

Symposium: Preparing Democratic Educational Leaders: The Case of Belarus

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Preparing Democratic Educational Leaders: The Case of Belarus<sup>1</sup>

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How Western countries can effectively provide educational technical assistance to more developing nations is a perplexing problem raising a number of questions. What educational technical assistance is needed; who should provide it; how and for how long should it be provided; how should it be funded; what political and administrative structures are needed to support the technical assistance both locally and from abroad, and how do we avoid denigrating local educational values while promoting Western values are just some of the issues faced by the authors over the last 17 years as they worked together and separately to help reform school leadership in Belarus. This paper explores the lessons learned from this extended experience.

### **International Cooperation on School Leadership Development between Belarus and the West: The Historical Context**

Cooperation on school leadership development between Belarus and the West started innocently enough in the spring of 1991. Mikhail Gorbachev had come into power in the Soviet Union in 1985 and, as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, introduced the new policies of *perestroika* (restructuring), *glasnost* (openness), *demokratizatsiya* (democratization), and *uskoreniye* (“acceleration” of economic development) at the 27<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party in February of 1986. Five years later, Belarus, as did the other former Republics of the Soviet Union around this time, declared independence on July 27, 1991. The Presidents of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine founded the Commonwealth of Independent States on December 8, 1991, declaring the end of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev resigned as President on December 25<sup>th</sup> and was replaced by Boris Yeltsin and the Soviet Union was formally dissolved the next day.

### **Initial Contacts between Belarus and Western Educational Administration Educators**

It was in this historical context that Iouri Zagoumenov, Professor of Educational Administration and Head of the Educational Administration Department of The Republic Institute for Upgrading Teachers of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus, convinced the Head of his Institute to fund a trip for a week in New York City in the Spring of 1991 to find out more about the tradition of democratic school leadership in the United States. Dr. Zagoumenov had only recently defended, in Moscow, his dissertation on Democratization of School Management in 1988, the first dissertation in the USSR focused on democratic

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governance of schools. Since *perestroika*, Dr. Zagoumenov has conducted research and innovation activities in the USSR aimed at democratization of the management of schools.

Upon arrival in New York, Dr. Zagoumenov was referred to New York University through a contact at the Belarusian Consulate in New York City. There he met Theodore Repa, the new Chair of the Department of Administration, Leadership, and Technology and professor of educational administration. Dr. Zagoumenov spoke excellent English and he and Dr. Repa had a mutual interest in shared leadership and decision making in schools. Dr. Repa arranged for NYU's faculty to give Dr. Zagoumenov some of the educational administration textbooks the NYU faculty used in their courses. Dr. Repa also invited Dr. Zagoumenov to accompany him in October in Baltimore to the annual convention of the University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA), the leading consortium of universities with doctoral programs in educational administration. At the conference, Dr. Repa introduced Dr. Zagoumenov to the leading scholars in educational administration from around the country, exposed him to the most recent research in the field, and showed him how to order free desk copies of books in educational administration from the publishers that were on display. NYU subsequently sponsored Dr. Zagoumenov's participation at UCEA in Houston and Minneapolis.

Dr. Repa next met with Dr. Zagoumenov during the spring of 1992 in Minsk, where Dr. Repa was a guest lecturer. Dr. Repa delivered two lectures to their graduate students that were subsequently published (Repa, 1992a and 1992b). Additionally, Dr. Repa visited schools, met leading school administrators, spoke with representatives of the Ministry of Education, and became more familiar with how education of educators was organized in Belarus. Subsequently, Dr. Zagoumenov continued his education about western educational administration preparation models by visiting Finland to learn about the Swedish models for the professional preparation of educational leaders.

### **International Educational Leadership Exchange Programs between the Belarus and New York University 1992-1994**

That fall semester Dr. Repa arranged for Dr. Zagoumenov to spend a sabbatical as a visiting scholar in NYU's Department of Administration, Leadership, and Technology. Dr. Zagoumenov co-taught a graduate level course, Leadership and Decision Making.

During the summer of 1993 Dr. Zagoumenov and Dr. Repa jointly taught a NYU Study Abroad course, Leadership and Decision Making in Minsk. Eight NYU students who were educators and nine Belarus educational administrators were enrolled for this three week experience. The US educators stayed in the homes of their Belarus educators counterparts. In the course, they formed cross-cultural teams as they studied and practiced democratic leadership skills. Belarus students did not have to pay tuition for this course.

In 1994, funding from the Soros Foundation and NYU supported a two-week visit to New York City by 12 Belarus educational administrators where they met and observed their counterparts modeling democratic teaching methods in urban and suburban schools. Dr. Repa and Dr. Zagoumenov were the lead faculty in this project.

### **International School Leadership Development Technical Assistance Program between New York University and the Belarus Institute for Educational Administration 1993-1996**

The next educational collaboration between NYU and Belarus was a two-year collaborative project entitled “The Newly Independent States Partnership: New York University and the Belarus Institute for Educational Administration.” Funded by the United States Information Agency, the project included six NYU faculty specialists in educational administration, international education, higher education, social studies education, and educational telecommunications spending one month each summer in Belarus. Dr. Repa was one of the NYU faculty specialists that participated in this project. The NYU faculty partnered with faculty from the Belarus Institute, including Dr. Zagoumenov, and focused on facilitating the process of democratization in the Republic of Belarus through educational reform.

The approach was to engage in a mutual exchange of ideas and to transfer educational knowledge and technology from the United States to Belarus. The partnership focused on the following issues: the decentralization of education decision making in higher education and in schools; the development of a civic education curriculum that promoted democratic values as an integral part of good citizenship; and a computer-based telecommunications center through which educators in Belarus could have access on a continuing basis to electronic mail, computer-based conferencing, and online library resources in the United States and other developed countries.

Among the accomplishments were the following: the donation by the NYU School of Education of over 1000 books on educational administration in Belarus, an extensive report on how to change the higher education system in Belarus to better meet international standards for degrees, the creating of a handbook to be used in in-service training on how to transform Belarus schools along democratic principles, the development of new social studies instructional materials focusing on Belarus and global history, and setting up and supplying the Institute with computers and modems to access the internet.

### **The Spawning of Multiple Western Leadership Development Programs in Belarus**

While a visiting scholar at NYU in 1992, Dr. Repa introduced Dr. Zagoumenov to Dr. Dale Mann, an educational administration professor colleague at Teacher’s College, Columbia University. Dr. Mann invited Dr. Zagoumenov to be an observer at the Russian Educational Leaders for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Program in St. Petersburg, sponsored by the Soros Foundation. George Soros also invited Dr. Zagoumenov to serve on the Board of Directors of the Soros Foundation in Minsk and to implement in Belarus with Dr. Mann the Belarus Educational Leaders for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Program in 1993. In the Belarus Educational Leader program, six teams of administrators, one for each of the six administrative regions in Belarus, comprised of the regional superintendent of schools, two district superintendents, two principals, and a trainer from the regional in-service institute for school administrators, received one year of democratic training from world-class international experts in education and business. At the end of that training, the teams developed five-year plans to improve the schools and democratic school leader preparation in their region.

Three other democratic educational leadership initiatives between Belarus and the West had their origin in 1993, although some did not start until some years later. The first began when Dale Mann introduced Dr. Zagoumenov to the Board of the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI). This collaboration allowed Dr. Zagoumenov over the next 12 years to travel around the world to attend international conferences of ICSEI. In 1996

Dr. Zagoumenov hosted this conference in Minsk where Dr. Repa presented a paper (Repa, 1996a) that was subsequently published in Belarus (Repa, 1996b).

With the help of these international contacts Dr. Zagoumenov was able to secure funding to establish the Educational Center for Leadership Development (ECLD) in Minsk in 1994. Its accomplishments included:

- Initiating the first pre-service course for educational administrators in the Minsk Region whereby 100% of the graduates were promoted to leadership positions in their schools and districts.
- Starting the publication of the first quarterly journal for school leaders in Belarus *Leadership and Management in Education*.
- Starting the first annual contest in Belarus for the “Belarus Educational Leader of the Year.”

All these initiatives continued after being taken over by the Ministry of Education or regional and local educational authorities. They were extended to include:

- Facilitating the National Association of Educational Administrators in Belarus, a professional network of educational administrators.
- Securing funding to for 30 Belarus educators to visit the Spinoza Lyceum (a Dalton School) in Amsterdam, Holland and to be introduced to the Dalton methodology. The Dalton Plan has three objectives: to tailor each student's program to his or her needs, interests, and abilities; to promote both independence and dependability; and to enhance the student's social skills and sense of responsibility toward others.
- Out of this last visit, a four-year collaboration with the Spinoza Lyceum, the Belarus Ministry of Education, SLO (a Dutch Curriculum Development Agency), and ECLD was initiated in 1995. The Dutch connection originated through the collaboration with Dr. Mann where Dr. Zagoumenov met Dr. Robert Mol, Rector of the Spinoza Lyceum in Amsterdam, Holland, with whom Dr. Zagoumenov would develop the Dalton School Project in Belarus in 1995. It established a network of schools in Belarus that adopted the Dalton School model. In addition to providing technical support to the adopting schools, a train-the-trainer model was used to prepare a group of independent Belarus educational consultants to support the newly established Dalton schools. The participants in the program established the National Association for Educational Innovations (NAEI) that is comprised of over 70 educational communities in all the Belarus administrative regions. Both schools that use the Dalton model as well as the National Association continue today.

The next Western collaboration developed out of meetings with Drs. Olof Johansson, professor of political science at UMEA University in Sweden and Dr. Paul Begley, professor of educational leadership at Penn State University in the United States of America and Dr. Zagoumenov while attending an ICSEI conference in Hong Kong in 2000. They developed a joint project that focused on developing democratic educational leaders in Belarus. Their collaborative efforts produced a publication on educational leadership in Belarus (Johansson and Begley, 2003). The purpose of the profile, described in more detail in the publication, is to identify key dimensions of professional practice for principals committed to improving the quality of education. The profile is based upon the assumption that a number of persistent

problems confound the efforts of those committed to the development of expert leadership practices - whether for schools of the present or those of the future. For example, despite the substantial body of applied research purporting to describe the nature of administrative expertise, a lack of consensus exists among academics and practitioners on what constitutes ideal school leadership and how it should be defined. Although principal preparation programs, or in-service courses intended for incumbent school administrators, can now be grounded in more than just context-bound practices, or theories-in-use, several problems remain. The "rear view mirror" perspective of most formal preparation programs, and the questionable pedagogy and relevance of some university and field-based professional development efforts, continue to compromise the participant perceived effectiveness of such programs. Another important issue is the failure of formal programs to accommodate divergent regional needs and learning readiness levels evident among the participants in professional development programs.

Johansson and Begley responded to these challenges by using situationally specific, multi-dimensional profiles of professional practice as a basis for fostering the development of expert school leadership practices. Within the past seven years, they had produced several regional profiles of effective principal practice; two in Canada, one in Western Australia, one in Karelia (Russia), and one in Hong Kong and this one in Belarus.

### **What's a Profile?**

A profile is a two dimensional matrix which describes growth in professional practice within developmental stages of selected dimensions of professional action. The creation of a profile begins with the establishment of a goal statement followed by a series of decisions about which categories of professional action are most relevant to the achievement of the desired state described in the profile goal statement. In a profile these categories are called Dimensions. Each of these Dimensions is also usually broken down into a set of Sub-dimensions. To accomplish this, various facilitative and consensus building strategies are employed to blend research findings from the literature with local craft knowledge.

The next step in creating a profile is behaviourally describing, within each Dimension or Sub-dimension, the range of professional behaviour which might be observed in the work setting. These alternate levels of professional practice are sequenced within dimensions of the profile according to their relative impact on attaining the desired outcomes identified in the profile goal statement. They can be thought of as the stages of growth ranging from typical competent practice to highly exemplary or ideal practice. Profiles generally are not employed to describe incompetent practices, so the lowest levels of the profile, while not particularly exemplary, should be considered as acceptable performance.

Profiles are usually produced by a writing team of representative practitioners and academics who generate a series of draft documents. These profile drafts then typically undergo an extensive field validation process before a final version of the document is released for use. Developing profiles typically requires 30 to 40 hours of intensive collaborative group work by the actual writing team, plus many additional days of work by a subset of the team in editing and validating the various drafts. Full validation of the final drafts typically takes at least one year. In our view, such profiles should probably be reviewed and re-validated within five years.

## **What has been the impact of the Western-Belarus education technical assistance initiatives?**

In February of 2008, Drs. Johansson, Repa, and Zagoumenov, along with the fourth colleague, Niklas Eklund of Umeå University, Sweden, spent a week in Minsk interviewing over 40 Belarusian educators who had participated in the various educational leadership development programs asking them to reflect on the impact of their particular experience. What follows are a summary of their findings.

### **Results from the 2008 Follow-up Interview with Dr. Iouri Zagoumenov**

Dr. Zagoumenov was the central figure in the development of Western educational leader developmental activities in Belarus. He initiated contacts with Western experts in 1991 and over the years has been a lead contributor to various democratic educational leadership development projects in his country. Dr. Zagoumenov points to his initial exposure to Western educational leadership literature he found at NYU as a key factor in promoting his interest and expertise in educational leadership. Each contact with the West seemed to lead to the development of the next leadership project. Western technical support to establish internet connections allowed Dr. Zagoumenov to find additional information about democratic school leadership, an idea not very well developed in Belarus before *perestroika*, as well as develop a cadre on international colleagues in educational administration, with which he could stay in touch and call upon. His international travel and ability to support other educational leaders in Belarus made him the leading educational administration professor in his country. However, it must be emphasized that without the initiative, cooperation, and navigational expertise of Dr. Zagoumenov, most of the leadership projects and successes in Belarus would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible.

### **Interviews and Survey Results from the Belarus and New York University Participants in the International Exchange Programs between 1992-1994.**

Four Belarus educators and four United States educators that participated in the exchanges were interviewed or surveyed. All noted that they changed their views of education based upon their participation with the two international exchange programs. The Belarus educators focused on the helpfulness of observing and participating in democratic teaching methods within a classroom setting that could be used in their schools, e.g., teaming, exercises, simulations, task forces, and the like. They also noted that they became more self-confident educators by successfully completing an English taught course from an American university. All, but one, went on to take more educational leadership responsibilities in Belarus. The four American educators talked about using their new found international education experiences in their schools. They used examples they learned to help provide better multi-cultural experiences for their students. They thought they were better able to understand and meet the needs of their international students.

### **Interviews and Survey Results from the Belarus and New York University Participants in the Technical Assistance Programs between 1993-1996**

Three Belarus professors and three United States professors who participated in the two-year technical assistance grant were interviewed or surveyed. The three Belarus professors all went on to assume important educational leadership positions. Dr. Zagoumenov continues to lead democratic, educational leadership development programs in Belarus. A second faculty member assumed a high ranking position in the Ministry of Education and helped Belarus move from a focus on knowledge-based education to competency-based education based upon international standards. The third faculty member spent a sabbatical at NYU and focuses her current efforts on educational reform in Belarus as a consultant. All three point to this two-year project as being pivotal in broadening their vision about directions that educational reform should take in Belarus based upon an international perspective. And all three have assumed positions in Belarus that have allowed them to implement their shared vision.

The three New York University professors, while thankful for the personal, professional growth that resulted from their international education experience in Belarus, were more circumspect about the difficulties of cooperative, international educational reform efforts. Sustainability of and scaling up democratic educational reforms within the political context and history of a top-down educational management system in Belarus was seen as a challenge. Ultimately, the future life of the democratic educational reforms that were introduced were in the hands of the cadre of Belarus educational leaders who participated in the Western sponsored projects, as the Western experts moved on to other responsibilities and interests.

### **Interview Results from the Belarus and Swedish Participants in the Technical Assistance Programs between 2000-2003**

In an effort to assess the impact and utility of the Profile, Belarus school leaders were brought together in two separate groups to evaluate and discuss their experiences. In the group chaired by Prof. Olof Johansson and Dr. Niklas Eklund, seven participants (5 female, 2 male) were asked to give an initial presentation of any professional changes linked with their work on the Profile a few years previously to discuss specifically how their views upon democracy, change, control, and knowledge in schools has changed. The presentations and ensuing group discussion went on for over two hours.

**Career and personal changes:** Out of the total seven participants, five have made significant career moves since 2003. One of them continues to work as a school principal, whereas another has returned to the role of school teacher. Generally, the Profile and related work and travel experiences have served as a source of personal inspiration for those who have moved on, over and above being a tool for teaching and administration in its own right. Professionally, those five participants who have moved up the career ladder have ended up in significant leadership positions in the Belarus system of education. One female participant is now the head of the institute “Innovations in Education” which entails daily work in a section of the Ministry of Education in Minsk as well as on the one hand heading up coaching processes for teachers in local schools in Belarus school districts and, on the other hand, doing and publishing research in Belarus scientific journals. One of the male participants has taken up a higher administrative position and is currently involved in the building of a new university faculty. Another male participant is currently trying the entrepreneurial route, originally by starting up and running a private school in parallel with his old job as a school principal. One of the female participants has become an entrepreneur, currently working as an independent consultant to schools all over

the Minsk region. Last but not least, one of the female participants has become a manager in the Academy of Education in Minsk, at a teacher training institute.

**Leadership styles and ideas:** There seems to be agreement in the group that the Profile, with its ideas about bottom-to-top processes of change and the pivotal role of democratic leadership, emerged at just the right time in Belarus. Consequently, it continues to play an important role not only on the personal level for participants and their respective co-workers, but also significantly as a critical source and check list in ongoing educational reform. All participants agree that the ideas about intellectual leadership, methodologies based on democratic principles, pluralism and open-ended thinking continually inspire change on various levels of the system, although it has been particularly important to practices and communication processes in schools. Regarding the context of current educational reform in Belarus, however, opinions diverge. There is an optimistic outlook among the majority of participants, emphasizing the opportunities for change. But, conversely, there is also a more pessimistic under current, which insists the real opportunities for democratization in administration and teaching methods have come and gone.

The positive contextualization rests on the observation by some group participants that real changes have taken place in how school teachers, pupils, and managers interact. There is, as observed by one female participant, validation of democratic principles, such as soft measures and dialogue, to be found in how teachers address each other as co-workers. Furthermore, the more principals and other leaders increase their awareness and observance of democratic values, the more they are approached and addressed openly in return. The positive image also involves such practices as having more staff meetings and more seminars on a wide variety of issues related to education and work in schools. Another participant adds that concrete effects can be seen in how the dialogue between teachers and administrators has become livelier as critical, goal-oriented discussion even creeps into discussion over coffee or tea during the breaks.

However, two participants in the group paint their images of change in Belarus in far darker colors. There is, according to them, a cultural element in the process of change which is hard to grasp but at the same time impossible to circumvent. In stark contrast with the ideas behind the Profile, school leadership in Belarus tends to be hijacked by administrative and legal culture, or by outright institutional inertia. There is, according to one female participant, what she refers to as the ‘documents-first strategy’. And, one of the male participants supports this negative view by saying that he believes it no secret that democratic leadership and principles are a hard sell in Belarus. With a background in both school and university administration, he feels it safe to say that authoritarian teaching methods are back in force in Belarus.

**Democratizing schools:** As the participants agree that pupils in Belarus schools suffer from work overload, sometimes spending as much as eleven hours per day either in the immediate school environment or on assignments, there is little to evince that new ideas and ideals have penetrated the classroom. There is, as one participant puts it, simply not enough time for kids to worry about that. Conversely, for the individual teacher there is a similar problem with the work load, which gives little or no room for democratic experimentation in actual education. The group nevertheless agrees that there is a more pleasant tone between teachers and pupils in some schools, and that there is a positive correlation between the class room situation and the overall organizational culture of any given school. However, the general, cultural expectation is still for Belarus officials and functionaries to keep a stiff upper lip in the light of economic or other shortages.

**Profile impact evaluated:** The group agreed that the lasting effects of the Profile can be seen on two levels. On one level, working on the Profile and putting it to use in subsequent work has led to a number of critical realizations about the problems and opportunities of education in Belarus. The very act of producing a concrete document and bringing it back home has been a source of both pride and opportunities for technical learning. The group also agrees that over and above the relative merits and demerits of the document as such, it symbolizes the starting point of a process which is still ongoing. On another level, writing The Profile up, coming back home, and going about trying to put the new ideas and concepts to work in their home environment, participants seem to agree that difficult questions and critical perspectives have come to the fore over time. Impressions from visiting and working for a short while in Sweden have been the source of critical reflection. The group agrees that it was easy to be overwhelmed by how seemingly well organized and functional everything is in Sweden. To be a first-hand witness to how well Swedish children handle different forms of oral and visual presentation or to learn about the caring and inclusive psychology which governs Swedish schools was jolting. Another observation was the significance attributed to the development of individuality and personality, both as observed in school but also as observed among Swedish participants in the project. The group agrees that their participation in a conference in Sweden which was also attended by the Swedish queen was the pinnacle of this overall, overwhelming experience. At this conference the Swedish core attitude of equality was blatantly illustrated by how the queen entered and joined the conference not as a leader or person of state, but simply as one participant among the many. In the words of one group participant, “this was probably when the totalitarian stereotype in us died.”

In answer to the question about what the group would have done differently if they were given the opportunity to rewrite the Profile today, there was significant agreement too. The benefits of new ideas and approaches, some that were set out already in the profile and some which have emanated from its later use, are simply seen as too great. The group participants were hard put to see any significant idea or concept that would improve the validity or utility of the Profile today. They pointed out, though, that recent Belarus reforms aimed at increasing competition between schools have exacerbated the problem of implementing the democratic ideas contained in the Profile. The group goes on to give examples of how various forms of testing and the bases for comparison between schools are of dubious nature, how manipulation of national tests is an easy thing to do and how, as a result, national curricula are advanced on the basis of false information. Thus, in conclusion, the answer to the question about what the group participants would have liked to add to the Profile points to some of the systemic characteristics in Belarus education. This particularly concerns the post-Soviet nature of education administration and evaluation, which is why the group constantly returns to their perceived need for methodological clarification and development.

In answer to if and how their view of the concept of knowledge has changed, the group wants to focus on the terms competencies and competence learning. They submit that school in Belarus for the most part is about learning facts and testing fact retention among pupils. Adding to that, they lament the fact that children in Belarus are laden with such heavy curricula and have so much learning by heart to do, that it is becoming a national health problem. “Our students never read novels, since they are not allowed to in school and are too tired to do it at home!” Another reinforced this point: “It is all papers, papers, and control!” At this juncture, the discussion gets very emotional and the general consensus is that teachers today feel sorry for the

kids at school. For the most part, teachers are required to pump out facts and figures while regarding pupils as empty vessels to be filled with factual knowledge. Importantly, this methodology is underpinned by control mechanisms from the top and competitive evaluations. The group agrees that it is interesting how Soviet-style control mechanisms and ideas about learning have not only survived but, interestingly, been integrated with ideas about school autonomy and competition.

The combination of Soviet-style administration and control on the one hand, and autonomous competition on the other is lethal, according to the group. This is why they feel that every teacher in Belarus is currently fighting a battle uphill for a more individualizing and competence based view of education. Teachers, they say, know about how competence thinking is necessary in education. They can all more or less feel it after a few years on the job. “Facts belong to the worlds of religion and politics”, says one participant in the group half-jokingly, and receives nods and smiles from the others. For the record, however, the group wishes to clarify that they think that their own sentiments on this issue are shared by the majority of teachers and a lot of school administrators in Belarus. Teachers, and by extension pupils, are forced to work according to curricula that completely substitute reflection and perspectives for quantities of fact retention. The group participants are sad to have to agree that school curricula in Belarus today are simply too massive for either pupils or teachers to find the time to pause and reflect upon what it is they are learning, how, and why.

Ultimately, the group reached a consensus on the overall positive impact of The Profile. It is agreed that both as an academic experience and as a source of new ideas and fresh thinking about education and school leadership in Belarus, the Profile has made a lot of difference. Eight years in retrospect, the group participants also see how it has impacted their individual career choices and the ways in which they go about practical work in education. The group is still wary of the many problems and pitfalls that remaining in post-Soviet politics and administration in Belarus. After all, they think that opportunities for international cooperation in a practical sense, as in the case of the Profile, aimed at concrete leadership and teaching tools and a joint publication, are few and far between for Belarus educators. Despite this generally gloomy outlook on world and European affairs, however, they wish to emphasize that individuals and small groups can make a difference and how they feel that this is what they have been doing in Belorussian education for a number of years now. By way of conclusion, they wish to send a message to educators in other countries not to invest too much confidence in rigorous competition and control models, regardless of whether these are cloaked in pluralistic parlance, or not. It is, they say, the safest route to losing democracy.

### **Lessons Learned About School Leadership Development from the Western Assistance Programs in Belarus**

Instead of drawing out some conclusions we would like to finish this chapter with reflections in the form of ten reflection points from our different experiences. Our first reflection is that at the core of the all the activities stands a person, Dr. Zagoumenov from Minsk.

- A champion or champions within the country where technical assistance is being provided greatly facilitates efforts and supports continuity of interventions over time.

- Democratically determined, mutually agreed upon technical assistance goals between the Western providers and the recipients enhances the acceptability and implementation of those goals.
- Educator exchange and participation in Western grant programs that focused on school leadership development brought prestige and resources to the participants that allowed them to become more influential in their schools or institutions.
- Educator exchange and participation in Western programs created new visions about what democratic school leadership could be.
- Participation in international conferences led to new contacts that often led to the next technical assistance program.
- Successful initial technical assistance efforts focused on exposing participants to and providing them with Western literature on school leadership development.
- A second type of successful initial technical assistance effort focused on providing participants with access to the world-wide web in order to facilitate contact with Western experts and to keep abreast of new developments in democratic school leadership initiatives.
- Programs where democratic teaching and leadership techniques were modeled by Western experts provided behavior examples of the types of interventions to be emulated.
- School leadership in Belarus moved from knowledge-based education towards competency-based education and developed new school accreditation standards based international models, e.g. the Bologna and PISA standards for graduation and achievement respectively.
- Developing an internal network of like-minded supporters for democratic school reform efforts within Belarus provided for continuity of intervention efforts.

Finally, to be active in projects like these described above also gives back a lot to the Western experts. We have to think one more time about things we take for granted when they shall be explained and argued for as parts of something that can be called best practice.

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