



Why Ivan Can Read But Johnny Can't

What the communist leaders did not foresee is that the high literacy of their slaves would not lead them to Marx and Lenin but to the dissident writers in the underground and the anti-communist literature of the West. Of course, the communist masters hoped that they could prevent this by a regime of strict censorship. But in an age of computers, radios, and video and audio cassettes, as well as books, the flow of information, news, and ideas could not be stopped.



Today's Russians can now read anything they want, provided the books are available. While high literacy alone is not sufficient to give the Russians the kind of society our Founding Fathers gave us, high literacy will enable them to make up for lost time. Well-educated Russian émigrés do very well in the United States where their technical skills are highly valued.

Meanwhile, in the United States, millions of Americans have been turned into functional illiterates by their schools, and thus are unable to use their God-given language learning endowment to better themselves. The American public education system is now the world's most effective censor because it denies millions of its citizens the skills needed to become proficient readers. These functional illiterates and non-readers are effectively cut off from mankind's greatest source of knowledge and wisdom: books. And all of this is caused by American children being taught to read by the look-say, whole-word, or sight method, presently being peddled as "whole language."

Oddly enough, the Russians used the whole-word method back in the early days of the communist regime, but replaced it with phonics in the 1930s when it became obvious that look-say didn't produce the kind of high literacy the communist leaders wanted. The *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (Vol. 4, p. 423) describes what happened in its article on Primers:

Primer, a textbook designed to teach reading and writing; a primary handbook for developing language and logical thinking in children.

The teaching of reading and writing is accomplished by various methods (the syllabic method, the phonetic method, the "whole-words methods," and so on); the corresponding primers are written for each method. The phonetic, analytic-synthetic method, which is the basis on which modern Soviet primers are compiled, is the most feasible method of teaching reading and writing....

The first Soviet primers, compiled according to the so-called whole-words method, were replaced in 1932 by primers in which the analytic-synthetic sound method was revived.... Since then all primers have been compiled according to this method.



Written by [Sam Blumenfeld](#) on November 18, 2011

It was John Dewey and his colleagues who visited Soviet Russia in the early days of the communist regime and persuaded Lenin's wife, Krupskaya, to adopt the new progressive curriculum, which included whole-word reading instruction, for Soviet primary schools. The whole-word method had been developed in the United States by the progressives in order to transform the American school into an instrument of social change. In the new curriculum, high literacy was to be downgraded in favor of socialization. In theory, the new curriculum would create the new socialist man, divested of individualism and totally devoted to the collective.

And so the new method was put in Soviet schools before it was even ready for the American classroom. In fact, the Soviet schools served as full-fledged experimental labs where American progressive ideas could be tested. And they were.

In 1922, Anna Louise Strong, a graduate of the University of Chicago, went to Russia where she investigated the new Soviet education. In February 1924, she wrote in *Survey Graphic* magazine: "Their idea is modeled more on the Dewey ideas of education than anything else we know in America. Every new book by Dewey is grabbed and translated into Russian for consultation. Then they make their own additions."

The purpose of Soviet education was, in the words of a Soviet teacher, "to teach the child collective action. We are trying to fit him to build a socialist state." (*School & Society*, 3/1/24) Isn't that what is now the purpose of American public schools?

But the Dewey-Soviet experiment came to an abrupt end in August 1932 when the Central Committee of the Communist Party abandoned the laboratory method and ordered a structured curriculum based on traditional teaching methodology. The reaction of American progressives to the news was predictable. Dr. Lucy L. W. Wilson, a principal of a Philadelphia high school who had visited Russia, wrote in a report in *School & Society* (1/28/33):

The consternation in the camps of educational progressives in this country caused by the decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union . . . was far greater than was any joy among the stalwarts....

It is true that the masterful teachers in the Soviet schools have been remarkably successful in developing healthy and strong boys and girls ... but sometimes — not always — these same children have been a little weak in reading, writing and arithmetic as well as in definite factual knowledge in physics, in chemistry, in mathematics ... subjects now included in the three Rs of the "fully literate" in newest Russia. These ... boys and girls ... have not developed into the fully competent engineers, technicians and managers demanded by Five Year Plans, old and new....

More than a year ago the Central Committee of the Communist Party, in its educational resolution sounded the warning:

"The basic defects at the present moment is that instruction in the schools does not give a sufficient amount of general educational subjects and does not satisfactorily solve the problem of preparing for the higher schools fully literate people well acquainted with the basic subjects of study."

Doesn't that sound a lot like what is being said today of American public education by its critics? But in communist Russia, all it took was a decree by the Communist Party to make the necessary reforms. But in our divided "democracy," sane and insane educational practices are given equal value by our politicians. The unionized teachers, controlled by the progressives, will continue to use insane teaching methods in American schools. And because reform of the system is impossible, parents have taken it



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upon themselves to homeschool their children in order to save them from the insanity of American educators.

Ironically, some of the well-educated Russian émigrés to America have looked at our educational system and shaken their heads in dismay. One such émigré in the Boston area decided to create a charter school in the town of Marlborough, based on the rigorous curriculum of the Russian schools. Naturally, it has caused quite a bit of controversy. The *Boston Globe* reported:

When Julia Sigalovsky fled the Soviet Union in 1989 she took only her husband, their son, Linda the collie, six suitcases, \$400, and a titanium strength foundation in math and physics. The latter proved to be her most valuable asset....

Two years ago, while trying to find a rigorous kindergarten for her second son, she thought: What if she created a school where children received the training she did? What if they studied a subject not just for one year, but for five or six?

The result was the Advanced Science and Math Academy charter school, serving grades 6 to 12. But the plan has been criticized by the Marlborough Superintendent of Schools, Rose Marie Boniface, who complained that the school would skim the cream, leaving the underperformers, diminishing the district's ability to be at or above state average.

Mrs. Sigalovsky has also created the MetroWest School of Mathematics, a private evening program that tutors children in grades K-12. And so, the rigorous education children get in Russia is now being made available in America, and parents are responding positively.

But why can't the public school system in Marlborough, or anywhere else in the United States, adopt the kind of rigorous education program that would produce the scientists and engineers that America so badly needs? Because that would require our colleges of education to produce teachers as well educated as Mrs. Sigalovsky, and their progressive professors simply prefer the Dewey program that the communists got rid of in the former Soviet Union. And that is why America will continue to lose its competitiveness to those nations like India, South Korea, and China, where rigorous education is the rule.



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