In Moscow, many of the teachers spoke English, but for some teachers this was with limited proficiency. While the language barrier should not pose too much of a limitation to the study, there is a possibility that some of richness of the information may have been a bit compromised or that the Russian teachers, filling out an English survey, may have found it difficult to convey information in the open-ended categories. The survey was not translated into Russian, nor was the survey culturally modified.

Summary

The methodology used to obtain data for this longitudinal study included a literature review, survey administration, participant-observation, and informal and formal interviews. Incorporating a variety of research methods ensured an accurate and intimate portrait of the New York State-Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project. Rich qualitative information is used to demonstrate the impact the project had on teachers, students, and administrators. On-site observation afforded the team an appropriate comparison between the original two countries, whose partnership launched the iEARN program. Informal and formal interviews were used to complement and enrich the observations, while surveys were used to bolster certain findings as well. Indeed, surveys added a quantifiable layer to the report, while helping to pinpoint the strengths and challenges of the NYS-MSTP experience.

CHAPTER FOUR: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Cold War

It is important to place the New York State – Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project in the historical context of the time. The NYS-MSTP was introduced during a very sensitive and highly combative relationship between the U.S.S.R. and the United States. The Cold War, starting the mid-1940s and lasting until the early 1990s, resulted in intense competition and rivalry between the two nations. Certain historical crises, including the Korean and Vietnam War, for example, almost contributed to a nuclear war between these two nations. Relations were persistently cold, and did not subside until the launching of the last leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev's (Encarta, Accessed March 30, 2007) reform programs, which deemphasized military advancement and focused on widening civil service initiatives.

Education Background

Consequently, the education system went through a massive change during the Cold War transition. Initially, the Ministry of Education served as the sole provider of classroom instruction and text, such that teachers were merely seen as messengers by which information was transmitted to students. Nearly all of Russian education (Bolotov & Spiro, 1995) was “content-based” and focused on whether answers were right or wrong; it did not focus on project-based learning as the NYS-MSTP and iEARN had introduced.

Towards the end of the Cold War, however, more freedom was given to teachers as education became more decentralized. Initially, teachers did not know how to react to these freedoms and struggled with being innovative, but over time, they incorporated more critical thinking methods into their curriculums (Bolotov and Spiro, 1995). In many respects, iEARN served as a complement towards this end, fostering creativity among teachers alongside the Russian government, as “teachers and principals were now seen as agents that could instill positive change within their students” (Interview Nina Ulorna, January 18, 2007). As current President Vladimir Putin begins recentralizing education, however, the government is increasingly taking more ownership of how education is disseminated to children.

The Role of NGOs

The role of education has not been the only area in the midst of change in the country, as the *New York Times* (NewYorkTimes.com, October 2006) has reported that the Russian parliament has voted to take greater control of non-governmental organizations in the country. The initial expansion of NGOs in the country was seen as the country increasing its civil society voice. Their growing influence on Russian public opinion has been troubling to the Kremlin, and Russian President Vladimir Putin feels that preventing foreign supported NGOs will curtail their political activities.

Many have debated what this will mean for Russian education as well, as many international NGOs have been closing operations in Russia. This is especially important in this study because iEARN-Russia, lacking government support, has all but dissolved in Russia. The organization currently exists only in the virtual world and the iEARN International website notes the future of iEARN-Russia as rather vague, reporting the following: “Teachers in Russia are at the moment in the process of setting up an iEARN-Russia centre; this process is supported by the Assembly and Executive Council of iEARN International.”

Previous Evaluations of NYS-MSTP

MAGI Associates Evaluation

The New York State Education Department commissioned an evaluation of the New York State – Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project to understand how the project worked and the degree of impact on learning. The project started on October 24, 1988, and the evaluation ran during the 1990-91 school year. MAGI Associates surveyed and interviewed teachers and students within New York State only.

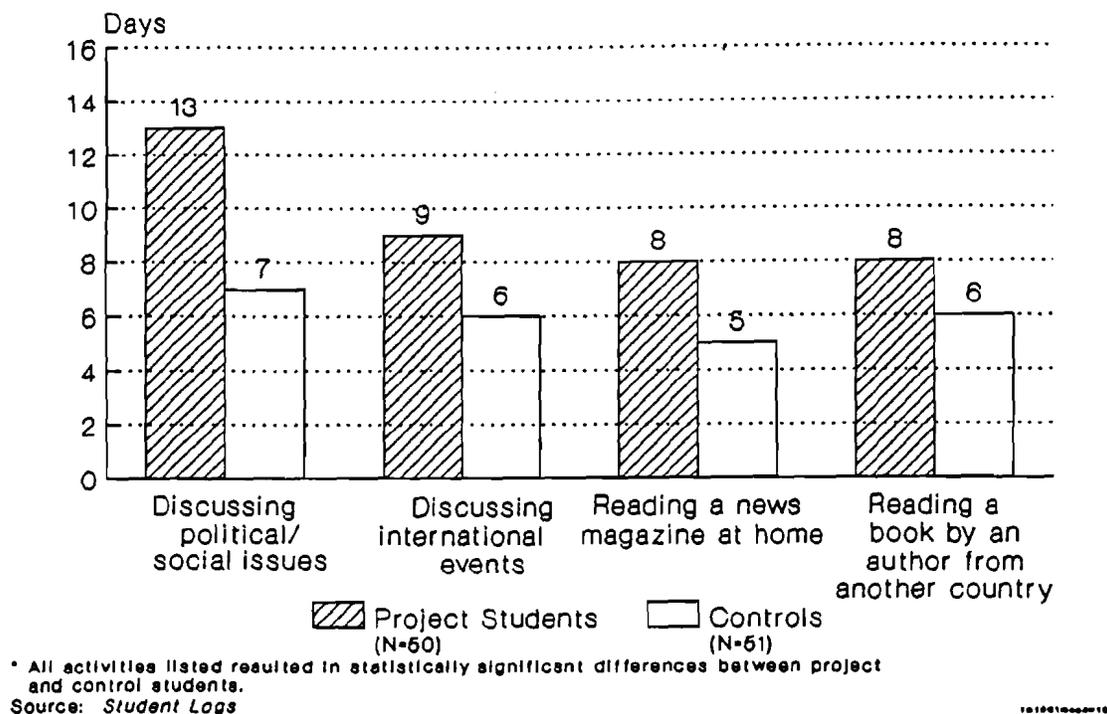
The basic premise of the New York State – Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project was: “...that students learn and apply effective communication attitudes and skills by participating in concrete, meaningful projects which 1) reflect student concerns, 2) are designed to solve problems, and 3) make a contribution to society” (Magi Associates, p. 8). The program also operated under the belief that, “...problems facing the planet are created by people, either individually or collectively, and that problems among people can be resolved through effective

communication” (Magi, 5). Thirteen schools were initially selected by the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences and the New York State Education Department, along with Peter Copen and the Copen Family Foundation.

The evaluation was designed and implemented in four stages. To begin, MAGI developed the project framework, which recorded how the project operated. For replication purposes, this is a vital step in doing an evaluation. Next, the consultants developed and implemented a documentation system for use by participating teachers and students. Both program participants and the control group used the same information-gathering pieces. MAGI also created a guide to all of the projects created by participating students in New York and Moscow. That guide is unfortunately lost. The final element of the evaluation design related to teacher and student assessment of the project. The evaluators combined both site visits and interviews and survey in their data collection.

The evaluation reports statistically significant results between the program and control groups in two areas. Program participants discussed political and social issues, and international events more frequently than the control group. Program participants are also more likely to read, at-home, more news magazines and books by authors from other countries more frequently than the control group. The information is presented in the document as Figure 2, which is reproduced below. (Magi, 14-15.)

Figure 2
 Number of Days Per Month Project
 Students and Controls Spent in
 Activities* Associated With Intercultural Understanding



The study findings show that teachers in New York State were very satisfied with the program's impact on student attitudes towards other cultures (64%). 70% of the teachers also responded that the program improved their professional development, but the specific aspects of the improvement were not collected. The specifics offered in the survey returned generally low scores for the teachers' perceptions of the project. Further, teachers were neutral on the assessing the strength and value of the student projects, and the collaboration with their counterparts in the Soviet Union. The teacher collaboration was rather limited: 83% of the teachers reported working with their Soviet colleagues on selecting the projects and 67% on creating student objectives for each project. Only 33% of the teachers reported any collaboration on everyday instructional activities.

The evaluation report states that communication between New York and Moscow was occasional and somewhat difficult. Because of that, the lack of planning time between the partners was a continual source of frustration for the teachers. The exchange visits, where students and teachers

would travel to the other country, were consistently rated as the most valuable aspect of the program.

The strength of the report lies in the timing; having an evaluation conducted during the operation of the program provides a wealth of information about the operations and intent of the program that would otherwise be lost.

John Anderson's Dissertation

During the start-up of the New York State – Moscow School Telecommunications Project, a doctoral student at the University of Washington was studying how advances in telecommunications would affect educational models and teaching. John Anderson's paper, "New Directions in Educational Telecommunications," follows iEARN and traces the educational pedagogy behind using telecommunications in school settings.

Anderson finds that, "Students enter the telecommunications experience highly motivated. They eagerly await responses, but when responses are delayed or never come, they quickly lose interest." Interviews with teachers back-up this statement; when the project was first implemented, technical difficulties on the Moscow side delayed communication for many months. The participants in the New York State – Moscow Telecommunication Project circumvented this challenge with a strong drive by the teachers to engage in the planned activities. However, pressure remains to produce products of the collaboration. Anderson also finds that, "...if no tangible product validates the frustration and work of cross-cultural, technological collaboration, students are hesitant to begin another project."

Beyond the desire to engage students in the project, Anderson notes that telecommunications projects appeal to students who might not necessarily fully engage in a classroom. The new medium could provide opportunities for students with different learning and collaboration strengths.

Anderson's research documents Peter Copen's skill in initiating ground-breaking education projects. The particular skill used to create the NYS-MSTP, and explore a similar project in

China, was his ability to locate partner organizations with local power and influence. “Before the U.S.S.R. permitted personal computers into the country, Peter Copen, working through the Soviet Academy of Sciences, successfully negotiated a contract to establish the first U.S./Russian student telecommunications projects. In China, he had signed a similar pact, less than a year after Tiananmen Square, by involving the Central Institute for Educational Research” (Anderson, p. 29). Of particular note, is that Copen chose to undertake these projects with two of the countries most inimical with the United States at the time.

Reinforcing the findings of the previous evaluation, Anderson finds that the ability of students from different countries to meet significantly deepens the project’s impact. “Though these face-to-face meetings are expensive compared with the cost of the electronic links, the Copen Family Fund has allocated a significant portion of its resources to bring participants together” (Anderson, p. 31). A question to explore for the present day is whether the ability to hold online chats and real-time video conferencing has removed the necessity of in-person exchanges.

The pace of technology development remains unknown. In his paper from 1992, Anderson conjectures that, “Optical character recognition scanners and voice recognition devices will likely replace the majority of keyboards by the end of the decade” (Anderson, p. 51). In 2007, the keyboard’s place in personal computing seems firmly established. The ability of educational telecommunications users to adapt and to adopt new technologies is very important.

Survey

Surveys are one of the most common methods of research today, and most often “describe a method of gathering information from a sample of individuals” (Scheuren, National Opinion Research Center, 2004). Information is then collected through methods that can include random selection, standardized procedures, and careful question selection, working in concert to compose a profile of a group.

In order to analyze the attitudes of teachers that had participated in the original New York State – Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project, it was imperative to include quantitative data. “Purely inductive research begins with collection of data-empirical observations or

measurements of some kind and builds theoretical categories and propositions from relationships discovered among the data...that is, inductive research starts with examination of a phenomenon and then from successive examinations of similar and dissimilar phenomena, develops a theory to explain what was studied” (Erlandson, 1993, p. 73). Anecdotal stories were obtained through interviews, to provide valuable qualitative data, but there was still a need to reach out to participants who were not available for an interview. The survey was created in order to address this issue as well.

CHAPTER FIVE: SURVEY RESULTS

Survey Design and Implementation

Purpose

The aim of the survey was to see if teachers implemented the iEARN philosophy of social change and global citizenry, as well as how determine if participation affected their teaching style. The survey was designed to apply to teachers in both the United States and Russia. A first draft survey was created that included both open-ended and rating scale questions. Both techniques were used to analyze different aspects of the effects of the program on teaching and on the students. The original survey was created through consultation with an active learning survey tool developed by Professor Spiro in both the U.S. and Russia. This survey was designed to measure how teachers felt about their teaching styles before and after the project time period, and had teachers rate their use of technology, team learning, and collaborative learning in the classroom.

However, after consultation with the iEARN-USA staff, it became clear that the original survey was too vague for the purposes of this study. Instead of incorporating the general aspects of how these teachers' methods were impacted by the NYS-MSTP, iEARN-USA wanted to know how the project directly changed these teachers and participants. The survey was redesigned to ask more straightforward questions such as, "My students' involvement in the program sparked their interest in global issues," and "As a result of the project my school administrators became more supportive of international projects."

Administration

The survey instrument was administered in English. In addition, there was an accompanying letter from iEARN-USA assuring the teachers that their organization had approved the survey. An anniversary letter was also used to spark the interest of the participants to encourage them to respond to the survey (refer to Appendix F). The survey was not rewritten in Russian due to time constraints, and because a translator was provided to Russian teachers. The survey was then administered in four parts:

1. *Email*: The survey and the accompanying cover letter was sent to teachers who participated in the iEARN from 1988-1993 over e-mail, encouraging them to participate in the study as part of iEARN's 20th Anniversary celebration during the last week of November 2006. After two weeks, on December 10, 2006, a reminder notice was sent to teachers via the iEARN list-serve. After receiving no responses, the survey was resent via email on December 16, 2006.
2. *Physical Mailing*: After failing to receive responses through the survey was printed out and mailed with the accompanying cover letter to U.S. teachers at their school addresses. Teachers were instructed to complete the surveys and mail them in enclosed, pre-addressed and pre-stamped enveloped to the iEARN-USA office. Some schools were able to forward the surveys to teachers who had retired; however, only two responses were received via this method.
3. *Interview Distribution*: Having email and mail not proven successful, the instrument was utilized in person during face-to-face interviews as well as on the phone during telephone interviews. This method proved to be the most effective method, collecting 5 responses in the U.S. and 14 from Russia.
4. *Survey Monkey*: With fewer responses than hoped for, an anonymous online survey was created and advertised through a web-based survey software company. This yielded a response of 8 surveys.

Sample Return Rate

27 surveys were returned in total after 240 people were contacted. This is an 11% return rate. Of the sample, 11 teachers from the U.S. returned surveys (40%) while 16 teachers filled out surveys from Russia (60%). 160 U.S. participants were contacted, making the return rate for the U.S. 7%. 80 Russian participants were contacted, making the return rate 20%, making it the highest rate of return.

Several factors could have contributed to this outcome. The Russian return rate could be higher because more teachers who were involved from 1988 are still teaching than in the U.S. Also, more Russian teachers were given paper surveys that were completed on sight and then returned. The overall low rate of return could be contributed to the fact that many of the teachers listed in

the iEARN-USA database never actually participated in the project and that many of the addresses/email addresses were incorrect or could not be located via telephone inquiries. In addition, researching Russian names on the internet is a difficult process because of spelling alterations and translation differences.

Survey Results

Project Participation

Three-quarters of the respondents reported participating in exchange visits and regular mail correspondence. Over half of the respondents used the Lumaphone or Visitel technology, long-distance telephone calls and online bulletin boards or other posting mechanisms in their communication. One respondent commented that the Lumaphones were difficult to operate. Another mentioned iEARN annual conferences as a communications tool utilized.

Project Successes

Factors that contributed to the project's success included a 95% rating for the opportunity for international exchange. 75% of the respondents also reported that the travel opportunity, access to computers, and support from their school was key for a successful experience. One respondent also said that having the project incorporated into the curriculum was vital, to allow the students the time and opportunity to collaborate with their classmates and partners in the other country. Multiple respondents noted that strong support from principals and school administrators strongly contributed to the success of the New York State – Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project.

Project Challenges

Nearly half of those surveyed reported that a challenge to the project's success was a lack of response from partners. A third of respondents said that access to necessary technology, configuring the modems, and finding time for the project activities during class time was a challenge as well. A number of the respondents wrote that the time difference between the two countries made communications difficult. One teacher noted the intra-school politics at play led a teacher with significant technical knowledge to be named project leader, although this teacher was not gifted in interpersonal communications.

Reasons for Participation

Over half of the respondents listed “Opportunity to collaborate with colleagues in another countries” as one of their top three reasons for participating in the New York State – Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project. Teachers were also eager to participate for the opportunity for their students to learn about those in other countries. Developing students’ teamwork skills was also an important opportunity seized by the teachers.

Project Rating, New York State vs. Moscow

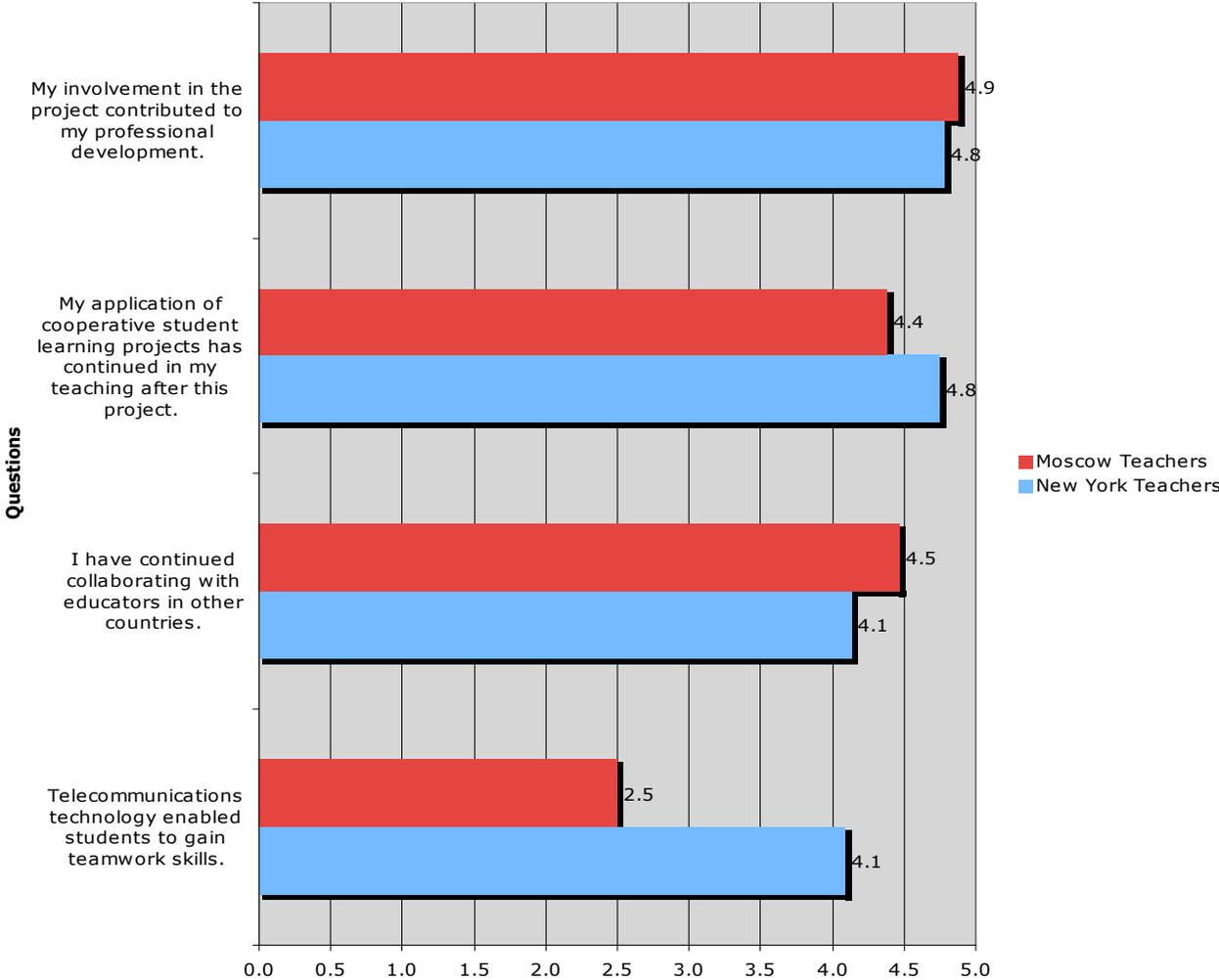
In the attached table of survey results, responses from New York State teachers are shown in blue, and Russian teachers are shown in red. For nearly every question, the averages for the two sets of respondents fell within 0.3 points of each other. (Refer to Survey in Appendix C.) Nearly all teachers strongly agreed that participation in the project contributed to their professional development, with very strong averages of 4.9 for the Moscow teachers and 4.8 for the New York teachers, on a scale of 1.0 to 5.0 where a 5.0 is “strongly agree.”

Surprising differences appeared in responses between New York and Moscow teachers in continuing to use cooperative student learning projects in their teaching. This model was taken up by New York teachers at a higher rate than those in Moscow. However, teachers in Moscow were more likely to continue international collaborations after the end of the New York State – Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project than their New York counterparts. The most startling difference was in the assessment rates of how technology allowed students to gain teamwork skills: the Moscow teachers fell between “Disagree” and “Neutral” and the New York teachers averaged an “Agree.”

Summary

Overall, the survey administered as part of this project provided valuable information on teachers’ and administrators’ involvement in and feelings about the New York State – Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project. Nearly 20 years after the project began, respondents reported highly positive experiences about the project and how it expanded their teaching opportunities.

Average Survey Responses from Teachers in New York State and Moscow



CHAPTER SIX: JOURNALISTIC ACCOUNTS

Northport High School (New York)

Context

Northport High School is a public high school located in the suburban village of Northport, NY. The village of Northport has a population of 7,606 (2000 census), and a median income of \$86,456 (2000 census). The high school boasts of offering an International Baccalaureate Diploma Program, as well as offering seven languages for its students. 93% of the 2,100 students at Northport are white (New York State Statistics, 2005), which reflects the village population (95.5% white, 2000 census). According to Ruth Billings, the Principal's secretary in 1989, the demographics of the school have changed very little. Merle Levine states that while there may have been a higher percentage of white students then, the school was offering the six of the seven languages they currently offer to students, with Japanese added onto the language program after the Russian teacher's exchange.

From 1989-1995, students from the high school engaged in physical exchanges as well as in telecommunications (via lumaphone and email) with students at Moscow School 1129. The first two years of the program was strictly amongst the students in the Russian language classes and the students at Moscow School 1129. As interest arose from other departments at Northport, telecommunications projects expanded to other language classes as well as the social studies department. Overall, a group of administrators (winter of 1989) and three groups of students (spring 1990, spring 1991, and spring 1993) from the high school were selected for a trip (funded by the Copen Family Foundation) to Russia to participate in a physical exchange program. The following eight people were interviewed who were participants of the NYS-MSTP from the start, including: three host families (Timmy Karro, Ruth and Don Billings), three students (Yvette S., Bryan Billings and Jen Adams), one teacher (Mr. Smith, who wishes to remain anonymous thus given a pseudonym) and one principal (Merle Levine).

NYS-MSTP Experience

Northport High School was involved with iEARN from its inception as the New York State-Moscow Telecommunications Project. According to Ms. Levine, the NYS-MTP started when Mr. Copen contacted Ms. Levine, the principal of the school, asking for Northport's participation in his new project. The NYS-MSTP would involve traveling for teachers/administrators from New York to the USSR to learn about their culture and teaching styles and then bring back that knowledge to invoke interest in students at respective schools on the world community as a whole (Merle Levine Interview, 1/31/2007). Ms. Levine, along with the superintendent of Northport, Mr. Hunt, and several other administrators from the district traveled to Russia in February of 1989. After their trip, telecommunications' projects started between the Russian language classes at Northport and Moscow School 1129. In 1991, the telecommunications projects spread to other languages and subjects, such as social studies.

A. Physical Exchanges

Northport High School administrators/teachers and students both participated in physical exchanges with Moscow School 1129. Administrators participated in exchanges in February 1989 while teachers participated as chaperones in the student exchange trips (1990-1993). A group of 5 teachers were selected by the administration at Northport to participate as chaperones. Students who participated in the exchanges were selected by a group of designated teachers after reviewing submitted applications and interviews.

A1. Administrator's Experience

The group of administrators from Northport went to Moscow for a week-long tour of their schools. Upon arrival to Moscow, the group was greeted by Alla (principal of Moscow School 1129) who transported the group on an eight hour bus ride to the Science Institute, where the group was housed for the week. When the group walked around the streets, they noticed that the Russians were uncomfortable to see Americans, yet remained friendly. Ms. Levine was shocked to see grocery stores with bare shelves and wondered how the families that hosted meals for the American group managed to provide food for the entire group.

The schools Ms. Levine visited often ran on two schedules: a day schedule for the regular students and then an afternoon program for students with working parents whom accounted for

most of the students. To meet the need, two sets of teachers were hired and there were cot areas in schools designated for students who needed to spend the night, again due to working parents. “I was surprised about the cots, but understood the need for them, and saw that the schools were seen as havens for these children, and even though these schools were very poor, they managed to provide such services to their children,” (Merle Levine Interview, 1/31/2007) which made Ms. Levine feel ashamed that the US schools lacked such provisions. The trip left her with a greater appreciation for her life in the United States and a sense of global responsibility.

A2. Students’ Experience

There were three exchanges for students to participate in. Bryan Billings and Jen Adams both participated in the 1993 student exchange to Russia. In preparation for the trip, Serge Nepo, a former Russian teacher at Northport, told students to pack an extra suitcase with supplies to give to host families in Russia. He suggested that students bring canned ham or other canned foods that were non-perishable, since food in Russia was scarce.

I remember watching the news and seeing the reports of the hungry Russians and being told by my parents and teachers to bring a suitcase of canned foods to give to the Russians. All of us went out and raised a canned food drive for the Russians, especially canned ham, for some reason, Serge Nepo was adamant about Russians loving canned ham. So we show in Russia with suitcases filled with canned ham and I remember being scared that the Russian customs might confiscate them all, but they didn’t. When we presented our Russian host families with the canned ham and other canned foods we brought, they kinda looked at us like we were crazy, especially about the canned ham! My host family was shocked because clearly we thought they were starving and worse, they didn’t even like canned ham! It was a good lesson in cultural sensitivity for me. (Bryan Billings Interview, 3/12/2007).

The emailing, lumaphone exchanges, reading about Russian culture all failed to fully prepare the students for other cultural shocks they experienced. Jen Adams states:

I remember crying when I got there, I had never been away from home before and I have never seen lived in such living conditions before. Houses in Northport typically have 5 or more rooms and the host family I was staying with lived in a space smaller than my parents’ bedroom. Truthfully, I was miserable because I guess I had high expectations and wasn’t fully prepared to meet their lifestyle. (Jen Adams Interview, 3/26/2007).

However, the exposure led students to a greater sense of appreciation of their lives in New York:

I developed a greater appreciation for the life I had, and became starkly aware of how materialism ruled the lives of my friends at Northport. That was one of the key things I took away from that experience. (Jen Adams Interview, 3/26/2007).

While some students coped with adapting with cultural shock, other students were enthralled to experience the new culture and test their Russian knowledge and language skills:

I had no idea why some of them spent their time crying and feeling bad about the lifestyles of the Russians, when they could have spent more time embracing the positives. We were in RUSSIA! This is the place that we spend the past year reading, writing, communicating about, and this was a great opportunity to apply our learned skills and learn about this culture first-handedly. I was enamored by the culture, and I felt blessed to be able to there and have my host family share their life with me. (Bryan Billings Interview, 3/12/2007).

B. Lumaphone Conferences

Lumaphone conferences were held once a month on Saturday mornings with Moscow School 1129. All three students interviewed concurred that it was the preferred method of telecommunications.

We would have to come in at 7am on Saturdays, but none of us minded. We were so excited to show off our Russian knowledge and talk with our friends. I think the faculty was more annoyed about having to man a group of hyper-excited teenagers on their day off, but the whole purpose of the project seemed fulfilled if you can get students voluntarily coming in once a month at 7am on a Saturday to chat over a phone to other students in Russia. It was a lot of fun and just talking about the experience brings back so many great memories and really makes me happy. I loved being part of that experience. (Bryan Billings Interview, 3/12/2007).

Initial lumaphone conferences were awkward period of trial and error for the teachers leading the session. This is mostly due to the fact that they were not given guidance from iEARN, and were experimenting with subject topics that would engage students' interests.

The most salient lumaphone conference occurred in October 1993, during the Russian constitutional crisis. Yvette S recounts that Yeltsin had tried to stop the government and in return, the government impeached him leading to dissention in Moscow. Protests started, leading to riots and fighting on the streets of Moscow, which led to the death of nearly 200 people by the police. A lumaphone conference was scheduled for the day after the riot. Yvette recalls the session as life-changing for her. The stories she was reading in the newspaper became real and no longer distant reports of foreigners. "The lumaphone conferences first started off being silly interactions with lots of joking and laughing, but this tragedy changed the dynamic for all of us, it [lumaphone conference] became a vehicle to really learn about what was going on

over there,” says Yvette (Interview, 3/25/2007). The people in the stories had become real people to her, and created awareness of the importance of cross-cultural exchanges.

Bryan Billings agrees:

I remember all the Russian students crying telling us what was going on and we were crying at Northport because none of knew what they were exactly going through since we’ve never been exposed to that sort of blood shed at Northport, yet we cared for them because they were our friends and we wanted to do something to make them feel better and let them know that we supported them...The lumaphone conference was an invaluable resource to us. It was our vehicle to express our support to the Russians and allow them to share their experiences.” (Bryan Billings Interview, 3/12/2007).

C. Email

Emailing allowed for a less formal structure where students could engage in personal conversations with Russian students. Students could engage in more in-depth conversation and used emailing to digress about the lumaphone conference, current world events and ask and answer questions. However, emailing was not used as frequently as some of the students would have liked for teachers would become frustrated with implementation of emailing. Emailing required someone to type up the conversation and then dial-it in, which required time-commitment. Mr. Smith had different students volunteer on a rotating basis to send the emails after school.

D. Social Gatherings

The host families of the Russian exchange students took turns hosting parties for the Russian and American students to encourage mingling. Mr. Billings recalls (Don Billings Interview, 3/6/2007) that there were a lot of parties held at the Billings, particularly because they had a lot of room and children. He feels that the parties were the highlight in the exchange program for the Russian students. They were able to embrace the life of an American student and listen to music, dance, eat and forget the troubles back home.

Results

A. Development in Students

The experience amplified communications skills, team building skills, as well as critical thinking skills through collaboration with peers in culturally and geographically distant places. This

experience added to not only the students experience learning in the classroom, but made the application of learning more concrete and applicable instead of remaining a theoretical concept. Participation in the project led to increased student awareness of global issues, which in result led to student empowerment and social action.

“We were reading about political events in the media and then able to engage in first-handed discussions with the people who were being affected by the events. The helped with comprehension of the material we were reading and really motivated us to take a bigger interest in the topic.” (Bryan Billings Interview, 3/12/2007.)

The students who participated in the iEARN exchanges, both physical and virtual, developed a sense of the world, and self-initiated research on Russian politics and Russian culture to discuss with their counterparts during the lumaphone/email exchanges.

B. Development in Language Program

After returning from her exchange trip to Russia, Ms. Levine worked on adding Japanese to the World Languages Program at the high school. The trip had opened her receptivity to building a pilot language program at the high school, in hopes of instilling another venue for the students to engage in cultural exchanges. Bryan Billings was one such student who took advantage of the newly formed Japanese language program, in 1994, he took Japanese, in addition to Russian (1992-1995) and German (1992-1992).

Participation in the telecommunication/physical exchanges led to more interest in the Russian Language Program, which subsequently led to increased enrollment to a program that was faltering. According to Mr. Smith, Russian language programs all around the United States were suffering from declines in enrollment around the 1990's due to the collapsing of the USSR. The previous draw that had surrounded the language had faded and students were less eager to engage in learning the language of a faltering country.

At Northport, the Russian Language program could not sustain steady instructors, Mr. Nepo had agreed to teach Russian for a year, but was predominately a French language teacher. Bryan Billings also recounts that the interest in the Russian Language Program was deteriorating during this time and during his three years in Russian; he had three different Russian teachers. The NYS-MSTP changed this trend at Northport, for students had exposure to Russian exchange

students and friendships developed, which led to some students to continue developing that interest by taking Russian classes.

C. Empathy of the Other/ Rise in Interest in Russian Culture

The physical exchanges seems to have had the most impact on the Northport community, as interactions with the Russian students assisted with change in attitudes in political, social and cultural context. Having the Russian exchange students come to New York and participate in life at Northport by attending classes, while living with American host families and engaging in social activities with the community also changed the perceptions Northport students and community had of Russians (and people of other nations). Exposure to a different culture provided those involved with the proper tools to humanize those who are foreign. Social attitudes underwent shifts and became modified and people developed an empathetic relationship for the other. Mr. Smith noticed that the negative name-calling of Russians (i.e. “Nuke the Russians,” “Red devils”) and the other discriminations towards other foreigners subsided at the high school.

Students who participated in the telecommunications gained more interest in world politics. Different patterns of thinking, social norms and economic-political orientation were transmitted to the students during the telecommunications exchanges. Students at Northport were better able to understand real-life events by engaging in telecommunication and see its impact directly. Students were able to develop analytical thinking processes and develop an understanding for that the other is like oneself.

Timmy Karro, who hosted the principal of Moscow School 1129, gained an appreciation for the Russian culture and her participation sparked an interest in hosting other individuals at her home, in hopes of promoting global caring. A few years later, she hosted a black student from the South, who needed shelter for a few months until the turmoil within his family subsided. He stayed with the Karro’s for a few months, completing his GED at Northport High School and went on to attend Harvard University and Harvard Medical School and now is a renowned heart surgeon who recently published a book on heart surgery.

D. Friendships developed/Creation of Global Community

Students at Northport became less suspicious of Russians. The physical exchanges made students and teachers appreciate the Russian culture and view Russians as individuals with dreams, wishes, and interests, much like their own. The reduction of racial prejudice led Northport to become more receptive to being integrated with the global community. The experience led to promoting awareness not only in the school but also into the community for students took home their experience from school and practiced its application at home.

Another outcome of the NYS-MSTP is the lasting friendships that developed amongst administrators, teachers, students and host families involved. The individuals involved with the physical exchanges, or hosting students/administrators during the exchanges, still remain in contact today. Ms. Levine, Ms. Karro, Bryan Billings, Mr. and Mrs. Billings, Mr. Smith remain in contact with Alla, the principal at Moscow School 1129. Both Ms. Levin and Ms. Karro report having stayed with Alla and her mother during their subsequent trips to Russia. They continue to reciprocate the hospitality whenever Alla visits the United States.

Mr. Smith still keeps in touch with his former students, particularly Bryan Billings. He communicates with his students via email, which he finds ironic, having once thought that using email was “time consuming and not an efficient method of communicating.”

Effect on Career

A. Ms. Levine, Retired Principal of Northport High School

For Ms. Levine, participating in the physical exchange empowered her with courage to make several changes at Northport High School in the year following the visit (she retired in 1991). The schools the group visited in Russia were beautifully decorated. “While US schools are designed to look like prisons, the exterior of the Russian schools were like works of art,” Ms. Levine recalls. She was amazed at the consideration given in designing the buildings that would house the students and she was also surprised to see how creative Russian teachers were with using limited resources to create colorful, happy backdrops for the Russian children to learn within these beautiful buildings. The Russians appeared to treasure their children and each child was seen as a gift and she wanted to invoke this sense of appreciation for each student upon her returning back to the US.

Therefore, upon her return, she worked to improve Northport School's physical environment. She felt that students would be more inclined to work at pursuing their individual goals if housed in an environment that invoked their creativity. Teachers were encouraged to hang up cultural artifacts, posters, etc. in their classrooms which would add to the structural framework of invoking global citizenship and imagination.

The other project she worked on was starting a Japanese language program to be offered to students at Northport. She accredits the strengthening the Russian language program and the addition of the Japanese language program as the result of her involvement with the NYS-MSTP.

B. Mr. Smith, Retired Social Studies and Russian Language Teacher

After Ms. Levine returned from her exchange to Moscow School 1129, Mr. Smith chose Moscow School 1129 to teach for a semester for the American Field Service Program while going on sabbatical from Northport High School in 1989. After returning from the Russian teaching exchange program, Mr. Smith expanded his teaching duties at Northport High School to include teaching the Russian Language classes in addition to social studies. He used his involvement in the NYS-MSTP as a catalyst to reviving the dying Russian Language Program at Northport and the school accredits his participation as reviving the program and he is seen as a valuable asset to the school. Participating in the program improved his telecommunications' skill set which he used to further his career. It helped expand the telecommunications projects over to the social studies classes, and used the lumaphone to enable his students to interview a WWII veteran who dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. In 2002, Mr. Smith wrote and published a book on the Cold War, which has earned critical acclaim from both academics and readers. He is currently writing a book on his experience in participating in the exchange program with Moscow School 1129 during the late 80's and early 90's.

C. Bryan Billings, Former Russian Language Student (1992-1995)

Participating in the program led to a strengthening of Bryan Billings' identity as a member of a global community and introduced him an appreciation of cultural exploration. Bryan started taking Russian language classes as soon as he was permitted (sophomore year of high school) and he became the President of the Russian Club. While at Northport, he was one of the fifteen

students selected to participate in the exchange program in the spring of 1993. After graduating from Northport, he moved on to Columbia University and participated in an exchange program at the Moscow State University for one year. Earning a BA from Columbia University, Bryan continued pursuing his interest in the Russian Culture by moving to Russia and is now currently working as the Assistant Manager of the Smolny Institute's international exchange program. Bryan Billings was cited by the school administration, staff, and fellow peers as the quintessential example of iEARN success.

D. Jen Adams, Participant in Russian Exchange in 1993

Jen Adams took Russian for a year prior to participating in the physical exchange. She accounts the overall experience as positive and increased her marketability in the job market. The skills she learned in emailing, overcoming language, cultural and historical barriers all aided to exposing her interacting with groups of people that were different from her cultural; distinguished her from her peers, which allowed for her to secure employment at an international consulting firm in California after graduating from college. She is still working and living in California.

E. Yvette S., Former Russian Student (1993-1994)

Yvette remains in contact with Bryan Billings and Mr. Smith, and currently lives and works in Chicago as a Global brand manager for a deodorant product at Unilever. The early exposure to the global community provided her with a deeper appreciation of how big the world was and how tiny her little existence was:

I never was one of those kids to pay attention to that was going on in the news, but taking the Russian class and interacting in the lumaphone exchanges changed all that for me...it really changed the way I viewed the world and I realized that it was important to take notice of what was going on and how interconnected the world really was....this was the time globalization was becoming a hot concept, and I'm glad I was able to understand that concept, it most certainly helped with my current position." (Yvette S. Interview, 3/25/2007).

Strengths

A. Student Engagement in Global Community

The use of international telecommunications became an important tool to facilitate new approaches to teaching and learning at Northport High School. Students developed technical

skills in operating emails, lumaphone conferences and navigating through the internet, while communicating with other youth in a foreign country.

The telecommunication exchanges encouraged the students to take an active, participatory role in social issues and the program brought to students' consciousness a global awareness of issues and engaged them in understanding that there was more to life than their own lives at Northport. It also enabled them to expand their imaginations and journey to other worlds and experience other cultures and made them aware of the possibilities of life and their ability to contribute to life. As the exchanges dealt with current world issues that was happening in Russia, a sense of personal involvement developed amongst the participating students and fostered an empathetic response. Through the development for empathy toward the other, students developed a sense of purpose and understanding, thus contributing to a more humane society.

B. Successful Incorporation into Classroom Curriculum

The successful incorporation of the program into existing classroom curriculum was a major attributor to the success of the program at Northport. The implementation of the program between language classes allowed for the program to be more easily incorporated as part of a language class's curriculum, instead of being an adjunct to the classroom curriculum. All of the Northport correspondences in emailing were in Russian while the Russians corresponded in English; thus allowing students to enhance their command of the language while also participating in cross-cultural communication. Teachers also mastered arranging activities that ensured increasing students' inquiry and interest.

C. Strategic Expansion of the Program

The pilot program started only between the Russian language class and Moscow School 1129. After its initial success, Northport expanded the project into other subjects, such as social studies. Since the communication technology became accepted and used effectively at Northport, they succeeded in spreading to other departments for the school had set in place a system of building upon established infrastructure.

The planned program change allowed for greater receptivity amongst teachers to the program and change. The strategy of gradualism worked at Northport, for teachers from other subjects and other languages begged the school to be included in the program.

Challenges

A. Infrastructure problems

The students and teachers involved in the NYS-MSTP did not have their own computers, hence competing with other classes for use on the school's computers, which was only available to them after school. This presented a challenge for all involved.

B. Participation Selection Politics

Selection into the program fostered jealousy amongst other teachers who also wished to be invited to participate in the program. Participation in the program was highly coveted by all teachers. This occasionally created a hostile environment within the teaching community at Northport as teachers involved with the iEARN program were sometimes snubbed by their peers when seeking support such as assistance with technological problems. However, some of the jealousy eased when the iEARN program was extended to other subjects.

The student selections also faced political opposition. The exchange program application was opened to all students who fulfilled the prerequisites (strong interest in Russian culture, knowledge of Russian Language, knowledge/interest in Russian current events). However, Mr. Smith reports that many students who applied were hoping to gain a free trip, resulting in a poor applicant pool.

C. Training for Teachers in Technology and Leading Sessions

Ms. Levine and Mr. Smith wish iEARN had recognized the inadequacies at Northport for the need for more highly trained teachers to better address operating the trends in technology and telecommunication. Teachers felt overwhelmed with the amount of work involved and the labor intensive the process of emailing. They also felt that there was no real support from iEARN, nor the other teachers at the school. iEARN did not produce a list of projects to partake or subjects the students could discuss with their counterpart schools in Moscow; thus, teachers were left to

choose topics for discussions, and sometimes inappropriate choices arose. Teachers involved were expected to volunteer their extra time and facilitate the telecommunications project while operating it on their own. Due to the lack of skilled teachers well-versed with the technology, Ms. Levine and Mr. Smith felt that participation in the program added additional work for teachers involved without proper technology support.

Bryan Billings supports this by pointing out that the students took charge of using and implementing the technology, as often teachers became frustrated with spending their time learning how to use the electronic sources and designated different students to become in charge of the technology. It appears that teachers either refused to learn or became inflexibly resistant to embrace the new technology, and instead, relied on students to implement the new technology.

D. Inadequate Preparation for Host Families in Dealing with Culture Shock

Training was not provided to host families on dealing with Russian student's culture shocks, nor did iEARN provide guidelines on proper hosting etiquette. Host families were at times faced with requests from host students for material gifts, and often the gifts were compared with the gifts given from other host families.

In one unfortunate case, a host family bought their student a stereo, not thinking it would foster resentment and jealousy from other students who did not receive similar gifts from their host families. (Jen Anderson Interview, 3/9/2007).

Ms. Karro also reports inadequate preparation to the difference in culture. Alla was very offended that she was not able to stay with Merle Levine, the Principal of Northport High School, and felt that it was an insult to her to not be staying at the house of the highest ranking member of the school. Ms. Karro learned later, when Mr. Karro and she visited Russia a few years after Alla came to stay with them, that the Russians take respect, honor and rank seriously. She wished she had been forewarned.

Author's Comments

Pictures were provided to the team by Ruth Billings from the Russian exchange trips and the student socials.

Cold Spring Harbor High School (New York)

Context

The Cold Spring Harbor High School is located on the north shore of Long Island, outside of New York City, in a wealthy suburban community. The entire school district serves approximately 2,100 students from a town with 8,000 residents. The town is home to the world-renowned Cold Spring Harbor National Laboratory and DNA Learning Center. The strong academic performance is evident from consistent, above-average student performance on standardized tests and the 95% of graduates who go onto higher education institutions (Cold Spring Harbor School District profile, accessed April 1, 2007).

The school community is, with a few exceptions, entirely comprised of Caucasian students (New York State Education Department accessed April 1, 2007). English achievement at the Cold Spring Harbor high school is 10 to 15 points higher than a similar school, and mathematics achievement is 10 to 26 points higher. The curriculum is extensive and varied, including a range of computer science classes and journalism and public speaking classes within the English language department. The Social Studies department offers classes in world and European history, and intensive electives on selected historical time periods.

David Egan was the Chairman of the Social Studies department at Cold Spring Harbor High School during the New York State – Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project. He taught at Cold Spring for 27 years, covering Russian history, culture, Soviet studies, and literature classes on Tolstoy. Due in part to his activity, the district hired a Russian language teacher during his tenure (the high school now only offers language classes in French, Spanish, and Latin). Beginning in 1973, Mr. Egan and his wife Mindy planned visits to the U.S.S.R. for Cold Spring Harbor students. 20 students were selected for each trip, which were funded by the parents. Mr. Egan offered these trips as incentives for students to study Russian history.

NYS-MSTP Experience

In 1988, Mr. Egan's principal received a notice from Jane Barley at the New York State Education Department that the school had been selected to participate in a new exchange and technology program, the New York State – Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project. He

recalls that initial contact with the teacher's counterparts in Moscow was through email, but project implementation was delayed due to significant technical difficulties in Moscow. Mr. Egan recounted that discussions of the student projects only began when the teachers from New York State arrived in Moscow for the first exchange visit.

Mr. Egan designed a formal, for-credit course for the project. Students would work as an author or participant in a final project item. During the course of the school year, he would work with the students to offer guidance on the project and provide support for the telecommunications component. This differed from his partner school in Moscow, School 4. There, with the highly structured Soviet curriculum, students were not able to work on the project during the school day. Students would stay after classes to participate, which would also minimize the time different between the partners.

A. "The Contemporary"

Students participated in some extraordinary projects as part of the New York State – Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project. One, a current events magazine entitled "The Contemporary," was from Mr. Egan's educator's point of view, "as dynamic and multi-faceted as anything [he'd] seen." (David Egan Interview, 2/3/07) Working in a collaborative manner, the students from the two countries decided on a question/issue for each edition, did research, and communicated their findings over email. Mr. Egan recalls that there were typically 50 messages between the schools to produce an issue. The students would publish the magazine in their schools, and field any questions that arose after publication. As additional schools became involved with "The Contemporary," an issue about Israel and Palestine's conflict drew ire from many directions, including from Peter Copen. Mr. Egan said that at first, the Israeli students were participating more actively than the Palestinian students, but at a point in the editing process, the Israeli students refused to answer more questions. As a result, the final issue had a stronger Palestinian perspective, which Mr. Copen felt was biased. Mr. Egan disagreed, however, and noted that the Israeli students declined to participate further. He also recounts that some of the students who worked on this issue of "The Contemporary" went onto write about this experience in graduate school.

B. DNA Learning Center

Another innovative, Cold Spring Harbor student-led project that was created as part of the New York State – Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project was the creation of the Moscow DNA Learning Center. Cold Spring Harbor’s DNA Learning Center was the first institution to work on things like gene splicing. Steven Malloy was a student of Mr. Egan’s, and an intern at the DNA Learning Center. In communications with his host brother Nikita Skryabin in Moscow, the two developed a plan to open a DNA Learning Center in Moscow. Fortuitously, Nikita’s father was the Vice-Director of the Soviet Academy of Science’s Engelhardt Institute of Molecular Biology, and he cleared the way for a collaboration to develop. (Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory DNA Learning Center 1990 Annual Report.)

However, Steven Malloy shouldered the real work of the negotiations. The collaboration was covered by The New York Times, which reported, “Yet it was the Malloy youth who, in a series of April meetings in Moscow with high-level Soviet scientists and businessmen, hammered out the details of what will become the U.S.A.-U.S.S.R. Education Program of DNA and Biotechnology.” (Strickland, *The New York Times*, May 20, 1990.) Representatives from the DNA Learning Center traveled to Moscow, and this new project also brought four Soviet scientists to Cold Spring Harbor in 1990. During that time, the scientists participated in a scheduled DNA Science Workshop, and met with American educators to learn about their teaching methods. The trip concluded with a visit to Washington, DC and plans to open the Moscow DNA Learning Center. The Soviet scientists returned to Moscow with approximately \$14,000 of donated equipment and supplies from manufacturers.

Results

Before this project, Cold Spring Harbor High School did not participate in cultural exchanges. Mr. Egan sees the New York State – Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project as a catalyst for discussing the world.

The introduction of technology to the classroom was hastened by the project as well. At the beginning, there was one computer in the class for the students to share. However, as the

school's participation in the project created positive publicity for the school, more computers were provided. With the higher profile, additional support came forth.

Effect on Career

Mr. Egan wrote, as part of the survey administered with this study:

Armed with a PhD in Russian history, I was able to establish a highly popular Russian Studies program in advance of the NYS-MSTP, but the project enabled me to enrich my program in more ways than I can count. Most notably, it allowed my students to experience first-hand the society and culture they had been studying, an experience which further enlivened my program and encouraged me to decide to stay at CSH HS rather than move on to a teaching career at the college level, which had been my initial goal upon finishing my degree. (David Egan Interview, Feb 3, 2007)

The opportunities presented by the New York State – Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project to a highly dedicated teacher such as Mr. Egan were of tremendous value. Exposure to a program such as this early in a student's academic career was exciting and rewarding for both teacher and student, and developed into a very strong program for Cold Spring Harbor High School.

Strengths

On a person-to-person level, a significant strength of the project lies in the fact that many students remain in contact with their host families to this day. Mr. Egan also said that many of the students from Moscow are now living in this area, and continue their relationships with their hosts. In this respect, the NYS-MSTP was very successful in eliminating the fear of the "other" and creating ties across country and political borders.

One strength of the project was, in Mr. Egan's mind, particularly relevant for the students at Cold Spring Harbor High School. Cold Spring Harbor is a very wealthy community in the New York City suburbs and the students did not have exposure to the challenges of living in crowded urban areas. Mr. Egan called the exchange visits, "an eye-opening experience" for students to live with a family in a cramped, Moscow apartment for a short period of time.

Challenges

Mr. Egan's partner school was School #4 in Moscow. He described it as the best school in the city. Many parents of the students held prominent positions within the Communist Party. For example, Gorbachev's niece was in the class. Mr. Egan noted that, on occasion, "Soviet patronage politics interfered with project work" (Survey data). He recounted that during the 1991 coup, their Moscow counterparts were very close-mouthed. As many of their parents were directly impacted by the events of the August coup, they wouldn't speak out, particularly on political issues. On cultural issues, there was not a barrier to communication, but by the end of the Cold War, politics was practically a taboo issue.

Brighton High School (New York)

Context

Brighton High School is located in Rochester, New York, a city in the western part of the state. The school has approximately 1,250 students enrolled, and 90% of the graduating classes go directly onto college or university. Brighton offers a wide range of Advanced Placement classes, including classes in French, Spanish, and German (Brighton Central School District profile, accessed April 2, 2007). The Foreign Language department at the school continues to offer Russian language classes. There is a wide range of elective classes available for students, demonstrating a commitment to expanding the opportunities for learning in a variety of directions (Brighton Program Guide, 2007-2008; accessed April 2, 2007). Brighton has a significant history in exchange programs with other countries, demonstrating an early interest in incorporating a global perspective for the school.

Jane Shuffelton began teaching French and Russian language in 1963, and retired in June, 2006. Halina Danchenko also taught German and Russian at Brighton during the NYS-MSTP, and retired from teaching after 30 years in the schools. Both teachers participated in the project from the outset, and traveled to Moscow on the first teachers' exchange trip.

NYS-MSTP Experience

The Brighton High School was invited to participate in the NYS-MSTP by Jane Barley, the Russian language specialist in the New York State Department of Education. In the summer of 1989, teachers from New York State traveled to Moscow to meet with counterparts and plan the

projects for the coming school year. Ms. Danchenko recalled that there was a great desire for the project to be more than just a cultural exchange. Ms. Shuffelton found the Russian personalities challenging, and hard to work with at the beginning. The principal of School #67 was an excellent educator, but at the end of the week of planning and meetings, announced that he wanted to see a math and science competition between the two schools, instead of the slate of programs on which the two teachers had been collaborating for days. She had to insist that the plans the two teachers had spent a significant amount of time developing would be the ones that were embarked on in the coming school year.

Ms. Shuffelton said that her students were fully invested in the project, and she knew how much it meant to them when she asked to see their first email messages to the Moscow school. She anticipated many grammatical and spelling corrections would be necessary, but every message was perfectly written.

One project undertaken by the schools was to produce a booklet called, “Schools in the 21st Century.” Ms. Shuffelton said that most of the ideas for the pieces originated with her students in Rochester, but the piece that had the most impact on her was from a Soviet student who wrote that schools equal freedom, and in the 21st century, schools will be little Americas. She felt that this contrasted greatly with the prevailing thought that Soviets couldn’t speak out and make their opinions heard. Her classes did write and discuss politics with their counterparts, including discussions about Stalin and his regime.

A. Exchange Visit

During an exchange visit to Moscow, Ms. Shuffelton said that it took her students only five minutes to take note of the differences in education pedagogy. The teacher from Moscow was harsh in her criticisms, and corrected students continually. Gender inequity was very present. The Brighton students were appalled by the lack of safety precautions in the chemistry lab they toured. The focus on learning facts, and the lack of class discussion was very obvious. The Brighton principal tried to engage the class in a discussion, but was told to stop by the host principal.

Ms. Danchenko wrote, “Lives of students were impacted from the total experience...in being able to communicate on personal and working levels...especially once exchanges began...our American students blossomed from the ability to study and work in the Soviet Union and Russia. Their experiences of living in families and attending schools were priceless” (Halina Danchenko interview, February 15, 2007). In summarizing the experience as a whole, Ms. Shuffelton felt that the exchanges were the most important experience for the students of the NYS-MSTP.

Results

Participation in the project encouraged both teachers at Brighton High School to use technology in their classrooms, and experiment with new technologies as they developed. It was, “an avenue to realize there was a way to communicate,” (Halina Danchenko interview, February 15, 2007) but adding technology to the language curriculum was a definite challenge, as it didn’t fit with the classroom goals. Ms. Danchenko also wrote, “Many students continued with Russian studies on the college levels and made careers in the Russian field. I always marveled at how the students matured in one month’s time and how their self esteem grew in leaps and bounds. Of course, their language development also had positive results” (Survey data). This evidence of a continued interest in Russian language and culture has developed a community of new Russian speakers, academics, and business collaborators.

Effect on Career

The experience in the New York State – Moscow Schools Telecommunications Project very positively influenced the teachers’ classroom practices. Ms. Shuffelton wrote, “It transformed my approach to teaching Russian,” and that, “Changing my thinking about teaching led me to be one of the authors of the National Standards for Russian” (Survey data). The lasting effect of the project that continues was expanding the horizons and collaboration opportunities for teachers that might be isolated in their geographic location, in this case, in upstate New York. “The project made me aware of the possibilities available to use computers for teaching, exchanges for communicative/social experiences. Also, provided opportunities to teach in Moscow schools and experience other teacher’s methods,” wrote Ms. Danchenko. Beyond the time frame of this specific project, she continued other exchange programs with Russian schools through 2000 (when she retired).

Strengths

Ms. Shuffelton wrote that her partner teacher in Moscow was a significant factor contributing to the success of the project. The English teacher she worked with was very eager and willing to embark on the collaborative projects, and that enthusiasm was infectious. Also, Ms. Shuffelton's school administration was, "very supportive," and that empowered her to dive fully into the collaboration. Ms. Danchenko felt that the first year of the project went really well, which was due in large part to the involvement of Peter Copen, in terms of both his time and funding. The first year of the project was fairly positive overall, but that feeling decreased as the project went forward.

Challenges

Ms. Shuffelton recalled that the first year of the project was particularly difficult, because email technology was so new in 1988. Experts were necessary to solve technical problems because no one had experience with this system of telecommunications technology. Typing emails in Cyrillic, at the time, was also a significant challenge. She also recounted personality conflicts with a few people from the Moscow team. Ms. Danchenko believed that everyone initially underestimated the amount of time necessary to produce quality collaborative projects. There were also a few cultural differences that couldn't be bridged. She attempted a community service project for both schools, which did not succeed as she'd hoped. The Moscow school had a hard time accepting the idea, and felt that volunteering was not part of the Soviet mindset.

Author's Comments

Ms. Danchenko wrote in her survey comments, "Just want to thank you for taking an interest in a project that inspired many schools, students, and teachers to promote understanding, goodwill, workmanship and fellowship at a crucial time when doors slowly began to open."

Somers School District (New York)

Context

Somers is a suburban town with a population of 19,720 (<http://www.city-data.com/city/Somers-New-York.html>) located 45 miles north of New York City in the northern section of Westchester County. Estimated median household income in 2005 was \$101,100, which is significantly

above the state average. The ethnic population percentage is significantly below state average comprising of 7.3% of the total population. The town's school district comprises of four schools: Primrose School, Somers Intermediate School, Somers Middle School and Somers High School. The elementary school and the high school share a campus while the intermediate and middle school share a campus.

The school district boasts of its emphasis on its technology program offered at all levels of its schools. Somers created one of the first technology centers in Westchester County with help from the BOCES program. The school district feels that embracing technology will prepare students to enter a "dynamic, interdependent world as effective problem-solvers, efficient researchers and competent communicators." Therefore, strong emphasis is placed on using technological innovations within the classroom and curriculum. Embracing new technology is not just an expectation from students, but from teachers as well. Teachers are expected to participate in continual learning in the use of technology and professional development and offered courses by the district sporadically throughout the school year.

The technology center at Somers School District provides for curriculum development, instructional support services, providing courses to help prepare students in assisting design/drafting, visual communications, electronics, and among many others. It was Somers School District's interest in technology that led to its participation in telecommunications projects with China within the iEARN program. John Forsberg and James O'Brien from the technology department were the main facilitators of the program, and students at Somers High School, Primrose School and Somers Intermediate School participated in lumaphone conferences, email exchanges and mailings as well as attending bi-yearly talks put on by Mr. Forsberg. The school district participated in the program from 1990 to 1993, with about 10 teachers from the school district participating in iEARN projects and with the majority of the telecommunications occurring between Somers Intermediate School and the Chinese elementary schools.

US-China Telecommunications Project

In 1991, Somers connected with iEARN for the project through Peter Copen's related work with Walkabout, located in a nearby office to Chris Morton, Mr. Forsberg's work colleague. Mr. Morton introduced Mr. Copen to Mr. Forsberg, who was the head of the technology department for Somers School District (SSD), knowing that Mr. Copen was seeking help in expanding iEARN to include China (John Forsberg Interview, 2/19/2007).

Mr. Forsberg embraced the opportunity and enlisted Mr. O'Brien's assistance to upstart the program at SSD. Mr. O'Brien said that Peter Copen had "a cult of personality," and his drive kept the project moving forward. Both teachers decided to help Mr. Copen in the project, and were asked to be part of the first group of teachers sent on an exchange to China (James O'Brien Interview, 1/30/2007).

A. Physical Exchanges

In the wake of the Tiananmen Square Massacres, a group of seven teachers from the US (of which Mr. Forsberg and Mr. O'Brien were part of) visited China for sixteen days two years after the tragedy. The trip was funded by the Copen Family Foundation. The first night consisted of having dinner with the Chinese at the restaurant of the hotel. And the next two days comprised of meeting with the teachers at the Center of Math and Science while the following thirteen days were comprised of classroom observations, technology training and sight-seeing. For the entire trip, they had a member from the Communist party come and follow them around. The group experienced cultural shock from this chaperoning and lack of personal liberties. Unlike the experiences of their colleagues who worked with schools in Moscow, the China team was accompanied at all times by a handler from the Party. The ill-will from this woman towards the team was another indication of the lack of personal freedoms and civil liberties facing all Chinese.

The schools themselves were not the free standing institutions that dominate the U.S.'s education system.

I remember the news media's report, about the student protests and their tragic death by the government soldiers. However, I was unprepared to find that the remnants of the tragedy still were very much a present reality for the Chinese. Not only was it taboo to engage in any discussion about the event, there was fear on the faces of our translators

when questions arose from the group about the event. (John Forsberg Interview, 2/19/2007).

Moreover, he was particularly interested in observing the behaviors of the high school students, and was saddened by the constraints placed by the government on the freedom to openly express their opinions. Mr. O'Brien recalls that each school had a business enterprise within the building. Each principal, he remembers, was both an educator and a businessman. The curriculums, of course, were all top-down and dictated by the central government.

B. Lumaphone

The Chinese students seemed more enthralled with using the telecommunications than the American students. The lumaphone conferences became a medium for these students at both high school and elementary school level to express themselves with a little more freedom and to also be exposed to a life completely different from their own. Mr. Forsberg comments that the Chinese students seemed at awe at the many outfits of the American student's dress and the vivacious behavior. They lived such lives of censorship, that the freedom experienced by the American children seemed unfathomable to them. Initially, Mr. Forsberg worried that such exposure to seeing American opulence and freedom from the lumpahones would cause the Chinese students to feel depressed and oppressed; but students from both China and the US loved using the lumaphone.

At the elementary school level, the students used the conference sessions as a show-and-tell; they would bring their favorite toys and possessions to share visually with their Chinese counterparts, while the Chinese students would draw pictures to share with the Somers students. At the high school level, Mr. O'Brien mentions that the students tried more to communicate about projects they were working on in their classes, and the interactions created a sense of friendship and camaraderie amongst the students and teachers.

At both the high school and elementary school level, the students engaged in lumaphone conferences twice a month. Using the lumaphone helped foster teamwork both in at Somers and in China. The students and teachers from each country had to work as a team to set guidelines on the use of the lumaphone: what order students would get to speak, possible topics for

discussion, etc. After the lumaphone conferences, Mr. Forsberg encouraged teachers to engage their students in reflection about what they have learned, observed and felt during the lumaphone conference.

C. Email

Emailing technology was primitive at the time and teachers at Somers found using it difficult and time consuming. Someone had to write up all the emails and dial in to send them to China, and connecting to China was not an easy task, due to their government controls---and often some of what was written was censored by the government, so teachers never knew if the Chinese children or the US children received the entire message. Also, the Chinese teachers refused to use it, because they were suspicious of it, and were afraid of getting in trouble with their government. Sometimes the US students would send emails, and the Chinese would respond via snail mail. Therefore, after initial attempts in the beginning, teachers chose to stop communicating via email and elected to stick with the lumaphone conferences.

Results

Participating in a telecommunications exchange with a country like China, after a major political event, was a good impetus for students at Somers to engage in world events. The lumaphone exchanges caused some students to become more interested in world politics and history. Mr. Forsberg reports that more students engaged in reading the newspaper or paying attention to the news to learn more about China. The elementary students responded to what they saw on the lumaphones and were able to comment on the differences in the Chinese schools from their schools, engaging as global citizens at an early age. Although there were language barriers (Chinese teachers translated what the American students said and vice versa), genuine empathy occurred amongst the students, and an appreciation for the respective differences in culture was also instilled.

The elementary school exchanges were more successful than the high school exchanges at Somers, because the Chinese counterpart (elementary school principal in China) was really involved and really made the effort to ensure the exchanges occurred. That teacher believed in the program, and wanted to instill a sense of hope in the children at her school—by exposing

them to a completely different way of living, thinking, etc. In Mr. Forsberg's opinion, Lee, the principal, was extremely bright and smart, and charming and had better understanding of what the program should do, and was about than anyone at Somers or any other the other Chinese schools, as well as iEARN. However, when she ran out of steam, so did the exchanges, since she was the source of the momentum driving the project for both US and Chinese teachers.

Effect on Career

Both Mr. Forsberg and Mr. O'Brien felt that participation in the program had a positive effect on their careers. Mr. Forsberg states that, "participating in the exchange program to China brought the importance of technology and implementing technological advances to the foreground for the school district." His role as the technology director for the school district grew due to the program. Although a successful implementation of the program failed at Somers, the recognition of the need for the use of technology in the classroom grew. SSD's successful technology department is due in part to the participation in the iEARN program. Mr. Forsberg used this experience as a learning experience to apply its successes and failures to future technology projects that the school district engaged in.

Mr. Forsberg observes that participation in the Chinese telecommunication exchanges led to improved computer skills for teachers, which would help them advance professionally. He cites the example of an intermediate school teacher whose computer literacy skill set improved vastly and was competent enough to lead training and technical support to her fellow peers. Her knowledge was seen as a valuable commodity by the school and she was given advancement. Participating in the program allowed for her to have the opportunity to access and develop those skills.

John Anderson, who went on the trip to China, developed stronger interest in China and relayed to Mr. O'Brien that he wanted to go back to learn more about how education and technological advances were affecting the Chinese. In 1992, Mr. Anderson went back to China to conduct more research and in 1995, he completed his dissertation, "The International Education and Resource Network: Building a Sustainable Virtual School," at the University of Washington, Seattle.

Strengths

The schools were able to establish some exchange programs, and had the most success between two elementary schools. Mr. Forsberg stated that the elementary students were very excited to share information about their lives with Chinese students, and to see the Chinese children on the screen of the lumaphone was a thrilling and special experience. Mr. O'Brien recalled using maps that included China and placed them in the center of his bulletin boards in his classes. Seeing the primacy of the U.S. challenged was difficult for the high school students to initially grasp, but it helped them to understand the way others view the world at the same time.

Participation in the program allowed for the school district to reach its goal of developing students' awareness and understanding of global issues. Participation fostered global citizenship and the promotion of human rights much quicker, by exposing students to new technologies and new cultures via the lumaphone exchanges. Mr. Forsberg believes that the early exposure in their lives to the Chinese students, at all educational levels, instilled the necessary knowledge and skill to succeed in a globalized world later in the lives of Somers students.

iEARN was strategic in partnering up with the technology department at Somers. Teachers involved in the telecommunications report less technological problems because they were able to garner the needed support from the technology department.

Challenges

On the first exchange trip to Beijing, Mr. Forsberg recalled that the lumaphones the team brought with them were held by Chinese officials until a tax payment of \$5,000 per device was paid. After significant discussion, the tax was dropped by the officials, and the group was able to proceed with the visit. However, this incident was only the first in many obstacles the iEARN project would face in expanding work into China.

The primary challenges in the project included the significant time difference between New York and Beijing, and the interference by the Chinese government. In order to send messages between the schools and have a conversation, students in New York would have to arrive very early in the morning, and their counterparts would have to stay at school late into the evening. Also, the

unreliable nature of phone lines in China hampered the conversation. It was impossible for the New York teachers to know if the lines were being monitored and purposefully dropped by officials or if the electricity dropped out and cut the connection.

There was also difficulty integrating the telecommunications into the curriculum. Teachers were given a lot of freedom with the telecommunications but were not given specific projects to work on, which left teachers having to expend energy during their free time coming up with possible projects to try out. Teachers experienced poor guidance on leading sessions and fulfilling the mission of engaging students to feel the need to take action while instilling the feeling that they could make a difference.

Furthermore, the focus of the project was aimed in trying to exchange the actual people (teachers, admin) instead of trying to focus on the exchange of ideas. Mr. Forsberg expressed that there was more excitement from iEARN and Somers over trying to get teachers over to the countries than building up the infrastructure for a successful implementation of the program.

Authors' Note

Abby Bush and Sora Chung conducted a face-to-face interview with Mr. O'Brien on January 30, 2007 at Somers High School. The authors note that the school's technology center was fully stocked with up-to-date computers and other technological advances (i.e. flat screen TV). The school's lunchroom was decorated with flags from different countries hanging around the room. The hallways of the high school were spotted with newspaper clippings, 3D displays and posters disseminating different cultures.

School 1129 (Moscow)

Context

School 1129 has for the most part been a part of iEARN since its inception. It is an urban school, with many apartment buildings surrounding its location. There is a colorful playground outside of the school. There are 210 students that attend the school from the first through the eleventh grades, with an even mix of boys and girls, and nearly most of the students and teachers are Russian Orthodox. Of the 210 students that attend the school, 32 students are from an

orphanage. There is a dress code at this school as well. Boys wear sweater vests and khaki pants, and girls wear sweater vests and skirts.

The school offers a three tier track: a general education school, gymnasium classes for gifted students, and special, intimate classes for the medically disabled, with a variety of specialty programs that include foreign language, ecology, computer labs, and Drama. The school also promotes after-school activities that include sports, special courses in science and mathematics, and programs that allow the students to work on projects, including iEARN projects.

School Spaces

The team was led on a tour of the campus by a student with a camcorder. This student prefaced the tour by stating that the school is “an amazing school; I love my school very much.” The school was typical of most Russian school arrangements with large and long hallways, lack of bulletin boards, plain classrooms, and lack of color; regardless, there was a vitality in the school that immediately could be felt. The students, even from the early grades, are savvy with speaking English, as they start very early. Students in the hallways are excited to practice their English and giggle uncontrollably at the sight of their guests.

The rooms in the school are much like most Russian schools, fairly modest, with plant-life lining the back of the room. Teachers’ desks throughout the school are always placed in the front of the classroom, and chairs are separated from one another typically in rows, positioned to look at the teacher in the front of the room.

The classrooms are bright, and children seem active and energetic. The classes are quite small, with no more than 10-15 students per classroom. Hallways are spacious and typically plain, but because of their recent school anniversary that took place nearly two weeks ago, the hallways have a lot more character. There are special banners placed all around the school – a collection of photos of different school events, such as dances, workshops, competitions, sports events, etc. A series of events were planned for the anniversary celebration, including performing special plays and songs to important guests, including alumni from the school.

The principal's office is airy and decorated with awards and acknowledgements to the school. Plant life too surrounds the entire office. iEARN photos of conferences and photos of students that participated in iEARN exchanges are placed prominently on the walls. A picture taken in 1989 when iEARN (Peter Copen) first visited the school is one of the most visible photos, as are the photos of Northport High School – their New York partner school.

NYS-MSTP Experience

School 1129 is unsure how they were chosen for this project, though it did involve a contact from Peter Copen, the founder of iEARN, which to the school was “the beginning of something great.” One theory is shared by Alla Shushkovskaya, the principal of the school, who has been involved in the NYS-MSTP since the beginning: “We were a very normal school . . . without any computers or technology. At the time there were more special schools, but we were a general school; maybe we were chosen to differentiate us, and better us” (Interview Alla Shushkovskaya, 1/18/2007).

Nina Ulorna, an original teacher of the program, but now an esteemed researcher in the field of education, who too researched and has followed up on the experience in the early years, agrees that the connection between the US and New York schools was a “big secret.”

A. The Moscow-New York Telecommunications Project Museum

One of the most distinctive examples of School 1129's participation in the project is the special space they have allocated for iEARN in their school museum. There is an exhibition dedicated to the international projects and country partners that they have had over the years. Truly, there is a great juxtaposition of new and old iEARN experiences. For example, a copy of *Pumsy Tales* – a poetry magazine written by Russian and American students about relationships they have with a mystical dragon – is placed alongside a modern project with Japan, where they currently are exchanging teddy bears and games with their additional partner country.

What is particularly striking in the museum is the collection of the old pieces of technology that started it all in 1988, including a lumaphone, an old computer, and a bulky camcorder as well.

Above these artifacts hangs a symbol that represents the telecommunications project – a butterfly, whose wings are images of the American and Soviet flag.

B. Students

The four students of School 1129, Natalie Demiovenko, Roman Barsukov, Denis Volkov, and Olga Tataianova, whom participated in the project during 1988-1992, have a sense of pride about being involved in the project. Words like “revolutionary” and “pioneers” are used in each student’s speech seamlessly.

There is a reminder by student after student that the historical climate at the time has much to do with why the project was so important to them and their school. Roman Barsukov adds:

The project was in the former Soviet Union, so you have to understand it was nothing but revolutionary. It was unusual for students in Moscow to get in contact with other students and foreigners to come over and visit us. I had the opportunity to connect with others and their way of life and it just felt so important at the time. It was my first opportunity to use the Internet and see technology like this. It was very unusual and exciting at the same time. (Interview Roman Barsukov, 1/18/2007).

Denis agrees with Roman, and reiterates that the political environment at the time certainly made him feel “special.” He says that it was something akin to “magic” to be chosen in the project, and since only ten schools were chosen it was like a “lottery.”

The students agree that the experience was memorable because the projects were different than what they were previously used to in class and that the projects were a lot of fun. Denis Volkov explains his favorite iEARN project, which involved his affinity for baseball. The students of the school had the opportunity to learn more about American baseball, which prompted Denis to collect baseball cards and become captain of his school’s baseball team. “We made a five person baseball team with only three gloves and one bat.” The school even had the opportunity to play Northport High School, which was the greatest aspect of the project.

Olga and Natalie agree that the interaction between the two schools fostered immediate relationships because it was taking some unfamiliar and allowing the students to incorporate something new into their lives. “The lumaphone was just amazing too because we could see these faces and it was like, you are so close,” Natalie adds.

Results

A. Increase in Technologically Advance Equipment

As a result of their participation they had access to modems, computers, and a lumaphone. They also had a strong relationship with their first partner school, Northport High School, in New York, USA. They participated in student exchanges in 1989, where ten to twenty American students visited Russia and about the same number of students visited New York. The goal was to have a real sense of each other's cultures beyond what was shared in letters.

B. Education Model Improves

Nina Ulorna as noted did research on the NYS-MSTP and reads a section of her research written in 1994 that shares her observations and findings during the first few years of the project:

Because of our projects and our contacts, we became different. After working on the project we began adopting planetary pedagogical methods to education. The experiment was during these first three years . . . some schools continued to use their partners with American schools; they increased their work and widened with their partners. There were many great changes to the schools in Moscow as well . . . for example; Gymnasium 1509 became an international gymnasium school after participating in the project. Many schools in Moscow developed their telecommunications in other ways by working with more and more countries . . . (Interview Nina Ulorna, 1/18/2007).

Olga and Alla agree that the findings reflect similar changes in their school as well, as they continued to have a relationship with their original partner school in the US, Northport; they also eventually developed other partnerships with other countries such as Japan in 2002. The school instructed English from the 5th to 10th grade, but after the program they expanded the English-speaking classes from 1st-11th grade, as the administration recognized the importance of practicing the language at a much earlier age.

One teacher of School 1289, whom participated in the NYS-MSTP as a student, offers an insightful observation that she believes teaching styles have changed. In the school where she teaches for example, there is now a course called "Country Study," where children have the capability to focus on one country and learn different aspects of social life; she believes that the values of iEARN contributed to the creation of this course.

Effect on Career

A. Teachers

During our roundtable with four teachers from School 1129 as well as four teachers from other schools that participated in the program between 1988-1992, the general consensus was that program played a huge role in their professional development and challenged them as teachers to think more creatively about how to engage with their students. Liudmila Sukhanova adds, “I became more creative with my lessons on ecological monitoring; I also learned how to use computer technology in the classroom, and my English improved as well.”

Nina Ulorna had been a mathematics and informatics teacher in 1998, but is now working in the Department of Technology and Education the Moscow Institute of Education. As a result of her work as a teacher in iEARN, in 1992 she made a smooth transition as a researcher, and did more work in education research and practices.

Olga Prokhorenko, the assistant principal of School 1129 is now one of two project coordinators that are leading the iEARN-Russia program. It has been her experience, devotion, and love of the program that has enabled her to transition into the position so naturally, thus minimizing the time iEARN-Russia experienced when they recently lacked governmental support of the program.

B. Students

Each of students interviewed are involved in an occupation that is highly respectable in Russia. Natalie Demiovenko is a teacher and advisor, and notes that upon her return from her student exchange to New York, she “became the most popular girl at her school,” as everyone wanted to hear about what the experience was like. Olga Tataianova is in the competitive field of Moscow real estate, which is a booming market in Moscow currently.

Denis Volkov adds that he gained priceless leadership skills and self-confidence as a result of his participation. He explains that the international experience also separated him from his other peers in Russia. He expresses that his ability to meet real American student completely changed his outlook on learning English. “First it was just a class,” he notes, “but then I began loving to

learn English,” which he believes has given an edge as a successful businessman in Russia as well.

Roman Barsukov is “trying to make Gazprom, the largest company in Russia,” (Denis Volkov interjects) “# 1 power producing company in the world.” Laughs of irony are shared by all, as it was Roman who explained that the deforestation project that he participated in changed his life immediately after high school. Roman Barsukov explains that the iEARN projects, such as the deforestation project, not only were memorable, but had a direct impact on his personal growth and graduate studies.

During my time in the military I became dedicated to ecological monitoring because of the inspiration of this project. My participation supported others, the team that I worked with on with ecological monitoring benefited from that insight and that continuation was great. That participation was also “real work” and our input seemed to matter. It allowed me to gain more knowledge, and that was a valuable reward . . . we definitely had a taste of democracy with this project. It was unusual; students had the opportunity to solve problems. It was an honor to represent the school i.e. when I went to the United States; it was an honor, even when I had the opportunity to exchange letters with other students. I was representing something and it was so unique in this way. I liked the democracy of the project that we got to work on. We got to go to the Hague and here I was, representing my country. (Interview Roman Barsukov, 1/18/2007).

Strengths

A. Improvement in Language Skills

Alla Shushkovskaya and Olga Prokhorenko believe that one of the great strengths was the fact that students had the great opportunity to use and practice their English. Olga Prokhorenko: “These projects allowed teachers to incorporate English into their lessons, and it was more fun for the students, more interaction.”

B. Participation in Conferences

Olga Prokhorenko also believes that the conferences today and especially back then were vital to the program’s success. In fact, a special conference in 1989 was hosted at the school between the United States and Russia for about three weeks. “Communication, ideas, projects,” were shared between the two countries, Olga shares, “and it was just very successful.” The conference was also a great time to learn more about lumpahone conferences and also begin thinking about student exchanges.

Ms. Prokhorenko thinks that attending the conferences today is as important as ever because “you need them to stay connected with what is going on around the world; I love attending the conferences, and as a teacher I have so much to learn from them, and to give back to my school when I return.”

C. Support from Administration

Nina Ulorna adds that one of the great strengths of the program, especially of her personal observation of School 1129 was the fact that Ms. Shushkovskaya and Ms. Prokhorenko have been so supportive of the project from the very beginning: “Much of iEARN depends on the school administration,” Nina explains, “its either a way of life or a casual engagement that is susceptible to end at any time.”

D. Technology

Both Olga and Alla also believe the new forms of communication introduced to the school were unparalleled. Alla adds:

For that period of time, it was the most important thing to be able to have these new types of technologies; it was fantastic and it was interesting. The government was unable to support (schools) from an engineering perspective, so iEARN was able to be a great technical partner. Also, politically, it was period of time when the USSR and the USA were having a great transition . . . we were the first schools when Gorbachev tried to change something and we were at the right place at the right time. (Interview Alla Shushkovskaya, 1/18/2007)

Olga Prokhorenko also explains that letter-writing was not an effective medium for learning more about students from other the USA, let alone other countries:

When heard the modem noise for the first time and saw that we made contact, there was all this applause of excitement. Writing letters is a process that just became worse over time. It’s not as interesting – boring – and unreliable. There is also no understanding about cultures either. I am an American student so I talk about the US. I am a Russian student so I talk about Russia – but the telecommunications project creates a context. Peter Copen gave us a chance to use telecommunications, which was only an idea in education and then projects started as a necessity to build upon the relationships. (Interview Olga Prokhorenko, 1/18/2007).

Russian teachers then learned that they could have all sorts of projects, whether it is within the classroom, in the district, in another country, or many countries. As Nina Ulorna confirms, “it was a paradigm shift in education to Russia.”

E. Friendship Developed amongst Students

During a roundtable with three male students, Seva, Dima, Shamil, who currently participate in iEARN projects today as well as student exchanges, note that one of the strengths of the programs has been the ability to make so many new friends. Seva notes that modern technology makes this easier: “I can use the computer and chat for hours, and email with so many students, from the United States, Australia, and play online games, its so much fun.” Clearly, the ease of communication with today’s technology is a positive complement to iEARN based projects. It has also facilitated other programs and activities that promote global citizenry among students.

Challenges

A. Difficulty in Implementation of Program

Nina Ulorna mentions that in her research she had seen that it was not quite easy for the teachers to apply lessons at first, and Olga and Alla agree. “We didn’t know what telecommunications was, but we knew how to do a project. The idea of a telecommunications project together was such a strange and novel idea,” Nina exclaims.

As a result, many of the challenges were technical. In fact, because of some technical problems, including lack of response and not as much support in maintaining the computers, school 1129 did not participate in iEARN between the years of 1996-2002. Many teachers during the roundtable express the difficulty in configuring modems as a challenge to the project as well. Teachers also had to learn to become more comfortable using the technology that there students were just learning for the first time.

B. Lack of Exposure to the Technology

The students can not recall too many challenges, other than the fact that they were not as exposed to technology as much as perhaps it was intended. “My involvement was fairly project-based,” Olga Tataianova admits, “I don’t think I even got to see the technology.” The students agree that not everyone in the school was exposed to iEARN, suggesting that one of the challenges was the difficulty in getting the entire school involved. This may have been due to the fact that there was not enough resources; thus, only some students were able to reap the benefits, depending on

whether or not their teacher was chosen to become involved or that a teacher took the initiative to become involved on their own.

Author's Comments

When speaking with the students of School 1129 who originally were a part of NYS-MSTP, it is evident the enthusiasm and the respect they have for the program and how much they enjoy sharing their stories. They convey a sense of sadness and disappointment when they think of friendships that continued after they graduated high school with their American counterparts, but then eventually faded with time.

What is so striking is the students' emphasis on the world's problems, and how they suggest iEARN's role in equipping students with the tools to promote peace and unity. Denis Volkov words particularly rings true: "Technology may have lost its essential purpose as it did when it was first introduced in the project, but our borders have not – as there are so many painful problems we face today, we need to ensure that the next generation of children will be able to do something about them" (Interview Denis Volkov, 1/18/2007).

We also had a chance during a presentation at School 1129 to hear students today share their experiences about iEARN. These students share the sentiment that many iEARN experiences are about making new friends or helping them to do well in classes. They enjoy the social quality of the experience – the ability to try new things and travel. However, it is easy to see the other important connections to other aspects of their lives right before our eyes: public speaking skills, creating Power Point Presentations, and becoming socially responsible.

Also, perhaps inspired as a result of our attendance to School 1129, Olga Prokhorenko did not merely bring together the teachers who participated in the project for the sake of our study, but also took the opportunity to inspire teachers to get involved in the iEARN-Russia program again. It was moving to see students share their stories to the teachers who once were a part of iEARN, but now no longer participate, while Olga Prokhorenko demonstrated the ease of using the iEARN website to learn about projects and how to create partnerships. The goal as she articulated was to "demonstrate the importance of continuing their country collaboration."

School 429 (Moscow)

Context

School 429 is located in the northwest section of the third ring of Moscow, Russia. The area around the school is very urban, with the city center only 20 minutes away by car. The school is quite large compared to other Russian schools, comprising of over 1000 students. It is homogeneous, comprised of middle-class white Russian orthodox children with an even ratio of boys to girls. The same characteristics apply to the staff of the school.

The school is striking among the Russian education landscape: large and new, having been rebuilt in 2003. It is a three-storied building with a state-of-the-art kitchen, theater, library, gym, dance, and computer facilities. Students have the opportunity to choose from a wide variety of courses outside the traditional Russian curriculum including sewing, cooking, computer science, dance, drama, and several others. The school is designed as an open space with many lounges available for students, which is useful because the school sponsors many after-school programs, including sports and the arts.

One of the most interesting programs in the school is a student-run television club. Student correspondents report the morning news over the loud speaker, and also create a complementary newspaper so that kids are aware of what is going on in the school and in the community. This newspaper is very celebratory of the students and in English, the heading of the newspaper is “Be Careful, It’s Cool!” The newsletter contains winners in contests and different compositions of students’ work that teachers found exemplary.

The school has both an English and German language program. Students choose which language they would like to pursue in the early forms, and then follow that curriculum for the rest of their time in school. There are three English teachers, and three German teachers, though one German teacher was an English teacher at the time of the original NYS-MSTP.

Marc Bubman has been the principal of School 429 for 20 years, and was involved in the NY-MSTP from the outset. Tamara Iranovskaya was the coordinating Russia language teacher at School 429, and still currently teaches Russian at the school. Olga Karp was a teacher at school

1509 during the original project in 1988 and is currently the Assistant Principal at the Moscow International Gymnasium.

NYS-MSTP Experience

A. Exchange Program

School 429 partnered with School 1509, now renamed the Moscow International Gymnasium, during their experience with the project. They began working together in 1989 with the lumaphone projects. The schools exchanged students with Tamarack High School in Troy New York in 1991. The partner teacher was Mr. Bolton, from Troy. First students from Schools 429 and 1509 traveled to Troy, followed by a visit from the American students six months later.

This experience was very “unusual” as the principal described, “because it was the end of the Cold War, and at that time very few Russians could travel internationally . . . it was the first time that young people from other countries were meeting Russian young people face to face” (Interview Mark Bubman, 1/19/2007). Mark Bubman credits the founders of the NYS-MSTP for “allowing us to have the opportunity to enter the project; it was the beginning for us to live now in the open world, and it was something I will never forget.”

A.1. Student’s Experience

Mikhail was one of the first students to participate in the project, and was part of the exchanges in 1991. He enjoyed the project a great deal and gained a lot of experience from it. He spent between 3 weeks to a month in the U.S. during his visit and traveled to New York, Boston, and Washington D.C.

Mikhail felt that he felt a “sense of freedom” in the U.S. he had never felt in the former U.S.S.R. (Interview Mikhail, 1/19/2007). He found it shocking that the students sat on the floor. He also noted an amusing insight that in Russia “when you skipped a class you would go to the local bakery, for a cake, and in the U.S, the kids would go to the forest, and just hang out.”

He said the discipline was much stricter in Russia, and that the students in the USA were more laid back, probably as a result. He also said that in the U.S. he was popular because he would do

the students math homework, and when he returned to Russia he was popular because everyone wanted to know that the United States was like. “It was so special to have traveled to the United States. I bought a pair of Levi’s jeans that all my friends were jealous of. At that time in Russia there were so many things that you couldn’t buy that we were able to get in the U.S.” (Interview Mikhail, 1/19/2007).

School 1509 was renamed the Moscow International Gymnasium in 2000. They were accredited by the E.U. Council of schools, and work closely with schools from the U.S. and U.K. In fact, the school continues to hold exchanges with Tamarack High School in Troy. Every year for two weeks in October the Russian students travel to New York, and in April the U.S. students come to Moscow. The school also sends students to a special conference with the United Nations school in New York City.

B. Video

During the exchange of American students to Russia in 1991 the group created a video to share. In this video, the Russian students performed a traditional Russian dance in traditional dress for the American students. The students then practiced both their English and Russian through a series of short exchanges. The students of both nations wrote the dialogue collaboratively. Each school then took a copy of the tape to share with their schools. “I remember the students took great initiative in the video project. Though some were embarrassed to perform, they all took part in singing, dancing, and writing the project.” (Interview Tamara Iranovskaya, 1/19/2007).

Results

A. Change in Education to Reflect Global Participation

The principal Mark Bubman could not stop commending his school’s participation as the reasons why the school has taken a more global outlook within education. He notes that the involvement spawned many international programs in Russia, and in some way, is partly responsible for the emphasis on student exchanges throughout Europe, including France, Spain, Poland, and Britain, to name a few. Diana Gasparyan, (Interview, 1/19/2007) an English teacher at the school, agrees:

I did not participate in the program, but I am familiar with its message. Teachers here care about the entire child and their development. We are a very special school, that challenges our students and allow them to do almost anything academically. We have students who play chess, or who perform the arts. We want our students to be cultural and proud, and we want them to have everything they need to do well.

B. Increase Use of Technology

The school is distinctively passionate about using technology in the classroom. It is not uncommon for many classrooms to have eight to ten computers, for example. “It is very important for our students to learn how to use technology in a way that can better their education. It is important for them to use the computer to enhance their studies, not merely for enjoyment,” explains Mr. Bubman (Interview, 1/19/2007).

Effects on Career

Today Mikhail works in the financial markets in Information Technology. He says he remembers his experience vividly, and the teachers in his school at time helped him along the way. He felt that the sense of freedom he felt in the United States prepared him to work harder for his future after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and that participating in the NYS-MSTP also encourages him to advocate for his students at the school, so that they receive a more global education.

Strengths

School 429 felt very privileged to be chosen, and that the greatest strength of the program has been the lasting impact it has had on fostering the international environment in the school today. They were especially happy with their partnership with Troy, because several of the Russian language teachers spoke Russian very well. School 1509 felt that the relationship with Troy was very smooth and felt fortunate they were still able to hold exchanges. They credit the importance of the experience as creating these long-term friendships they would not otherwise have had. They also believe that the project aided in English language development in the school as well.

Challenges

A. Poor Integration of Technology in Curriculum

Challenges to the actual project seemed to be minimal because 429 focused mostly on physical exchanges and not on telecommunications projects. The teachers expressed a desire to continue

to work with iEARN, but after the initial exchanges did not know that the program had transitioned from the NYS-MSTP to iEARN. The lack of clarity while participating in the program prompted frustrations, which led to the school no longer participating in iEARN today.

B. Language Challenges

Currently, only one teacher who originally participated in the project is still teaching at School 429, Tamara Iranovskaya. The school no longer works with iEARN. However, the school itself currently facilitates exchanges with the UK, Germany, France, and Poland. They credit these continuing international learning experiences to the NY-MSTP project. Tamara was a Russian Language teacher, and did not know much English during the process, as she was only involved in the first few years of the exchanges. “I remember the American students spoke such good Russian, many of them had great accents that you could hardly tell they were American.” (Interview Tamara Iranovskaya, 1/19/2007).

Author's Notes

The teachers and principal of 429 were very proud of their school, and took every opportunity to show how wonderful their students were. The school was the newest of the schools that the team visited while in Russia, and offered the most opportunities for its students. Though the school no longer participates in iEARN, it continues to participate in international activities. Recently, for example, the English teacher took a group of 25 students to London.

The apparent modernizations in the school are a testament to the impact the NYS-MSTP had on the administrators of the school indeed. Principal Mark Bubman admits that the introduction of the NYS-MSTP demonstrated to him “the many important things that are necessary for the education of our children.” There is attention to every aspect of the child’s growth, as the school fosters numerous opportunities for the students to further develop their interests, even outside of academic pursuits. It is easy to see, navigating the school hallways, the impetus the NYS-MSTP had on this school.

School 429 and the Moscow International Gymnasium continue to work together presently, and believe that the bond they have between other schools and countries inspires new directions in education. Olga Karp states, “The Moscow International Gymnasium international projects and relationship with many countries of the world are flourishing and all this great work began thanks to the e-mail projects Peter Copen and his Educational Fund. We are grateful to him for this wonderful initiative.” (Interview Olga Karp, 1/19/2007).

Epigraph School (St. Petersburg)

Note: The Epigraph School was not one of the original schools involved in the NYS-MSTP. Epigraph only joined iEARN in the past 10 years. However, the school is a shining example of how iEARN is working Russia today, and the data that was gathered from the school was relevant to the project as it is here to share more information about the lasting effect of the original project on Russia and its educational system

Context

The Epigraph School is housed in a cute and intimate building, nestled ten minutes outside of St. Petersburg suburbs. A painted symbol of a gold fish adorns the exterior of the school building, a symbol that represents “the possibility of many wishes coming true.”

Epigraph is a small private school, which started off as a public school when created in 1994, and houses less than fifty children, with less than ten students per each grade. The school offers a variety of subjects from mathematics to geography, to English and Chemistry. Teaching English is a priority in the school, and the children engage in English-speaking exercises as early as first grade. The school is homogeneous as each student is white and Russian Orthodox. There is a fairly even split of both girls and boys at the school as well. While there are twenty teachers in the school, half of them are part-time teachers – many of which are furthering their studies at nearby universities.

In Russia today, it is mandatory to complete up to grade nine, before a student receives his or her first diploma. After a student graduates from the 11th form, they will receive a second diploma,

which will allow them to be eligible to apply to other universities. Traditionally, most of the students in the Epigraph School will reach 11th grade and then apply to other universities.

The school principal, Elena Lyalagina, has a distinctive office that is colorful, with floral arrangements decoratively bringing to life the modest space. There are spray-painted flowers of blue and gold on the bookcase, which contains all sorts of children's books and educational tools; the neatness and vitality of the space provides an impression of professionalism as it does approachability and comfort. A coffee cup with the words "good morning" in many languages is placed next to a magazine, where she appears on the cover.

The school has a variety of after-school programs and it is typical to see a child stay at school until 8 pm: students can eat meals, complete their homework or participate in a wide array of activities, including English club, Drama, Computer Club or Publishing, to name a few. The publishing club is an extension of their participation in iEARN, which allows them to create newspapers, literary magazines, and flyers. A beautiful set of water-colored postcards of favorite places that the students like to visit in St. Petersburg are placed on the walls near the publishing room space. These images reappear on the bulletin boards in the close quarters of the hallways of the school as well.

Technology has also recently become a priority for the school. Students are encouraged to use technology in different ways. For example, one or more students are encouraged to make public presentations to the entire school during their lunch time at least once during the semester. They are encouraged to use PowerPoint technology to create their presentation and it is expected that video capability will also be used soon. There has been a Rotary program to obtain new computers in the school as currently there technology space only includes 10 working computers that are old and are equipped with basic software tools. It is expected that it will take two years to get the school new computers.

iEARN Experience

The Epigraph school learned about iEARN through an accidental internet search online looking for ways to expand cultural projects at the school. An email to iEARN led to contact with

iEARN-Russia. The Epigraph partner schools include Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Japan. One of the most distinctive projects that they have participated in is the “Teddy Bear Exchange.” The project consists of exchanging stuffed animals which are representative of the host country, i.e. Australia uses a koala bear, with partner countries.

They also participate in a Christmas card exchange with their partner schools as well; the goal is to convey the message of “see how big the world really is,” by recognizing that countries all around the world celebrate Christmas a bit differently.

Alexandra Lyalagina and Tatyana Gdalina, two teachers at the school, along with Elena Lyalagina, the principal of the school, explain how important it is for the projects to be diversified. “When you are catering to students of all ages you can not merely do projects with technology,” explains Elena. “Email is of course faster and more efficient, but the young ones need to be able to touch something (Interview Elena Lyalagina, January 16, 2007).”

Consequently, one of the most successful projects that the Epigraph school has been involved includes the well-known collaboration “From Russia to Japan, with Love,” because of its emphasis on hands-on applications. Eight participating countries celebrated a week of Japan culture. Activities include sushi making, calligraphy, creating haikus, and creating traditional Japanese garments. The week garnered media attention in St. Petersburg and the Epigraph school was even able to have a Japanese ambassador attend the weeklong festivities to share insights about how the Japanese live their daily lives. Additionally, contributing to the project’s success, was the opportunity for Sasha and Elena Lyalagina, mother and daughter, to attend an iEARN conference in Japan in 2003, where they had the chance to showcase what an impact the week of Japanese culture had on their students.

It is so nice to see children getting excited about learning a new culture. They see how they live, eat, and they want to become friends with the children. There is a deep sense among the Epigraph teachers that these types of programs bridge relationships and challenge the children to step out of their comfort zones. At first, they may laugh ‘ha, ha, I can’t eat that well with chopsticks,’ but then can you can see they take the activities very seriously, almost with a sense of respect. (Interview Sasha Lyalagina, 1/16/2007).

Some of the pictures that capture the project contain inspiring messages, such as “Let’s create a light for all generations,” and “let’s remove the border from our hearts.” These images can also be found proudly in Elena’s office.

Results

When asked if the students are learning from these projects, Elena gives a huge smile and lets out a big “Yes.” “The kids are learning and having fun, and sometimes I do not think they even know how educational it is what they are doing; in that way, it is a very nice tool to get children involved in different activities” (Interview, 1/16/2007). She acknowledges that while iEARN is a part of the equation, iEARN cannot be the only program used to explore cultural diversity. She explains the difficulty for a child to understand that there are boundaries placed throughout the world and that connecting with others is not always easy. Participating in iEARN led to the school’s participation in other programs such as the Rotary Youth Exchange program, which encourages children at a young age to travel and live with other cultures to further open their minds, as well as inspire a more focused vision for the school. “Education, Development, and Health” are our schools priorities,” she explains. “We are interested in the entire child,” and iEARN provides us with projects that acknowledges the importance of that idea (Interview, 1/16/2007).

Effects on Career

Elena Lyalagina’s career has progressed because of her participation with iEARN. She was on the cover of a Russian educator’s magazine. She explains that she was included in the magazine based on nominations she is not familiar with, but her work towards the promotion of global citizenry among her students is a contributing factor to her recognition.

During a round table with seven teachers from the Epigraph School, including Alexandra Lyalagina, the teachers echo a similar sentiment. “Many of us are young teachers here, still in university,” Alexandra explains, “but our participation in iEARN complements our studies and many of us think beyond living in Russia.” Alexandra is actually interested in applying to New York University, as she would like to pursue a business degree. She believes that living in New

York will also greatly contribute to her professional development and hopes to apply her experiences to the improvement of her country as well.

Strengths

A. Travel

Both Alexandra and Elena Lyalagina admit that travel has been the significant factor in her professional development, not to mention one of the few opportunities for students and teachers to practice their English or another language. “I have been to three conferences – Moscow, Japan, and Slovakia – and they are my favorite part of the iEARN program,” Elena confesses (Interview, 1/16/2007). The principal makes the opportunity a family affair and uses the Epigraph school bus as a way to bring other students from the school to attend the conference at a much cheaper price.

“The conference gives you a desire to work on the projects. You see what other students are doing and you get excited,” Alexandra Lyalagina recalls. She remembers how one student during an iEARN conference experienced a change in his attitude towards Germany: “This one boy was very much in dislike towards Germany, because of soccer, and said ‘I hate Germany, I do not like the food, Germany is bad,’ but then he sees some of the projects and meets some of the German students at a conference, and he is all like ‘I love Germany, and all he can talk about is Germany’” (Interview Alexandra Lyalagina, 1/16/2007).

B. Ease of Project Participation

The ease of coordinating projects with other schools is another strength of the program. They note that Lisa Jobson’s, Assistant Director of iEARN-USA, creation and monitoring of the forums has been pivotal in this process, and that iEARN is “very communicative” about opportunities that are available to participating schools. The website itself is a valuable tool as well. One teacher echoes that simplicity for when she learned that March 2nd was kite day, she simply had to look through the iEARN website to find a school to participate in a kite project.

C. Strength of Projects

In the project, “A City by the Sea,” Ludmila Pavlova’s first objectives was to teach the students about symbols of cities near the sea, as well as incorporate lessons about professions that take place near the sea too (Interview Ludmilla Pavlova, 1/16/2007). The children incorporated these famous symbols into paintings. According to Ludmilla Pavlova, several of her students have pursued academic tracks where they will specialize in learning more about historical cities near the sea. Such a response has prompted her to replicate the lesson year after year.

Challenges

A. Support from Administration

On January 10, 2007, St. Petersburg was experiencing terrible flooding, which promoted the importance of the project all over again. “Because of these floods, we will again discuss the problems of living so close to the sea, and how it affects those inhabitants of the area when such a tragedy occurs,” Ludmila confirms (Interview Ludmilla Pavlova, January 16, 2007). Even though this project has been successful in School 544, there has been no momentum to further iEARN participation at the public school. The fact is the teachers here “did the project alone,” and feel that the administration “is not really interested in supporting us or any of the teachers further.”

Because of this lack of support, their partner school in Amsterdam, Holland has become the coordinator of the project, and participation in the project is no longer iEARN driven as it is an annual lesson by a few geography teachers. Support is needed to ensure that there is a principal and enthusiastic administration in place to guarantee that the programs run smoothly. Such support ensures that the iEARN vision is pervasive in the school, rather than focusing on a sole project or concept that may come and then go.

B. Project Difficulty

In addition, iEARN projects do not always run smoothly. “We tend to value the ones that we coordinate the most,” explains Alexandra. “Yes, it’s because this project is ours, and it means something to us, but also because we have more control of how the project turns out and how responsible we can be towards our partner country (Interview, 1/16/2007).”

C. Expense of Attending Conferences

The iEARN conferences are considered to be one of the most valuable tools to the teachers in the Epigraph school, and are sometimes the only opportunities to speak English or practice another language, but are “so expensive,” is the most burdensome. The travel expenses and accommodations are too much and there is no support from iEARN Russia to subsidize the cost as well. As a result, the Epigraph school has not participated in any iEARN conferences in the last two years.

Author's Comments

Having the opportunity to visit both the Epigraph school and School 544 was an essential aspect of our analysis. Epigraph serves as a great model of iEARN participation today, while school 544 merely participated in one project – “The Cities Near the Sea”. It was striking to see the exuberance of the Epigraph school with plant life, bulletin boards, pictures adorning the entire building, while School 544 gave the impression of a typical Russian school that permeated with simplicity, professionalism, and adherence to policies and procedures. Evident was School 544's bleak hallways, with minimal student recognition or project examples on the walls compared to the many iEARN project examples that could be found at every corner of the Epigraph school. Such a comparison suggests that participation in iEARN may have an effect on both school and classroom atmosphere, as well as general attitudes towards learning and recognition.

CHAPTER SEVEN: ANALYSIS

New York Teachers and New York Students

Results

A. Developed Technological Skills

The majority of the teachers taught in an affluent, suburban setting, where all had access to a computer lab at school, although did not have computers in their classrooms. By participating and using the innovative technologies on a regular basis, students and teachers were able to develop new skills through continual practice.

B. Increased Participation in Global Community/ Awareness of Other

The direct communication with persons of different cultures heightened both students and teachers awareness of global issues and allowed students to become directly involved with addressing global concerns. Students developed increased interest in world events. Students report development of empathy towards others. They became aware of global concerns and needs through the telecommunication interaction.

C. Curriculum Adoption of Technology and Cultural Learning

Teachers integrated the use of technological innovations into their classroom curriculum and ensured that the use of the technology will increase access to global knowledge through interactions. Teachers saw themselves as the facilitators of social change, while students viewed themselves as feeling empowerment to make social changes. The classroom environment became a place where social, cultural and political issues became an integral part of learning.

Effects on Career

Teachers report professional development skills in curriculum building and technological skills by integrating technology and the classroom. Language teachers learned an effective method of teaching the language curriculum. All three students interviewed work within an international field. They accredit their exposure to foreign cultures through their NYS-MSTP experience as a catalyst to their foray in the field. Teamwork, critical thinking and cultural sensitivity were developed by the students in engaging in the NYS-MSTP, and applied in their current positions.

Strengths

A. High Receptivity to Innovation

School administration advocated the program and provided support. Participation in the program increased computers for teachers and students in the program. Teachers chosen to be involved were receptive towards learning how to use email and lumaphones. Students expressed high levels of enthusiasm towards using telecommunications and voluntarily spent out-of-school time participating.

B. Continued Relationships

Nearly all teachers and all students report staying in touch with other participants of the program. The positive experience of contributing to the global community created attachments for teachers and students though the development of empathy towards the other, which remains years after participation in the program ended.

C. Exchange Program

Having adequate financial resources to send both teachers and students on exchange trips enhanced the NYS-MSTP experience. The physical exchanges completed the cultural understanding process, as those involved in the exchanges were more receptive towards continuing the relationship.

Challenges

A. Infrastructural Issues with Partner Schools

All teachers and students report that telecommunications facilities were unstable with partner schools, hence implementing telecommunications were difficult because the necessary infrastructure was not in place with the partnering schools due to political interruptions, time differences and, for a few teachers and students, language barriers.

B. Intensive Need of Outside of Class Time

Technological reforms demand different resources and present more challenges for teachers. Teachers had to develop technological skills outside of classroom time and wished more

classroom time would have been considered to implement changes. Time differences between partner schools added to the need for outside time to telecommunicate.

C. Unclear Role and Guidelines

Clarity was not given to teachers on proper standards for telecommunications exchanges. Teachers felt that they received little to no guidance on implementing the project. This added to frustrations experienced by teachers and cited as one of the reasons they stopped participating in the NYS-MSTP.

Russian Teachers and Russian Students

Results

A. Developed Technological Skills

Before their participation in this project, the Russian teachers had little to no experience with technology such as computers, or e-mail. For Russia, the technology was very advanced for its time. Many of them credit their participation with introducing their schools to the importance of technology in education. Alla Shushkovskaya said that, “When Peter Copen started with 10 computers in Russia he started the telecommunications process for Russian education.” (Interview Alla Shushkovskaya, 1/18/2007)

B. Increased Participation in Global Community/ Awareness of Other

Being able to interact and communicate with American students and teachers had a significant impact on Russian teachers and students. Many of those interviewed stressed that communicating was the most important aspect of the work they did because during that period it was not easy to communicate with foreign countries. For students it gave them a chance to see what the people they had heard so much about were really like. It gave them a glimpse of what living under a democracy was like, and it made them more globally aware of what was going on in the world. For teachers, it was important because it gave them a chance to see the principles of education in America. Moreover, it introduced the project model of education to the Russian education system.

C. Curriculum Adoption of Technology and Cultural Learning

Nina Ulorna states that, “Before this there were NO school projects, this project was the first and after, inspired others and is now widespread.” (Interview Nina Ulorna, January 18, 2007) All the schools that participated in NYS-MSTP still have international programs, and emphasize the exchange of global ideas. All the schools also have a focus on technology, each with computers and work in video conferencing. Students who participated in the project, and students today both see themselves as global citizens and emphasized that having exchanges with international students is an opportunity to learn more and express your own culture.

Effects on Career

Many teachers interviewed still teach, and see that their careers were enhanced by participation in the program. Many teachers have traveled since their participation in the project, and improved their English speaking skills. Several teachers also moved up in the education to administrative levels. Students interviewed had all entered the workforce, and are successful in their occupations.

Strengths

A. Exchange Programs

All the students and teachers say that the chance to travel to the other countries and to interact with students and teachers face to face was the greatest strength of the program. It enabled them to experience another culture first-hand, and to understand what the world was like in a new place. It also gave them perspective on what was going on inside Russia, and the opportunity to see the United States for themselves, without the propaganda so common in this time.

B. Projects

The projects were also important to the teachers and students. It gave them a chance to work on subjects that were outside the Soviet mandated curriculum. For School 1129, they were able to work with several countries to draft an international law that they proposed before the International Court in The Hague. These projects inspired many teachers and students to continue to work with the issues even after the projects were finished. Furthermore, these projects are still used by the teachers that originally participated in the NYS-MSTP in their classrooms today.

Challenges

A. Technology

Even though the project used some of the most advanced technology of the time, it was still difficult and cumbersome to use. First, there were the problems with configuring the modems. For many schools, they would need to write their emails at the school, save them to a disc, and then one student would have to go to an off-site location to send the emails to their partners. Without experience in using telecommunications technology, the learning process was even slower.

B. Transition

After participation in the original NYS-MSTP, many schools stopped working with iEARN. Several teachers expressed that after the exchanges with their partner schools, little was communicated about how to continue the project. With the fall of the Soviet Union, the educational curriculum began to change, and many expressed that it was the perfect time to continue working on international projects, however, instead of working with iEARN, they had to go out and find other organizations with which to work.

New York Students and Russian & Chinese Students

Results

A. Exposure to Different Educational Systems

One of the most significant results of the NYS-MSTP is the exposure to another way of life for young people. In a time when there was a great deal of fear of the “other” in the waning days of the Cold War. The exposure to a different education system was eye-opening for all students. Russian and Chinese students reported strong emotions to seeing the relaxed, informal classrooms and behaviors in New York; awe of the freedoms enjoyed by the Americans to express themselves and relax in their classrooms by sitting on the floor during a group discussion. Students in Russia noted the differences in classroom management and discipline, which were more relaxed in New York.

B. Project-Based Curriculum

Russian and Chinese students noted that the project-based curriculum promoted in the NYS-MSTP was entirely foreign for them, and very different from what they did in school. Those students were eager to engage in the projects, which were deemed to have real-world value. They didn't see the projects as just assignments, but as a way to make a contribution to the world.

Effects on Career

Most of the project participants found that the option to practice Russian or English gave them a significant edge upon entering the business world. Beyond simple language skills, exposure to a world outside their school set them ahead of their college classmates. It helped to set the stage for a more integrated, global understanding. Many Russian students are working in international arenas or hold prominent positions within Russian business circles, and New York has a former participant working in Russia, as a coordinator of undergraduate exchange programs.

Strengths

The travel exchanges for all of the students were the highlight of the NYS-MSTP experience. All students interviewed spoke at length about their visits to other countries, and what it was like to live (for a short period of time) in a culture so different from their own. Russian students spoke about becoming more popular at home as a result of their exposure to America. Evidence of the relationships founded during the exchanges is found in the fact that there are many former students still in contact with their host families.

Challenges

A significant challenge for the students was finding the time to engage in real-time lumaphone exchanges with their counterparts. Because of the time differences between Moscow and Beijing, and New York, students were required to stay at their schools very late, or come in early in the morning. However, given that the lumaphone experience was so important and valued by the students, the challenge of getting to their schools outside of the regular hours was one that they would accept.

Some Russian students also noted that only their class was able to participate in the project, and the entire school was not involved. However, the students were very proud to be selected for the project. This contrasts to the project design in New York, where participation in the project was generally offered as an option for the Russian language students, and students were not selected by teachers and administrators.

NYS-MSTP Moscow and current iEARN-Russia Program

Results

There is certainly a sense that the NYS-MSTP had a significant historical impact on the teachers and students of Russia. This impact can be felt today among iEARN-Russia participants, though maybe not as tangibly within the students quite yet. The NYS-MSTP students have nostalgia and the importance of history behind them, which certainly makes the program feel more special. However, the students of Russia today are eager to participate in projects and learn about other aspects of the world, without apprehension.

Teachers deserve the acknowledgement for the results of these two impacts, because each participating teacher has shared an enthusiasm and commitment to encouraging their children to balance Russian pride as well as having a well-balanced global outlook. In this way, one can safely assume that both the role of NYS-MSTP and iEARN-Russia today have contributed to the country's emphasis on reforming education, and modeling education similar to western education. As Bolotov and Spiro (1995) note, "reflective teaching" takes time as it "must eventually come naturally and automatically" for the teachers. It is apparent that this process is becoming more and more natural for Russian teachers as the critical thinking and project-based model to education is being incorporated into their pedagogy.

Effects on Career

According to survey and interview analysis, teachers and students have either directly moved up in their position as a result of participating in NYS-MSTP and/or iEARN-Russia, or have gained valuable skills that have prepared them for increased leadership in the educational sector.

Many teachers and students note first how the program was pivotal in learning English and helping them to apply their English learning in an academic setting. The field study itself in Russia, and the enthusiasm generated by participants to practice their English is a testament to how such opportunities can be valuable learning experiences. Learning English has made both teachers and students well-rounded, and this too had aided in their professional development.

Moreover, NYS-MSTP corresponded directly with the fall of the Soviet Union, and many great changes for its people. Many students felt that this experience gave them an upper-hand to other students who did not have interactions with Americans. It gave them an opportunity to see what life was beyond communism, and gave them drive and experience to excel.

When iEARN-Russia was no longer operating as an official center, it took the leadership and educational experience of Olga Prokhorenko and Nina Koptyug, to become the new regional coordinators of iEARN Russia, and keep the program afloat as only two women in operation. Their experience as teachers during their iEARN participation however, equipped them with the tools necessary to lead the program. The fact that they believe in the importance of this type of work is evident.

Strengths

Many different aspects of the program have affected students and teachers in different ways. Student exchanges, both during the NYS-MSTP and iEARN today, are often referred to as the best part of the iEARN experience. Conferences too are indicated as one of the strengths of the program as well. These activities have in common: the ability to meet new people, practice English, share experiences, and learn new things. These types of experiences challenge the individual on many levels, and thus have the greatest emotional and professional impact. It further suggests that as close as technology can come to creating an image of a friend or a classroom before you, that the impact is not as strong as being able to meet new friends before your own eyes. It is these types of experiences that lend themselves to flashbulb memories and gripping anecdotes of memories that will last forever.

All the schools that participate in NYS-MSTP still have some type of international interaction program at their school. Students often still have the opportunity for exchanges with other countries. The teachers and principals interviewed credit the NYS-MSTP for allowing a state of mind where international cooperation is important in the classroom.

Challenges

During the NYS-MSTP there was certainly the initial challenge of ‘what does a relationship look like between the students and teachers of two countries.’ Many of the challenges that were experienced during the NYS-MSTP project were technical, for the most part, because telecommunications was an innovative tool to promote and sustain a relationship. According to interviews and the surveys, configuring modems and getting used to the new technology took practice and time. Even with these challenges, the ease of instant communication and the ability to see the relationships grow before one’s eyes were assets to the program’s success. In that regard, the challenges of the NYS-MSTP were valuable tools, demonstrating the ease in which student exchanges and projects can play a role in one’s academic career.

As with many life-changing experiences, it is not always easy to follow up with the new friends one may meet over time. Indeed, there were several examples of schools or students keeping in touch with their partner school or friend. For many, however, it is a challenge to continue this relationship over time, especially during the early years of the program. Such a challenge demonstrates the need for an active database of students and teachers who participate in the program, so that there is a greater potential to maintain relationships over the long haul.

There is certainly an irony to the role politics has played as a challenge to the iEARN-Russia program. Where politics once prompted the importance of building a relationship between the United States and Russia, there are at present a whole host of issues that threatens this relationship. Losing a key leadership figure in the iEARN-Russia Centre, Victor Minakhin, as well as lack of governmental support in addition to President Putin’s policies that do not look so favorably towards international NGO influence, the status of iEARN-Russia sustainability is in question.

Furthermore, many of the schools were involved in a transition from NYS-MSTP to the iEARN model in 1994. The schools often kept in contact with their partner schools, but not with iEARN as an overarching organization. It was only through coincidence that School 1129 became involved with iEARN again in 2001. However, it is important to note that since that time they have actively participated in iEARN projects during the past six years.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS

Results

The varied and engaging collaborative projects introduced a new way of teaching and learning to the participants of the NYS-MSTP. The global reach of the project demonstrated how individuals from formerly warring nations could come and work together on issues that affect the world. Learning about other regions of the world has become a standard part of curriculums in all aspects of academic life throughout the schools in this study.

The NYS-MSTP was a groundbreaking project in linking schools, and more importantly, students from hostile nations together with each other. Timmy Karro, a host of NYS-MSTP exchange students in Northport, NY recounted: “[We] felt especially sensitive to the having students at Northport realize that there is more to life than little nice Northport with our big homes and white faces. Mitchell felt that being part of this project helped, in our little way, spread the message of global citizenshipness.”

Academic Support

One teacher said that participation in the project made the teacher take a more active role in shaping the school district’s approach to international education: “...after the project back in 1992 I began working with the local Board of Education and was an advocate for international education, cultural months and activities, and language instruction.” The program analysis found, on more than one occasion, the sentiment expressed in one anonymous survey: “This was a very special project to me because it reminded me of what I always wanted to do with international education, but just needed the support. I believe my students have benefited greatly; I know that I have.”

Project-Based Teaching

The NYS-MSTP provided new teaching methods and opportunities available for the first time for teachers in Moscow. Nataliy Orlova became acquainted with project-based teaching methods: “I use the experiences in my lessons. The projects provide interesting examples for students at the lessons, and after school. It has made the course work stimulating and it makes

me a better teacher.” Another Moscow teacher, Nina Koptyug, said: “I make project work a regular part of my school plan, and of our academic activities. Students learn to use the Internet and email as an instrument of gaining knowledge and experience—and not just as toy.”

Technology Support

In the late 1980s, in spite of the hurdles in learning an entirely new technology that was continually developing, the access to the systems and its possibilities generated excitement and interest in further exploration in the education systems. While technology itself was not a new teaching methodology, it provided the catalyst to reinvigorate teaching and learning. James O’Brien, who participated in the project with schools in Beijing, China said, “[I have] discussed with each class the role of technology and related insights gained from this experience.”

In many ways, the NYS-MSTP provided the support and inspiration for teachers to seek creativity within themselves, and apply more cutting-edge techniques to education. Even if the process was difficult at first for some, the results were immediate and something that many teachers felt needed to persist with or without the presence of NYS-MSTP in their lives.

Effects on Career

The NYS-MSTP was consistently regarded as one of the most valuable experiences in professional development for teachers. The opportunity to learn new technologies for communication and teaching shows how the NYS-MSTP was ahead of its time in the expansion of technology into the classroom. For the Russian teachers, learning and participating in project-based teaching was an entirely new way to think about education. With the exposure and collaboration with teachers from New York State, the participating teachers in Moscow learned a new methodology of education years before glasnost would allow it. An anonymous respondent said: “I utilize the case study approach in most of my learning. I allow my children to choose one country in the beginning of the semester, and throughout the year they learn new things about the country and share it with the class. My goal is that each student will one day visit that country on their own.”

For the participating students, many cite the NYS-MSTP as a seminal event in their early educational life. Large numbers of students used these experiences to guide their later education and career choices. Many of the participants continued to study Russian and English language, and now work in international fields where experience in living and working with other cultures is vital for success.

In today's globalized world, participation in the project gave those students an edge due to their early exposure to the English language, according to Olga Prokhorenko from Russia. "English became a professional language for so many students as a result of their participation. Some of the students decided to follow their education in the USA." New York teacher Audrey Maurer felt similarly: "Yes, my students were impacted. Several went on to study Russian and Russia Studies in college. Some went on to work in Russia, after graduation from college." Beyond selecting a course of study at university, Principal Alla Shuskovskaya felt that there was an even longer-term impact of NYS-MSTP participation: "For many of them, this project helped in choosing their future profession. Most of them use English and computers. And they still have good friends with their partners."

Strengths

At the end of the Cold War, fears of the "other" were not abating as quickly as the Soviet Union was opening. In initiating this project, Peter Copen sought to accelerate the process of learning about each other's culture in order to create mutual respect for the former enemies. It was of particular importance to reach the day's youth, to create a new generation of leaders that would not fear the former foes. In this respect, the NYS-MSTP was a resounding success. Students and teachers learned about each other's daily routines, and experienced meaningful and worthwhile collaborations on projects of which they could be proud.

Mark Bubman feels that the strengths of the project are just as important today as they were two decades ago: "The ability to improve our students' skills, communicate with other students of other countries and the desire to improve the quality of language and the life on the planet is something that continues to make this work important." James O'Brien from Somers, NY links participating in the China project to a broadening of his school district's curriculum: "...the

curriculum has evolved enormously! All classes in every subject area of our high school (and entire school district) are encouraged to incorporate a global perspective. The iEARN initiatives were way ahead of their times. Extremely enlightening.”

Students who participated in the telecommunications gained more interest in world politics and began to adopt different patterns of thinking. Students might not have been aware of the impact at the time, but it is clear that in retrospect, they can better understand the importance of real-life events, seeing its impact directly and realizing how much there was to gain from other people when boundaries begin to dissolve. As a former NYS-MSTP student, Denis Volkov, recalls: “We were brothers, when the Americans came over, and it was just about having a good time and realizing that all these controversies, the ‘me this’ and ‘you that’, or the ‘your country did this’, was just not as important as going out in the field [baseball field] and having a good time.”

Exchange Visits

The exchange visits meant so much to those who were able to participate, and the study performed by the MAGI Associates echo this similar finding. The New York State schools that participated were generally located in wealthy suburban communities, and the experience of living, for a few weeks, in an urban setting was very exciting. Learning about other ways of life contributed to the sense of being a global citizen for the students and teachers.

Halina Danchenko, a teacher from Rochester, NY feels that the entire project was an excellent teaching and learning experience, but places particular emphasis on the physical exchange component of the NYS-MSTP. “Lives of students were impacted from the total experience...in being able to communicate on personal and working levels...especially once exchanges began...our American students blossomed from the ability to study and work in Soviet/Union and Russia. Their experiences of living in families and attending schools were priceless. Many students continued with Russian studies on the college levels and made careers in the Russian field. I always marveled at how the students matured in one month’s time and how their self-esteem grew in leaps and bounds. Of course, their language development also had positive results.”

Friendships

Another outcome of the NYS-MSTP is the lasting friendships developed amongst administrators, teachers, students and host families involved. Many of the individuals involved with the physical exchanges, or hosting students/administrators during the exchanges still remain in contact today and even if they do not, participants experience a sadness of nostalgia of meaningful it would be to connect again to their friend – their “partner” – and express time and time again that such memories will never disappear as the friendships they have made have become integrated into the scrapbook of their lives.

Challenges

New Technology

The technology utilized for communication during the NYS-MSTP is now considered so rudimentary that it is hard to conceive how useful it was for collaboration in the late 1980s. The physical equipment was a challenge, as was addressing a half-day time difference with a partner school for John Forsberg. “The lumaphones were very difficult to use and often I had trouble trying to connect into China, due to their government problems. Time difference also added to the difficulty.”

For Russians teachers in particular, incorporating a new technology was very difficult and was often cited as the biggest challenge to having the NYS-MSTP get off the ground. Olga Prokhorenko recalls: “Between the modems and trying to work the new equipment, it was difficult in the beginning, and it was very hard for the teachers to learn how to use this technology . . . and to allow children to use this technology as a way to learn.” Such sentiments confirm why the Russian teachers may not have felt that telecommunications enabled teamwork skills among students as much as their American counterparts. “It just would take more time for this to come together,” Olga Prokhorenko recounts.

However, the tremendous pace of technological development has ensured that the difficulties faced by the teachers and students during the NYS-MSTP are not of concern for today’s schools. Government interference in the project also led to the early demise of the expanded program. In addition, the widespread acceptance of technology in the classroom results in more resources,

both in hardware and technical support from other users within the school, to further online collaborations between schools.

Limited Space

Students who participated in the NYS-MSTP noted that they were very lucky to be selected to join in the project. Limited resources often result in difficult decisions for administrators and teachers on who would be chosen to participate. Consequently, not all students had the opportunity to participate in the NYS-MSTP either. Given the overwhelming positive response to the project activities and experiences, there is hope that funding will be provided for all interested parties to join projects in the future. The fact that many students cited “popularity” as one of the benefits on being a part of the NYS-MSTP also indicates that many of their peers could recognize the importance of the work involved and how intriguing the work must have been.

Culture Shock

It is amusing how many of the challenges of the NYS-MSTP have also evolved into the project’s greatest strengths. For example, while the initial experience of the NYS-MSTP provided a culture shock that many of the participants felt they were not prepared for, the learning experience was vital and have greatly contributed to the impact of participants’ memories. Exposure to a different culture provided those involved with the proper tools to humanize and relate to those who were foreign. Social attitudes were altered and became modified as people developed empathetic relationships with their new friends.

This was indicative, for example, when Mr. Smith noticed that the negative name-calling of Russians and the other discriminations towards other foreigners subsided at his high school. It is also indicative when during a roundtable with current students Seva, Dima, Shamil, and Dima shares: “The great thing about all of these projects and trips is that I meet kids that I wish were going to my own school. Maybe they are interested in what I want to do, like be a really good soccer player . . . and then when bad things happen, like I don’t make the team, and they know, because maybe they didn’t make their team either.”

This source of empathy and fondness is truly the heart of the NYS-MSTP, a project that undoubtedly “inspired many schools, students, and teachers to promote understanding, goodwill, workmanship and fellowship at a crucial time when doors slowly began to open” as Halina Danchenko explains. It is the reason why teachers such as Tamara Ivaskaja continue to commit to the iEARN mission: “I have been a part of the program since the beginning and we are continuing to do projects now; this will always be important, that we never stop making these connections to learn from each other, respect each other.”

CHAPTER NINE: RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for the 20th Anniversary of iEARN

As the 20th anniversary of iEARN approaches, there are a series of recommendations that can guide this momentous special event. These recommendations have been drafted taking into account sustainability reflection, an analysis of the NYS-MSTP as well as considering the experiences of iEARN today. Anniversaries offer the great and rare opportunity to provide stakeholders with a perspective on both history and new strategies for growth and/or sustainability. These recommendations may also inspire iEARN to widen its donor support as well as inspire and secure volunteer relationships along the way.

Strategic Plan

Now is a great opportunity to list your goals that you would like to achieve at the end of your anniversary celebration by adding a special section within your strategic plan dedicated to the 20th anniversary. Consider how your goals will align with the tactics that will be planned to achieve them.

Marketing

The anniversary is a great opportunity to create new marketing materials, while creating an integrated communications plan. Reflect your vision in letterhead, newsletters, and emails – in as many mediums as possible.

A. Video marketing

A video marketing piece might be a creative way to present important archival information to different country Centres, and inspire continued involvement in years to come. This video could be a way to reach teachers that want to get involved with an international program, but know nothing about iEARN too, for example. In the video, iEARN can showcase the stories that have been outlined in this report. Undoubtedly, having interviews with teachers that participated in the program over the years will help inspire other teachers to join iEARN.

B. Website

Alter the website to reflect this historic event as well. A popular tool has been creating an interactive timeline that can be accessed on your website. These tools demonstrate the history of the organization since its founding, and are often very user-friendly. Consider creating a timeline that demonstrates iEARN's growing reach internationally over the last twenty years as well. This may serve as a great reminder of how iEARN has an impact all over the world.

C. Information Packets

The 20th Anniversary is also a great time to update any information packets that iEARN provides. These packets would be a versatile tool that could be sent to potential partner schools, media before events, and attachments for donors and grant proposals. The packet would include a summary of the original NYS-MSTP and how iEARN has grown since then. It will give you an opportunity to use stories and quotes from students and teachers that have been touched by iEARN.

D. Logo

Creating a logo for this special occasion is a great opportunity to share a new symbol or image that might capture your audience and transmit your vision most effectively.

Throw a Benefit

There is no better time to hold a special event to commemorate twenty years of inspirational work in the global community. A benefit is a great opportunity to raise significant dollars to your organization as well as attract potential donors and sponsors to supporting your cause as well. Though iEARN has held benefits in the past that have not been financially advantageous, benefits are an important marketing tool to make those involved feel like they have a place to celebrate their accomplishments. For example, this would be an opportunity to launch the video marketing tool mentioned in an earlier recommendation. Furthermore, iEARN can reduce expenses by eliminating the dinner portion of the event that are so frequently associated with benefits, and doing something creative with either a cocktail hour and/or incorporating special video conferencing capabilities may be a nice touch as well.

Make the News

Now is a great time to consider an issue that may be important to the iEARN vision and is one that can garner strategic reactions from the media; in doing so, iEARN can further its name recognition and demonstrate its relevance among other international education organizations. This is also a great opportunity to educate the public about the importance of iEARN's work as well.

Archive Project

This will involve an assessment of iEARN's accomplishments in the past twenty years, and most certainly showcase experiences of the NYS-MSTP. There were so many special and interesting projects and publications that were found in the iEARN-USA office that illustrated the rich history of the organization and the way in which it has touched so many lives. The anniversary is an opportunity to archive this information appropriately. Showcase these beautiful pieces of history and pride! Scrap books that log each year might be a great physical representation of the work of iEARN. However, iEARN should also consider creating a virtual log of their materials and thus collect its rich history to CD. Modernizing the information will also make it more accessible to share with other iEARN Centres, as well as individuals, foundations, and others who may be interested in supporting iEARN's work.

Sustainability

Based on the study's conclusion, it is apparent that the work of iEARN needs to continue, as there are so many teachers and students around the world that can benefit from its mission. Consequently, a sustainability assessment was utilized to not only assess the issues faced during the NYS-MSTP, but to also address the issues iEARN faces today. Consequently, the following approach has been adopted:

- First, understand and define the concept of sustainability, and identify key elements of sustainability that need to be assessed in order to determine the organization's success with sustainability;
- Then, have the management at iEARN examine sustainability issues that the organization faced in the early years and the actions they took to meet those challenges.
- At the conclusion of this report, provide recommendations by the team for optimal future sustainability of iEARN programs.

iEARN Management Review—1999 NGO Sustainability Index

Using the 1999 NGO Sustainability Index as an analytical framework, iEARN-USA management was interviewed on March 2, 2007. Ed Gragert (Director of iEARN-USA) and Lisa Jobson (Assistant Director of iEARN-USA) delved into the issue of sustainability. Both interviewees were asked to assess how iEARN has addressed each of the seven dimensions in the NGO Sustainability Index, as well as were asked questions from the Sustainability Assessment survey (provided by Professor Spiro, Feb 22, 2007) to further delve into specific details. At the conclusion of both interviews, both were asked their opinion on what iEARN should do in the future to maintain sustainability of its program.

Legal Environment

For an NGO sector to be sustainable, the legal and regulatory environment should support the needs of the NGOs. It should facilitate new entrants, help prevent governmental interference, and give NGOs the necessary legal basis to engage in appropriate fund-raising activities and legitimate income-producing ventures. Questions to ask include: Are NGOs and their representatives allowed to operate freely within the law? Are they free from harassment by the central government, local governments, and tax police? Can they freely address matters of public debate and express criticism? (1999 NGO Sustainability Index)

A. Russian Legal Environment

Russia has been experiencing dramatic changes in terms of legal and regulatory environment in the last couple of decades. In the U.S.S.R., NGOs were basically non-existent and very closely monitored by the government. Had Mr. Copen attempted to establish the program in the early 1980's, iEARN most likely would not have sustained itself, due to the inability to operate freely within the Communist regime.

The U.S.S.R. had at the time of the start of the NYS-MSTP, implemented new programs of glasnost (political openness), perestroika (economic restructuring) and uskoreniye (speeding up of economic development); all of which opened Russia to become receptive to an innovative NGO such as iEARN. The new wave of industrialization based on information technology left the U.S.S.R. desperate for Western technology and the government welcomed organizations like iEARN, which could counter its widening of the information gap. The Russians saw the access to knowledge and information as being synonymous with power and the ability to speed up the

procedure for positive progress, by “developing a set of skills that will contribute to the development of knowledge and skills in all other aspect of the youths’ lives,” (Peter Copen Interview, 10/24/2006) and eagerly set up a favorable legal environment for the sustainability of the program. Glasnost resulted in greater freedom of speech and less control of the press, which allowed for free exchanges of ideas and communication within the two countries.

In today’s Russia, NGOs are much freer to operate, allowing a legally favorable environment for the sustainability of a program like iEARN. However, there have been ongoing issues with the enforcement of the rule of law. Corruption and organizational crimes remain real problems and President Putin acknowledges that “dictatorship of law” is to be one of his major objectives. Therefore, iEARN operates in a legal and regulatory environment that, while vastly improved compared to two decades ago, still has significant issues that could adversely affect its operations and sustainability.

B. Chinese Legal Environment

After establishing the initial connection between Russia and New York, iEARN looked to other countries to establish additional exchanges. Mr. Gragert acknowledges that the importance of the legal environment is closely tied to the issue of program sustainability. The legal environment was less favorable in establishing a program in China in 1990. China had suffered a political upheaval the year prior with the Tiananmen Square Massacres, and part of the challenge in sustaining the China-New York exchanges was overcoming government interference and red tape.

The past 17 years have witnessed unprecedented improvement in the legal environment of China, resulting in improvement in living standards to the Chinese in both economic and social areas. According to the World Trade Organization, the historic transition from a planned economy to a market economy allowed for deregulation for foreign NGO’s to participate in the country with less government interference. China has made great progress in implementing sustainable development for NGO’s such as iEARN to flourish, however. In 1995, the country launched increased investment in its education system by infusing more science and technology in order to make the nation more competitive in the global arena.

While early exchanges with China were manipulated and controlled by the government, which led to a faltering exchange for the pilot team in 1990, today's Chinese government has changed to allow more freedom for organization's like iEARN to sustain their program and even welcomes such programs. In fact, current participation in iEARN projects is greater among iEARN-China than among iEARN-Russia (<http://www.iearn.org>). The 7th Annual iEARN Conference and 4th Annual Youth Summit was held in China in July 2000, where presentations were made on iEARN's beneficial impact on Chinese education, where iEARN "became the model for not only how to utilize modern technology in education, but also how to harness the hearts and spirits of youth to make this world a better place to live." (<http://www.iearn.org/china2000.htm>).

Organizational Capacity

The organizational capacity dimension of the Index addresses the operation of the NGO. Questions to ask: Does the sector have a core of professionals who are experienced practitioners and trainers of NGO management? Does a core group of mature NGO's exist in a variety of sectors and geographic areas with well-developed missions, structures and capacity, including a recognized division between the Board of Directors and staff members? Do NGOs actively seek to build constituencies for their initiatives? (1999 NGO Sustainability Index)

iEARN is comprised of country Centres that comprise an assembly (iEARN Assembly). The Assembly consists of one member from all Member Centres of iEARN, the Copen Family Fund and Youth Representative. This is to ensure that one Centre does not dominate the decision-making process. The Assembly is the supreme decision making body of iEARN and is managed by the Executive Council, which consists of a rotating body of three individuals from three different iEARN Centres; they serve a two year term and run the operations of iEARN International.

Mr. Gragert explains that iEARN is set up so each Centre has autonomy to run its organization to fit within the political/educational/cultural environment of host countries. As long as a Centre operates to fulfill the mission of the iEARN organization, it may choose its own best practices. This procedure assists with sustainability issues, by allowing each Centre to feel empowered to make organizational changes as needed and also to improve the functionality of services provided. The procedure also ensures that each organization knows that it is autonomous and not

under the auspices of iEARN-USA, which was the governing Centre for the first six years of iEARN International's history.

Ms. Jobson acknowledges that although attempts have been made to separate iEARN-USA from iEARN International, many people still confuse the two and often equate the US Centre as synonymous with the International Centre. iEARN-USA receives inquiries on the difference between iEARN-USA and iEARN International on a regular basis. They are continuously working on improving the distinction between the two entities, most recently, by launching an iEARN-USA website that emphasizes its status as one centre within the international network.

Ms. Jobson points out that to address the growing need for providing more technical and educational support for teachers, iEARN offers professional development programs for teachers. Currently, they offer face-to-face workshops and seminars, as well as online courses. The primary focus of the professional development is to offer support for teachers in a variety of areas: technology, collaboration skills, and/or curriculum development. The online courses started in November 2001, and teachers from 23 different countries were trained. Today, the online courses are offered twice a year with eight courses to choose from and last nine weeks long. Since 2001, over 1,000 teachers in nearly 80 countries have gone through online courses (Lisa Jobson Interview, 3/2/07).

The trainers who run the online courses are experienced educators that offer their time and expertise. Trainers are education experts who have been asked by iEARN to lead seminars, as well as teachers who have participated in past courses and are now trained as course facilitators. Online course facilitators come from around the world, an intentional move to allow for facilitators in different time zones so that someone is available to answer questions at all times.

Mr. Gragert states that the above services were not available at the onset of iEARN in the late 80's and early 90's because the infrastructure was not available yet within the organization to set up such programs. Initially, the greatest organizational capacity challenge was training teachers and providing training to teachers in technology use. iEARN set up technology advisors, who were volunteers with many other time commitments, for each regional site, and this individual

would be responsible to addressing teacher training and questions. Due to limited financial resources, full-time technology staff could not be employed; hence, there was a heavy reliance on volunteers. Limited resources led to frustrated teachers calling iEARN's office and requesting support from Mr. Gragert and other iEARN staff. As technology adaptation became mainstream, iEARN was better equipped to assist teachers still having technology problems as an increase number of volunteers were available, trained in the technology.

Financial Viability

A critical mass of NGOs must be financially viable, and the economy must be robust enough to support NGO self-financing efforts and generate philanthropic donations from local sources. For many NGOs, financial viability may be equally dependent upon the availability of and their ability to compete for international donor support funds. (1999 Sustainability Index)

The first four years of iEARN was funded solely by Peter Copen, through his family fund. The Copen Fund donated roughly \$150,000 yearly during these first years to cover the overhead costs, fund physical exchanges between students/teachers, and provide equipment. However, as the organization grew, iEARN realized that it needed to look to other sources of funding to help expand its operations. In the early 1990s, George Soros donated a large number of computers and equipment to Russian schools. He noticed during a site visit saw that the computers were not being used. The teachers in Russia were not trained to use the computers and also did not know for what purpose they ought to be used. iEARN saw an opportunity to integrate its program with Mr. Soros' mission of introducing Russians to use computer technology, and in conversation with the Open Society Institute (Mr. Soros' foundation), outlined a plan in which iEARN would train teachers in Russia how to utilize computers in their classrooms and have them use the computers to interact on collaborative projects through the iEARN network. Soros decided to fund this project and donated a few million dollars into iEARN, funding 90% of the organization during mid-to-late 1990s.

For three years, the organization in the US was funded primarily through Soros. However, in late 1990's, funding was reduced according to a sustainability plan, leaving iEARN to seek other sources of funding. Mr. Gragert, through his contacts with the State Department (in Washington, DC), applied for grants and secured contracts for iEARN. Mr. Gragert states that iEARN-USA

is constantly trying to create a diverse portfolio of sources of funding. Currently, iEARN-USA's funding is comprised as follows:

- 60% Federal Government
- 9% Membership and professional development Fees
- 25% Foundations
- 6% Private Individuals

To address issues of financial viability, Mr. Gragert would like to increase the percentage of funding of fees for services to 25%, and decrease the percentage of funding from the federal government to 50%.

In the past, the organization has held three galas (2000, 2001, and 2003), which did not add financially, but broke even. Although the events brought a lot of publicity and good will for the organization, it did not achieve its set goal of providing significant income.

Advocacy

The political and advocacy environment must support the formation of coalitions and networks, and offer NGOs the means to communicate their message through the media to broader public, articulate their demand to government officials, and monitor government actions to ensure accountability. (1999 Sustainability Index)

In absence of a marketing budget, iEARN-USA's advocacy has mostly been ascertained through their website and through word of mouth. This has been a proven method, and iEARN-USA continually receives unsolicited interest from schools, and teachers who wish to partake in their program. iEARN-USA understands the need for a marketing budget, and it is a priority for the organization.

Public Image

For the sector to be sustainable, government and communities should have a positive public image of NGOs, including a broad understanding and appreciation of that role that NGOs play in society. (1999 Sustainability Index)

IEARN-USA has a good public image, and has garnered public recognition and accolades. It was a topic of critical discussion in four PhD dissertations as well as nearly a dozen studies. It has also received accolades for its work, most recently being honored as a Laureate in the Education category for the 2004 Tech Museum Awards and the 2003 Goldman Sachs' Prize for

Excellence in International Education with the Asian Society. IEARN-USA has also been covered in the *New York Times* for its projects (Steven Malloy and the DNA Learning Center project) and most recently appeared on Channel 13's "Celebration of Teaching and Learning Conference," where students presented on iEARN-USA's YouthCaN and Solar Cooking Projects.

The interest by academics and public helps keep iEARN-USA a sustainable organization, because the public affirms the need and support for the organization, deeming its mission and valuable work as necessary for the community and the world.

Service Provision

Sectoral sustainability will require a critical mass of NGOs that can efficiently provide services that consistently meet the needs, priorities and expectations of their constituents. Questions to ask: Do the goods and services that the NGO produce reflect the needs and priorities of local donors and the community? Do NGOs have knowledge of the market demand? Do they have knowledge of the ability of the consumers of their services to pay for their products and services? Does the government, at the national/local level, recognize the value that NGOs can add in the provision of basic social services? (1999 Sustainability Index)

Both Mr. Gragert and Ms. Jobson feel that iEARN-USA succeeds in providing a service that meets the needs of their constituents and that the organization has evolved that it continuously meets the needs of their audience and stakeholders. Although Mr. Gragert admits to initial difficulties in the early years to meet teachers' needs, he never questions the need for an organization like iEARN-USA that services youth and empowers them to interact via the internet.

Because the need is still present, iEARN-USA continues to be relevant and will continue to sustain itself to meet the need.

Sectoral Infrastructure

A strong infrastructure is necessary that can provide NGOs with broad access to Intermediary Support Organizations (ISOs) that provide local NGO support services. ISOs providing these services must be able to inform, train and advise other NGOs and provide access to NGO network and coalitions that share information and pursue issues of common interest. (1999 Sustainability Index)

IEARN-USA’s management described a number of issues they had in the early days, generally due to poor infrastructure and the lack of ISOs. The continuing usage rate was low for the original teachers involved with the iEARN program, due to poor receptivity/unfamiliarity to the technology, pressures on teachers, instable telecommunication connections, political obstacles, and country infrastructure. It was difficult for teachers to fund expensive telecommunication projects. Thus, teachers tried to form a strong sectoral infrastructure by aiding in forming partnerships with not only the schools, but with local institutions, i.e. the Science Center in Moscow, State Education Department in New York, and Chinese government in China.

While the original teachers did not have access to the training programs they currently have today, or access to teachers’ forums; they did have access to technology advisors that were assigned a region. However, often the demand exceeded the resources available. Initially, there was an inadequacy of resources to handle teachers’ requests, but as the organization grew, these demands were met with the addition of a teacher’s forum on the iEARN’s website, as well as training sessions.

Technological reforms demand different resources and usually present more challenges to all involved. The project was originally funded by the Copen Family Fund, but as the organization started to grow, sources of funding needed to be expanded as well.

IEARN- USA Management Review—Sustainability Assessment

The team also utilized another tool, the *Sustainability Assessment Questionnaire*, see Appendix B, to examine to what extent has the following elements been incorporated into iEARN. Utilizing both sustainability tools aided in providing a breadth of results for the team.

| |
|--|
| Scale: 5 – Already exists 4 – In progress 3 – Somewhat 2 – Minimally 1 – Not at all |
|--|

| | <i>SUSTAINABILITY ELEMENT</i> | <i>CURRENT STATUS RATING</i> |
|----|--|------------------------------|
| 1. | On-going funding is assured | 3 |
| 2. | Most funding sources are coordinated to support the ongoing work | 5 |

| | | |
|-----|---|---|
| 3. | There are supportive regulations in place | 5 |
| 4. | A critical mass of supporters is in place beyond “early adopters” | 5 |
| 5. | The strategies and values are embedded in the culture | 3 |
| 6. | There are on-going communications mechanisms | 5 |
| 7. | There is a network of supporting organizations | 5 |
| 8. | There is little active opposition | 5 |
| 9. | This strategy is considered important by the affected constituencies and the public | 5 |
| 10. | There is a clear and legitimate procedure for leadership succession | 5 |
| 11. | This strategy is considered important by internal constituencies | 5 |
| 12. | There is a institutionalized system for training of leaders | 3 |
| 13. | All partner groups are actively participating (universities) | 4 |
| 14. | The outcomes of this work are institutionalized in the states and districts | 3 |
| 15. | Union contracts support the on-going work | 1 |
| 16. | Mandates exist to support the work | 5 |
| 17. | Continuous gathering of data supports the achievement of the change goal | 5 |

Summary

iEARN started as a spectacular and historical vision in 1988, connecting schools in New York State with schools in Moscow, and today it has grown to include more than 118 countries with over 1,000,000 youth engaged in projects yearly.

The management acknowledges that there were some crucial kinks they needed to iron out initially, such as providing more training/support for teachers, expanding to catch up with technology and students’ inclinations, and collaborating with competitors within their field. Another challenge they faced was addressing the technological training for the teachers – an issue that no longer exists with today’s teachers, who are much more assimilated with current technology and engage in it on a daily basis as second nature.

Today's audience of teachers is more assimilated with innovations in technology and navigates through the WWW and email with ease. On the other hand, the teachers who participated in iEARN in the early years had less familiarity with computers and emailing technology – it was a new innovation – which led to less receptivity towards iEARN. Teachers and administrators may also have felt that the innovation was too complex and did not feel they had adequate technology training from iEARN as well. Teachers were unfamiliar with arranging phone connections (internet was linked via dialing into a service provider), for example, and some were recorded as being discouraged with their inability to master the new technology. Mr. Gragert asserts the growing popularity of and the need to participate in the WWW as a factor in assisting with iEARN's sustainability.

Recommendations for Sustainability

iEARN-USA

A. Diversify Funding Sources

iEARN-USA has recognized that a need exists to diversify its funding sources. Historically, they have relied too much for their funding on Peter Copen, then the Soros foundation, and currently the federal government. Less reliance on government funding would result in fewer political hurdles and conditions attached to the programs, as well as freeing up staff time currently spent on the cumbersome government proposal and reporting requirements. A wider range of funding sources would guarantee greater autonomy for iEARN-USA, and provide greater sustainability for the organization, should federal funding be greatly minimized.

B. Increase Outreach

iEARN-USA would greatly benefit from increased exposure in the education community, and philanthropic circles at large. The organization should plan some fundraising and public relations events to generate exposure to aid in diversifying funding sources. iEARN-USA participates in a number of studies and receives awards for its high-quality work, and these events warrant publicity to make a wider audience aware of the organization's excellent programs.

C. Generate Support at Schools' Administration Level

To ensure that the network of participating schools does not diminish as teachers retire, efforts should be made to engage school administrators at a district and statewide level. Institutionalizing iEARN activity as part of the school curriculum would ensure a consistent number of schools participating and joining as members each year. Forming strong relationships with state education officials and administrators, as was done in the NYS-MSTP, would add to the exposure of the organization. It would also lend itself for local evaluation, to assess the impact iEARN may have on education at the local level.

D. An Updated Database

For the purpose of efficient and effective communication, it is essential that iEARN-USA continue to maintain an accurate list of teachers and students who participated in the program. Such contacts can be useful in planning future events, collaborating on other projects, as well as assessing the program strengths and weaknesses in the future.

E. Create a Strategic Plan

All of the above recommendations should be considered in creating a Strategic Plan for iEARN-USA to span the next five to seven years. The Strategic Plan and surrounding discussions will provide an opportunity to focus on long-term goals for the organization and create plans that will support the work of diversifying funding sources, increasing outreach, and creating relationships at a school district or state level. The Strategic Plan should also include plans for leadership succession and expanding the executive team at the organization to utilize the Board's resources, both human and capital.

iEARN-Russia

A. Website

After the iEARN-Russia was temporarily disabled for quite some time, it is refreshing and a positive sign that a new website is in place and that navigation of the website is user-friendly (<http://iearn-russia.org>). Recently, sharing the launching of the new website with the iEARN community via the iEARN News Flash was a helpful way to demonstrate to other partner countries that iEARN-Russia was in gradual preparation to become an official country Centre again in the future. It is important that the website continue to be the vehicle in which iEARN-

Russia disseminates information as currently, iEARN-Russia solely exists in the virtual world. This is a great tool to continue to use to illustrate the ease in which other teachers and schools, whom support iEARN-Russia work, can become more involved.

B. Leadership development

It is very difficult when a leadership plan is not in place to prepare for the challenge(s) of an important and dedicated person(s) leaving an organization. Thankfully, both Olga Prokhorenko, of School 1129, Moscow Russia and Nina Koptuyg of Lyceum # 130, Novosibirsk, Russia, have stepped up to the challenge of keeping the iEARN-Russia program afloat. Bolstering iEARN-Russia's leadership capacity will be necessary step as iEARN-Russia considers expanding its vision and considers physical space to promote its mission as well.

C. Training

Olga Prokhorenko used some of her time explaining the impact NYS-MSTP had on its teachers and students by bringing together past participants of the NYS-MSTP, as well as new teachers who might be interested in the iEARN program, during the time of the field study. Olga Prokhorenko demonstrated with ease the navigation of the iEARN website and how to register with iEARN as well. Familiarizing other schools and districts the simplicity of becoming a part of the iEARN network will continue to be an essential and beneficial process, especially as iEARN-Russia gets back on its feet.

D. Financial Support

Another recommendation is to ensure that financial support is in place to promote and carry out other projects in Russia as well. Financial support will also be necessary to ensure that teachers and students can attend iEARN conferences, which have been viewed as one of the best aspects of the iEARN program. Seeking out wealthy Russian businesses and/or identifying stakeholders in Russia who believe in the iEARN mission is a strong start in securing unrestricted funds. Looking to program alumni would be an ideal starting point. Pooling together these private financial and in-kind resources may create opportunities for students and teachers to seek out the fund and in turn experience other aspects of iEARN in the global community.

E. Capacity Building

In article II, Chapter I of the iEARN Constitution states: “iEARN will only intervene in matters within domestic jurisdiction when invited by individuals or sites within that centre or country.” It is a recommendation that iEARN Constitution contain more explicit language as to how iEARN can assist other Centres, especially in need – perhaps due to political fall out, lack of financial support, or change in leadership – that compromises the existence of the Centre. While it is understandable that the iEARN Constitution encourages each centre to be self-sufficient in handling sustainability issues, it is our recommendation that certain capacity-building guidelines are created to demonstrate support and global solidarity when another centre is in crisis. The culture of support that exists within the iEARN network performs many of these tasks on an ad hoc basis, but would benefit from being codified.

F. An updated database

For the purpose of efficient and effective communication, it is essential that iEARN-Russia maintain an accurate list of teachers and students who participated in the program. Such contacts can be useful in planning future events, collaborating on other projects, as well as assessing the program strengths and weaknesses in the future. iEARN-Russia should utilize the existing international database for iEARN.

Summary

As iEARN experiences its twentieth anniversary, there is much to be planned and much to celebrate. There are a variety of recommendations that will benefit the sustainability of both iEARN-USA and iEARN-Russia, even though both are experiences different phases of growth in their iEARN Centers. iEARN-Russia, for example, is in a critical state as it only exists in the virtual world and no longer functions as an accredited Centre. However, recent leadership is in the process of keeping iEARN-Russia afloat, and focusing on increasing the organization’s reach throughout certain regions of Russia. Many of iEARN-Russia’s recommendations, nonetheless, focus steps that the organization should consider as it strives to create an increased voice in the Russian community again. On the other hand, iEARN-USA is more established, and also holds a more secure position. Even so, a strategic plan, detailing a series of long-term goals and objectives will serve the organization well. Such a strategic plan will be pivotal in not only

carrying out a successful anniversary, but in securing the organization's place in the international education arena for years and years to come.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW LIST

Interviews Completed, New York Project

Jen Adams

Student, Northport High School

Interviewed 3/26/07

Bryan Billings

Student, Northport High School

Interviewed 3/12/07

Don Billings

Host family, Northport High School

Interviewed 3/6/2007

Ruth Billings

Host Family, Northport High School

Interviewed 3/6/2007

Halina Danchenko

Russian Language Teacher, Brighton High School

Interviewed 2/15/07

David Egan

Chairman, Department of Social Studies; Cold Spring Harbor High School

Interviewed 2/3/07

John Forsberg

Technology Teacher, Somers Middle School

Interviewed 2/19/07

Ed Gragert

Executive Director, iEARN-USA

Interviewed 3/2/07

Ken Holvig

Technology Teacher, Scarsdale Middle School

Lisa Jobson

Assistant Director, iEARN-USA

Interviewed 3/2/07

Timmy Karro

Host Family, Northport High School

Interviewed 2/20/07

Merle Levine
Principal (retired), Northport High School
Interviewed 1/31/07

Eugene Lebowhl
Director, Walkabout Program

James O'Brien
Technology Teacher, Somers High School
Interviewed 1/30/07

Yvette S.
Student, Northport High School
Interviewed 3/25/07

Jane Shuffleton
Russian Language Teacher (retired); Brighton High School

Mr. Smith (Alias)
Russian Language Teacher, Northport High School
Interviewed 3/8/07

Interviews Completed, Russia Project

Roman Barsukov
Student, Moscow School 1129
Interviewed 1/18/07

Mark Bubman
Principal, Moscow School 429
Interviewed 1/19/07

Natalie Demionenko
Student, Moscow School 1129
Interviewed 1/18/07

Dima, Shamil, & Seva
Students, Moscow English Gymnasium
Interviewed 1/18/07

Olga Karp
Assistant Principal, Moscow International Gymnasium
Interviews 1/19/07

Alexandra Lyalagina

4th Form Teacher, Epigraph School
Interviewed 1/16/07

Elena Lyalagina
Principal, Epigraph School
Interviewed 1/16/07

Sonia Lyalagina
Student, Epigraph School
Interviewed 1/16/07

Mikhal
Student, Moscow School 429
Interviewed 1/19/07

Olga Prokhorenko
Assistant Principal, Moscow School 1129
Interviewed 1/18/07

Olga Shevtsova
Student, Moscow School 1129
Interviewed 1/18/07

Alla Shushkovskaya
Principal, Moscow School 1129
Interviewed 1/18/2007

Nina Urlona
Research Scientist, Moscow School System
Interviews 1/18/2007

Denis Volkov
Student, Moscow School 1129
Interviewed 1/18/07

Note: Roundtable or informal discussions were held with the following teachers: Nina Koptug, Tatiana Bgantsova, Tamara Milosserdnaya, Nataliy Orlova, Susanna Oganessian, Katya Sadilova, Liudmila Sukhanova, Elizaveta Schirkova, Shane Irene, Olga Tulogonova, Tamara Ivanskaja, Diana Gasparyan, Luzmilla Pavlova, Olga Ivanova.