



REFORMING
ECONOMICS
AND
ECONOMICS
TEACHING
IN THE
TRANSITION
ECONOMIES

From Marx to Markets in the Classroom

Edited by

Michael Watts and William B. Walstad

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6. Economics Instruction in Belarus

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The Republic of Belarus borders Russia, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland. It declared its independence on 27 July 1990, and took its first step towards the establishment of a democratic system of government through the adoption of a new constitution on 15 March 1994. That much of its history during the transition period is generally in line with other European nations that were part of the former Soviet Union. From that point on, however, the Belarusian experience is unique.

In 1995, President Alexander Lukashenko moved the country back toward his version of market socialism. His powers to direct the economy were greatly expanded in a national referendum that modified the constitution in November of 1996. Since then he has reimposed administrative controls over prices (including foreign exchange rates) and subjected private businesses to numerous regulations and controls – some imposed retroactively – including frequent and rigorous inspections, and prohibitions of many previously legal practices.

Politically, Belarus not only maintains formal economic and political connections with Russia, but has occasionally discussed the possibility of a formal reunion. Generally, the structure and pace of its economic reforms is much closer to what has occurred in Russia than the reforms implemented by its neighbors to the West and North, due largely to what has been called its 'self-isolation' from US and European market economies. All of this has, predictably, limited western investment in the country. Two poor harvests in 1998 and 1999 made the situation even worse, as have persistent trade deficits. GDP per capita fell from an estimated \$3,500 in 1993 to \$2,180 in 1998. The population fell from 10.4 million in 1993 to just under 10 million in 2000 (World Bank, 2000).

The educational system in Belarus also continues to reflect a strong influence from Russian practices, philosophy, and ideology. It is a very large system – at the beginning of the 1998-99 school year it included 4,500 pre-school institutions, 4,783 elementary and secondary schools, 249 vocational schools, 151 state special secondary schools, 57 state and private¹ higher educational institutions, and over 100 skill improvement and retraining institutions. Over 2.1 million students and about 200,000 teachers attended or worked in these schools, excluding the retraining institutes. Overall, education employs about 400,000 workers, representing about 10 percent of total employment in the Republic (UNESCO, 2000).

I. ECONOMICS IN THE COMPULSORY CURRICULUM

General education is delivered in three stages: primary education (four years, grades 1-4), basic education (five years, grades 5-9), and general secondary education (two years, grades 10 and 11). As in most former republics of the Soviet Union, the quality of precollege education in Belarus is generally high and meets or exceeds international standards in many areas, especially math and natural sciences. However, it has three notable weaknesses that were also inherited from the Soviet era. These problems play a crucial role in current efforts to develop and deliver economic education in the nation's schools.

First, students are overloaded with required courses and homework. All students in a school district take the same courses, and almost all districts in the nation offer courses in the same basic disciplines, including mathematics, chemistry, biology, physics, geography, history, literature (mostly Russian and Belarusian), foreign languages, and a few other disciplines. Usually the total number of disciplines taught in a school system is between 24 and 27. Almost all of the disciplines are compulsory, and every teacher treats his or her subject as a major requirement in the curriculum. High school students who are interested in humanities and plan to major in fields such as literature, history, or economics after graduation have to study chemistry, biology, and physics as if they planned to be future chemists, physicists, or biologists. This course overload is a holdover from the cold war period, when every Soviet student had to be well prepared in these 'strategic' subjects.

Second, secondary humanities and social sciences courses, including economics, are still treated as an important part of the state ideological system. Many textbooks are still based on Marxist-Leninist methodology, in spite of the fact that officially students are to receive instruction on 'humanistic values.' This ideological bias is not surprising in a country that continues to celebrate 7 November – the anniversary of the 'Great October Socialist Revolution' – as a major holiday, and where the president decides which textbooks on Belarusian history are right or wrong.

Third, economics was never a separate discipline in the general secondary schools during the Soviet era. Some elements of economics from the Marxist perspective were, however, included in humanities courses on Man and Society, world history, the history of Belarus, and geography. Today, economics is still not a compulsory subject in the secondary schools. In grades 10-11, however, students study such topics as production, the national standard of living, property rights, the distribution of income, the market and its role in the development of society, monopoly, competition, and the role of the government in the Man and Society course.

Some positive changes occurred in the early 1990s, due to a high demand from the emerging market economy for economists and lawyers. Private colleges and universities offering just two majors, business and law, grew like mushrooms.

These changes led to a rising demand for basic economic education from high school students who planned to enter these colleges and universities.

In 1992-93 the Ministry of Education allowed general secondary schools to offer special economics and businesses classes, and adopted the following list of approved course titles for those classes: introduction to economics, principles of entrepreneurship, basic secretarial training, economic geography of the world, economic geography of Belarus, mathematics, and informatics (information systems). By 1996, 135 of these classes with a total enrollment of 6,505 students were registered by elementary and secondary schools across the nation – a significant but relatively small start, compared to the national total of nearly 5,000 schools at these grade levels. Looking at the distribution of those student enrollments, 156 students were in grades 1-4, 3,013 in grades 5-9, and 3,336 in grades 10-11 (Plotnitskii et al., 1997, p. 6).²

Under the 1992-93 Ministry plan, general secondary schools were also allowed to offer economic subjects (principles of entrepreneurship and introduction to economics) as elective courses. By the end of 1996 there were 370 of these classes in grades 8-11, enrolling 8,425 students.

In 1998 the Ministry of Education adopted an elective course with 136 hours of instruction (68 hours in grades 8-9 and 68 hours in grades 10-11), titled *Introduction to Economics*. This program was revised in 2000, retitled as *Principles of Economics and Entrepreneurship* and scaled back to 102 hours of instruction. Schools are allowed to increase or decrease these hours, which means teachers now have some flexibility in developing and using their own course outline and materials. These changes, however, must be approved by the regional teachers' retraining institutes that offer courses and training programs that educators are required to periodically complete to keep their jobs as teachers or administrators.

One broader initiative was initially proposed in 1996 when, in cooperation and with financial support from the Belarus Soros Foundation (BSF), the Ministry of Education started to develop state standards in high school economics. Unfortunately, shortly thereafter the Belarusian national government banned the Soros Foundation due to political and ideological disagreements with the president of the BSF and with George Soros himself. Without the organizational and financial support of the BSF, national economic standards have still not been developed.

In another initiative launched in 1996, staff members from the Ministry of Education, a group of professors from Belarus State University (BSU) and Belarus State Economic University (BSEU), and members of some non-government associations, developed ideas for a new concept of economic education in the nation's elementary and secondary schools. The main goal was to incorporate economics instruction in the curriculum at all three levels of the elementary and secondary schools. It was claimed that this new approach would provide students with more economic knowledge at an earlier age, be based on international standards, and help students understand the real economy³ (Plotnitskii et al., 1997).

The proponents of this approach argued for the adoption of four key principles for economic education at the precollege level. It should: (1) become an essential part of secondary education; (2) prepare all students to work and live in the newly emerging market environment (not just a priority for special groups of students, such as those who attend special schools, gymnasiums, or lyceums); (3) begin in the primary schools and continue in the second and third levels of general secondary education; and (4) be both complex and realistic, with classwork supported by extracurricular activities that provide students real life experience in the fields of production and business.

It was further argued that these principles could be realized by introducing economic terms and topics in the syllabuses of the other compulsory social studies subjects. This objective could also be achieved by offering optional classes on economics, which students could choose in accordance with their interests, and by including special classes on economics and economics courses as a required part of the curriculum for students in grades 1-11 or 8-11.

The planning group then suggested the following goals and content breakdowns for economic education in the four stages of Belarusian elementary and secondary schooling. In preschool the main objective is to give children a basic understanding about people's roles in the economy as workers and consumers, and to introduce basic economic terminology connected with life experiences. For example, at this stage children would be introduced to such concepts as a person, worker, consumer, wants, money, personal budgets, and saving.

In elementary schools (grades 1-3), students are introduced to the basic concept of each person's role in his or her family and society, and shown how certain economic concepts can be applied in real life using real-world examples. Here children become familiar with such concepts as a family and its wants, the different types of jobs performed within families, the relationship between work and the fulfillment of a family's wants, what society is, and why citizens are responsible for the economic welfare of their society. They also learn what firms and enterprises are, and what types of enterprises exist.

The principal objective for grades 4-9 is to prepare students to make careful and deliberate economic decisions. Students learn the basic principles of what economics systems are, how they operate, and how the Belarusian economic system and the domestic economy function. They begin to see and use economic analysis, and gain some understanding of entrepreneurship and the basics of operating a business.

The secondary level (grades 10-11) is the final stage of forming students' understanding of economics and the economy. Students study complex problems related to the development of various social and economic processes in society. In other words, at this stage a pre-professional competence of the students is to be achieved, which prepares a student to function in society or in some cases to pursue professional levels of training in economics and business.

This proposed structure represented a giant step forward from the existing forms of economic education in Belarus. Many features of the plan are based on curriculum ideas that are often proposed, although not always achieved, in the United States. That is not surprising because some of those involved in developing the concept proposal were familiar with US standards and practices in the field of economic education, and had been participants in several international seminars and conferences.

The program has not yet been officially adopted in Belarus, however, for several reasons. Perhaps the two major obstacles are the lack of funds in the state budget to launch such a major project, and the political resistance of many Belarusian government officials to adopting market reforms. At present, only some schools in the country are trying to implement some principles of the overall concept, in collaboration and with sponsorship from the economics departments at universities in their regions. As long as the complete program is not adopted, each teacher is able to decide what questions, topics, and concepts are to be included in the curriculum, and what questions are not important. That much flexibility is not always a good thing, particularly given the peculiar history of teaching economics in Belarus and the other republics that were part of the Soviet Union.

II. VOLUNTARY AND ELECTIVE PROGRAMS IN ECONOMICS

As things stand today there is not likely to be widespread and routine inclusion of economics in the nation's school curriculum in the near future. Instead, the main avenue for introducing economics in the secondary schools is through optional courses and programs. Currently there are two basic approaches for that kind of coursework, extracurricular classes and classes of 'labor education.'

Extracurricular Classes

Students can sign up for extracurricular classes in economics in the same way they do for sports, dancing, music, etc. These programs in economics are popular among high school students, but there are important limits to their scope and reach. First, there must be a teacher in the school who is willing and able to teach the elective economics class, and often that does not happen because pedagogical universities in Belarus do not prepare secondary school teachers of economics. Also, the salary of Belarusian teachers is extremely low. In September of 2000 the average monthly salary in education was 44,000 Belarusian rubles, which was equal to \$40. The relative wage for teachers was 53.4 percent of the average industrial wage. Moreover, to get these wages teachers had to work on average 31 percent overtime (Skuratovitch, 2000). That leaves teachers very little time or energy to prepare special courses for extracurricular activities.

There were several attempts to organize extracurricular economics classes on a commercial basis (meaning that students would pay several dollars a month for the classes). This format would create some financial incentives for teachers, but the Ministry of Education usually opposed these arrangements. And actually, almost all commercial activity in the country meets with considerable resistance from state officials.

The most successful example of extracurricular economic education is the Youth School of Business, *Velesitchi*, which was established in 1990 and sponsored by the Belarusian Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers. During the past 11 years nearly 1,500 students in grades 10-11, from Minsk and surrounding regions, graduated from the school. With strong financial and organizational support from the Union the school offered a wide range of classes, including Principles of a Market Economy, Introduction to Entrepreneurship, Principles of Management and Marketing, Financial Management of the Enterprise, Principles of Accounting, and an Introduction to International Business. The school has received extensive publicity in the educational media because of its innovative approach to economic and business education.

Another successful educational organization, the Youth Entrepreneurship Support and Development Center,⁴ organized in 1996 by 17 teachers, offers similar programs teaching economic concepts and other kinds of business courses. The Department of Education of the Minsk Executive City Committee finances some of their programs, but grants and charitable donations sponsor most of the activities. The Center not only organizes classes for students, but also provides seminars for teachers on active methods of teaching and conducts a student competition called 'Stairway to Success.' It also organizes student teams to participate in a US-based stock market game and competition.

Labor Education

The second approach to offering optional courses on economics in general secondary education is quite new, emerging only over the past two to three years in classes called 'labor education.' These classes have been an essential part of the general curriculum since the Soviet era, but including economics concepts and coursework in these programs represents a radical departure from past practice. In these programs, students spend two to four hours a week in what are called educational-manufacturing guilds. These programs are similar to US programs in vocational education, and students receive training in basic skills for such crafts as carpentry, mechanics, and tailoring. Today the Ministry also allows these hours to be used for instruction in such disciplines as computer science, business, foreign languages, economics, and law. Each school has some flexibility to decide how to use this time, which creates a good opportunity to introduce economics in the curriculum. Once again, however, the main obstacle is that not every school has teachers who are trained in economics, and know how to include it in labor education courses.

One specialized program that works in this area was started in 1998 when the nongovernmental Institute of Parliamentarism and Entrepreneurship created a department of precollege education. The faculty members of this department teach courses on business English, basic economics, introduction to entrepreneurship, and introductory business, finance, and accounting. The audience for these courses is secondary school students from nine Minsk schools, using hours in the curriculum that were previously used for professional training. Currently this department offers 22 classes to 576 students.

III. TEACHER TRAINING IN ECONOMICS

A major obstacle to developing and expanding economic education in secondary schools is the lack of teachers who are prepared to teach economics. That problem is particularly severe in Belarus because universities and pedagogical institutes do not train future secondary school teachers of economics. There is only one department in the country, the Department of Economics at Belarus State University, which trains future educators. But this program does not address the problem of training secondary or elementary teachers because it is intended that graduates of this department will work at universities and colleges. At most there are 30 graduates a year from this program, which basically meets the demand for university economics instructors but certainly not the demand for economics instructors at the precollege level.

Teacher retraining institutes that updated content and pedagogy training for secondary instructors both during the Soviet period and today are not able to offer programs in economics due to their own lack of specialists in this field. That is not surprising because all retraining institutes are operated by the Ministry of Education and are supposed to deal with subjects that are included in the curriculum. Thus, there are retraining programs in history, biology, chemistry, and other major subjects, but it is administratively impossible to initiate a new retraining program until the institutes receive permission and funding from the Ministry. In 1999-2000 there were discussions in top educational circles on the question of who could potentially teach economics courses if the subject is included in the secondary curriculum as a compulsory discipline. Theoretically teachers of history, geography, information systems, or mathematics could provide the instruction. Most likely it would be geography teachers, which means that students of the geography departments of pedagogical universities should take economics as a second major. The question then becomes who at the retraining institutes will retrain the current (and future) geography teachers? This vicious circle must be broken if economics is adopted as a compulsory discipline.

Several years ago the National Institute of Education (NIE) in Minsk started a master's program for secondary school teachers who were teaching economic theory and who wanted to improve their knowledge of economics. From 1997-2001 there were 53 graduates of this program. But all education programs at

public universities and institutes in Belarus are under the control of the Ministry of Education, and in 2001 the NIE program in economics was cancelled, apparently because the Ministry decided it was not important as long as economics was not added to the curriculum as a compulsory discipline.

Fortunately this gap in the state retraining system has been partly filled by nongovernmental initiatives. There are two major institutions that deal with secondary economics instruction in Belarus: Junior Achievement and the Belarusian Economics Association.

IV. JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT IN BELARUS

In 1991-92, 16 Belarusian teachers interested in economic education took part in retraining seminars in Moscow that were organized by Junior Achievement (JA). In 1994, 11 graduates of that program established the Belarusian headquarters for Junior Achievement. In August of that year the Belarusian Ministry of Justice registered the organization and the Ministry of Education offered its support to the newly established organization.

The educational goals for JA are to organize retraining programs for school teachers in JA programs, and to translate, adapt, and update JA teaching materials developed in the United States for Belarus. From the outset the leaders of this program were interested in introducing economic education at all grade levels, following the JA model in the United States. The retraining program included three basic segments: Elementary School (grades 0-6), Project Business (grades 7-9), and Applied Economics (grades 10-11).

The JA retraining programs for teachers are structured in five stages. Stage 1 is a five-day training seminar, with participants receiving a temporary certificate to begin teaching a JA economics class. Stage 2 is a two-day pedagogical conference, after which permanent certificates are awarded. Stage 3 is a series of monthly retraining seminars, focusing on a different topic each month. Stage 4 is a five-day training program for trainers who then train other teachers of JA programs. Stage 5 training is provided by specialists in economics, management, and marketing – these are typically sessions for all JA teachers conducted by professors from BSEU and some other institutions.

With this limited instruction in economics teachers start offering JA courses in their schools, which are annually registered by JA. Since 1991, JA reports that 447 teachers have attended training sessions and 975 classes have been offered in Belarusian schools, enrolling a total of 26,478 students. In recent years JA in Belarus has sharply reduced its activities, mainly due to a lack of funding. Several attempts have been made to invite teachers to training programs on a tuition basis, but those attempts have failed because teachers in Belarus simply do not have money to pay for courses.

Economic ‘Olympiads’

JA Headquarters did initiate the first student competition in economics in Belarus. Their first ‘Forum’ took place in 1994 with 16 teams from Belarus, one from Lithuania, and one from Russia. The second Forum attracted 32 teams from all six regions of Belarus. JA helped the Ministry of Education organize the first national Olympiad in economics in 1996, in cooperation with BSEU. The winners of the Olympiad were admitted to BSEU without taking the customary admission exams.

In December 1997 the Ministry issued an official document to specify the rules for national Olympiads in economics and management. Since then Olympiads have taken place every year. The official recognition for these contests demonstrates that economics has begun to play an important role in Belarusian secondary education. That recognition is really quite remarkable, as previously Olympiads only took place in compulsory subjects.

The main goals of the economics Olympiads are to increase students’ knowledge of economics and help students choose their future professions; identify the most talented secondary school students and interest them in enrolling in special economics classes and pursuing careers in economics; involve more scientists, students, Ph.D. students, and professors in the development of a higher level of economic education for the secondary level; and to more closely integrate secondary and higher education.

The Olympiads are organized in four stages: school, city, region, and national. The final stage includes competitions in principles of economics, marketing, accounting, computer modeling in economics and management, and business projects of school companies.

The winners of the Olympiads continue to receive special privileges in entering BSEU. Belarus State University also offered an Olympiad in 2000, following the official rules established by the Ministry but featuring a different structure. The first round of this state competition was conducted on an individual basis. An economics problem was published in a newspaper, which secondary school students could answer by correspondence. There were 362 responses coming from all over Belarus, although nearly half came from Minsk. Then the second and third rounds were held on the premises of the economics department of BSU. Of 70 participants in the third round, 10 were recognized as winners and awarded full tuition waivers to study in the BSU economics department.

V. THE BELARUSIAN ECONOMICS ASSOCIATION

The other national organization that conducts teacher training programs in Belarus – and currently the only group offering a comprehensive series of teacher training programs in economics – is the Belarusian Economics Association (BEA). This group grew out of several different international retraining programs and continues to cooperate with several international programs and organizations.

The Economic Development Institute (EDI) of the World Bank launched its retraining program to provide instruction on basic principles and institutions in a market economy for government officials from the economic ministries of the former Soviet Union. Teams of professors from these nations were invited to Washington DC to attend sessions offered by economists at the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, providing intensive instruction on teaching micro- and macroeconomics. Retraining centers at the EDI offices in these countries were created in 1993. From 1993-97, the Belarus EDI center organized 20 three-week intensive retraining seminars in microeconomics, macroeconomics, and the major macroeconomic policy areas for approximately 600 participants from the key economic ministries.

In 1994 the Belarusian Economics Association (BEA) was formed as a nongovernmental, nonprofit organization, following the EDI model and philosophy. The founders of BEA were Belarusian economists, managers, and professors of economics.⁵ The main purpose of the Association is the promotion of a liberal market economy in Belarus. The Association intends to take part in the creation of an information environment that will permit easier and better decision-making by officials, businesspeople, and consumers. The principal areas of Association activities are offering and supporting high quality continuing education and retraining programs for government officials, university professors, high school teachers, and students. Today there are approximately 200 members of the BEA.

VI. THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND JOINT PROGRAMS WITH BEA

The US National Council on Economic Education (NCEE) has conducted training programs for teachers and teacher trainers throughout eastern and central Europe and the former Soviet Union since 1992. Its first 'demonstration workshop' for teachers in Belarus was conducted in Minsk in January 1995.

In spring 1995 the Belarus Soros Foundation organized a joint meeting of JA and the BEA to determine who could help them offer a retraining program for school teachers. The initial suggestion was to hold an NCEE-type workshop and have JA incorporate NCEE materials into their retraining program. The BEA representatives argued that was premature for two reasons: first, JA did not have instructors who were familiar with the NCEE's materials; and more important, they lacked instructors who were familiar with the market economy and western economics.

As noted earlier, the JA basic training program is very short, and covers a relatively small number of topics, limited to the coverage in the JA materials. The most valuable aspects of the JA program in Belarus was that, through their activities, they advertised economic courses among school teachers, helped teachers organize economics courses at the secondary level, and kept a record of

where those courses were taught, with the names of instructors and numbers of students enrolled. But frankly, what economics was actually taught in those classes, given the limited training and materials provided to teachers, is open to some question. Certainly some JA instructors have been found to have serious gaps in their training and understanding of basic economic principles. Given the high general standards of education in Belarusian schools, among both teachers and students, secondary teachers should go through an intensive retraining program in university economics to prepare them to teach good economics courses. They also require training in non-lecture, active-learning strategies such as games, simulations, and role playing.

The BEA offered to create a retraining system for up to 200 secondary teachers and professors who taught in secondary schools on a part-time basis. In these programs, participants covered the principles of microeconomics and macroeconomics using the standard curriculum of any major American university. The program was offered in two phases: three two- or three-week workshops in basic economics in phase one, and in phase two three eight-day workshops on methods of teaching economics in secondary schools, featuring NCEE materials.

The Belarus Soros Foundation provided a three-year grant to the BEA to launch the program. These programs were offered in cooperation with JA, which helped to identify almost half of the participants – most of whom were already registered as teaching economics classes. While preparations for these programs were being made all of the BEA and JA instructors for these programs took part in the NCEE's Training of Trainers Program in 1996-97.

By the middle of 1997, 22 workshops on basic economics had been conducted for approximately 200 participants, completing the first phase of the program. Overall, approximately half of the participants in these programs taught at general secondary schools, about a fourth were secondary teachers in special schools or programs, and the remaining fourth were university professors who also taught secondary classes.

The second (pedagogy) phase was about to begin in 1997, using NCEE materials. The Belarus Soros Foundation was expelled at that time, however, which meant that this retraining program was interrupted for two years. During those two years several additional BEA professors attended the NCEE Training of Trainers seminars, bringing the total number of trainers to 28 during the period 1996-2001.

BEA conducted its own training of trainers program (jointly organized and partly funded by the NCEE) using NCEE materials and syllabuses for 39 participants from Belarus in 1999-2000. In 2001 it conducted a series of two workshops for 30 secondary school teachers, taught by the best graduates of the BEA program. BEA has also hosted seven of the NCEE's workshops for international participants, including 'Training of Trainers' and 'Elementary Economic Education' programs for participants from over 20 nations, which are taught in Russian and English.

Through these training programs BEA and its cooperating organizations have been able to achieve five outcomes: 1) influence the economics curriculum in Belarusian universities and secondary schools; 2) raise the level of economic understanding of hundreds of instructors at these schools; 3) replace old, Soviet-style textbooks and instructional materials with teaching materials developed by the NCEE and other US organizations; 4) demonstrate to instructors how to modify western materials to include Belarusian examples and institutions; and 5) convince teachers to share these materials and new instructional approaches with their colleagues. The 'multiplier effect' of working with teachers who will also train their colleagues is actually the key idea behind all of the BEA and NCEE programs. The long-term goal of these programs is to establish local centers for economic education in all regions of the country.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Any assessment of economic education reforms in Belarus over the past decade must be made in light of the political and ideological climate in Belarus. Although President Lukashenko has adopted some of the public rhetoric of market reforms, he continues to employ Soviet methods of managing the economy. While he claims that it is possible to build a system of market socialism his policies put far more emphasis on socialism than on markets.

Politically Lukashenko is even more hostile to reforms. In fact, his official slogan is 'The West is evil.' He acts on that slogan, and as a result market reforms in Belarus have been very slow. Similarly, reforms of economic education in Belarus have been slowed by the lack of support from government agencies and policy makers, and at times by outright hostility (most notably the expulsion of the Belarusian Soros Foundation).

The Ministry of Education's major achievement in economic education reforms and innovations is probably its role in supporting student Olympiads. Unfortunately, whenever the Ministry explores initiatives in economic education, it usually affiliates with old-line, Soviet-style professors of political economy. These professors are not only out of date in terms of their economic theory, their pedagogy is also based on standard Soviet practice. Most have never used active methods of teaching in their own classrooms.

Fortunately for the individual teachers and organizations that want to promote market-based economic education, the main language of instruction in Belarus schools is Russian. That allows teachers to use textbooks and other teaching materials published in Russia to promote economic education reforms in that nation. The ministry thus far has not objected to that because, as the President is fond of saying, 'Russia is good.'

Through programs that were conducted by the BEA and NCEE, and often with the active support of various JA staff members as well, it has been possible over the past five years to get better instructional materials in the hands of almost

all Belarusian teachers who are currently teaching secondary economics courses or units. This outcome is another example of the multiplier effect at work, because many of these teachers have still not had direct training in using the materials. But almost all of the teachers are in contact with at least one or more colleagues who have received the training and the materials.

There is a clear need for continuing support from international organizations in reforming economic instruction in Belarus, given the legal restrictions imposed on organizations that would otherwise fund more such programs in the nation, and the limited support available in this area from the Ministry of Education. The demand for such programs may well skyrocket when changes eventually occur in the political climate and/or the decision is made to make economics a compulsory subject in the secondary school curriculum. But without continuing support from the United States and other nations these reforms can not yet sustain themselves in Belarus.

Joint programs with US faculty have been especially beneficial for introducing new content and materials and for creating links between teachers in Belarus and US professors. This has been enormously important in breaking down negative stereotypes about the West and market economics – especially as it is practiced in the United States – which were strongly cultivated by many Belarusian education agencies and public officials.

The last decade of economic education initiatives in Belarus has been unique in many respects, but in other ways quite representative of events in the other former Soviet republics. The limited pace and sometimes outright hostility towards market reforms and reformers has certainly created special challenges. Nevertheless, strong support from faculty members at the leading university in the nation, and cooperation involving BEA, the NCEE, JA, and Soros Foundation offices, has resulted in an extremely high and comprehensive level of training programs that have been delivered to a large number of teachers. For exactly the same reasons, the future of economic education in Belarus is bright in some respects but extremely uncertain in others.

It is clear that the effects of what has been accomplished so far will be enduring, as hundreds of teachers and thousands of students are involved in courses that could not have been offered in any school in Belarus just a decade ago. That in itself is reason for hope and considerable pride of accomplishment.

NOTES

1. The official term used in government reports is 'nonstate' schools.
2. The chief of the group that wrote this report, M. Plotnitskii, is a vice-rector of BSEU. A. Uloga is responsible for the secondary economic education at the Ministry of Education. V. Starikov is the head of Junior Achievement in Belarus. S. Shcherbakova and A. Koval'chouk are also from JA, and were participants in the NCEE Trainer of Trainers program in 1996-97.
3. For a review of the US research literature on the effects of K-12 'infusion' approaches vs. separate high school courses on economics, see Walstad (1992) and Watts (1991).

4. The two principal organizers were N. Shappo and E. Nesterchouk, both participants in the NCEE Trainer of Trainers program that is described in a later section.
5. Alexander Kovzik has served as the President of the BEA since its formation. Anatoli Kovalenko is an Executive Director of the BEA, and Mikhael Chepikov is the BEA's General Accountant.

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