

EVALUATING HIGHER EDUCATION IN UKRAINE FOR CROSS-CULTURAL TEACHERS

Written by Mike Manna; Vice-President of Youth Ministry International; Director,
National Center for Youth Ministry, Kiev Theological Seminary (October, 2005)

INTRODUCTION

Foreign missionaries have been teaching in Bible colleges and seminaries for the past several years in Ukraine. Their students have been educated through the Ukrainian school system and come to these colleges with many cultural assumptions of what formal education looks like. The Americans also come with their preconceived notions of education as well. It is important that both the teachers and the students understand these differences. The focus of this limited research is to look at some of the characteristics of formal education in Ukraine.

Some people have said that the educational system in Ukraine is at a crisis point. The country has made many reforms since it left the Soviet Union in 1991, but the educational system has seen little change. Anastasia Shchepetova, a university student in Kiev who also studied in the states, said, "Our life and values have changed rapidly over the past 10 years, but our schools are still the same. Poor teachers produce poorly educated children. Nowadays all the parents want their children to get a higher education. It is prestigious to have it. But they never realized that after [their child] gets a diploma -- Ukraine will gain one more unemployed specialist and their family will gain one more parasite" (Shchepetova, 2003). This pessimistic attitude is probably grounded in reality.

Formal education is in transition in Ukraine. It has only been in the last 10 years in which Western educational theories have been translated into Russian and

considered in the Ukrainian context. One of the most prevalent theories of how students learn is Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory.

MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES AND UKRAINIAN EDUCATION

Gardner suggested that there are eight different categories or "intelligences" that are found in people (Armstrong 2000: 1). One way of evaluating the explicit curriculum of an educational system is to look at which "intelligences" are prevalent within the university curriculum. Lena Yakim is a translator in Kiev who has had experience translating educational classes which included Gardner's theories. She graduated from high school in 1996 in Zolotonosha, a city two hours South of Kiev. She went on to get her Teaching Degree in Home Economics and Technical Design (Bachelors equivalent) from Dragomanov Kiev Pedagogical University. This school is considered the top Teachers' College in Ukraine. She attended the university from 1996-2001 for 5,504 hours of class time. Yakim has completed an evaluation of her own experiences during her university education to determine which of the Multiple Intelligences are addressed in Ukrainian formal education. It is not possible to make a sweeping generalization of the entire Ukrainian education system with this evaluation, but this degree program is similar to many other degrees offered in several universities around the country.

Linguistic Intelligence

In Ukraine, all students are pressured to study the Ukrainian language as well as other foreign languages. The foreign languages which are stressed to be learned are

English, Russian, German, French and Spanish. During the High School years, some students have the choice of going to a special school which focuses on foreign languages. In large cities, at the beginning of the ninth grade year, students much choose a track of study similar to a major. One of the tracks offered is always languages. At the high school and at the university level, speech classes are not offered, although education degrees have several teaching courses. An educational degree in Yakim's field of study at the Kiev Pedagogical University includes the following courses in the Linguistics Intelligence:

- History of Education (74 hours)
- Educational Science (140 hours)
- Basics of Educational Creativity (94 hours)
- Styles of Teaching (85 hours)
- Styles of Teaching in Home Economics and Technical Design (51 hours)
- Ukrainian & Foreign Culture (108 hours)
- Business Ukrainian Language (94 hours)
- English (186 hours)
- Ukrainian History (140 hours)
- Methods of Teaching Home Economics (238 hours)

Based on this course work, this degree received 1210 hours of class time in the linguistics intelligence sphere or 22% of the total class time (Lena Yakim, personal communication, October 25, 2005).

Linguistics is vital to understanding the culture for the cross-cultural teacher. Wolcott wrote, "Each of us must 'gropingly discover' the unexplicated rules of our language through deriving a grammar for at least one of the languages spoken around us" (1982:93).

Logical/Mathematical Intelligence

Students are pressured very highly to do well in mathematical subjects in Ukraine. Yakim said, “If you have a bad grade in math, you are considered a loser” (Lena Yakim, personal communication, October 25, 2005). During the high school years, this area of intelligence seems to have equal importance to linguistics. At the university level, certain specializations have a great deal of math courses. An educational degree at the Kiev Pedagogical University has a much larger concentration of courses in the Logical/Mathematical Intelligence than a typical educational degree in the States. Courses include:

- Higher mathematics (170 hours)
- Physics (221 hours)
- Chemistry (68 hours)
- Technical Mechanics (68 hours)
- New Informational Technologies (70 hours)
- Electrical Engineering (120 hours)
- History of Engineering (71 hours)
- Logistics (48 hours)
- Material-Working Machinery – Math/Physics course (102 hours)
- Power Machinery – Math/Physics course (168 hours)

This degree received 1106 hours of class time in the logical/mathematical intelligence sphere or 20% of the total class time (Lena Yakim, personal communication, October 25, 2005).

Spatial Intelligence

This intelligence is “the ability to perceive the visual-spatial world accurately (e.g., as a hunter, scout, or guide) and to perform transformations on those perceptions (e.g., as an interior decorator, architect, artist, or inventor)” (Armstrong 2000:2). Yakim claimed that she does not remember any high school education in this

area of intelligence. During the elementary school years, creativity and drawing is taught, but all of these classes were completed by the end of middle school. A few classes in this area are taught at the university, but it is rare as well. The education degree at the Pedagogical University includes the following classes:

- Descriptive Geometry (170 hours)
- Design (51 hours)
- Practical Drawing (68 hours)
- Clothing Design (136 hours)

The total concentration of formal education for spatial intelligence is 425 class hours and only makes up 8% of the total class time (Lena Yakim, personal communication, October 25, 2005).

Bodily/Kinesthetic Intelligence

In Ukraine, physical education is required from the earliest grade in elementary school through the third year at the university. Physical education is taught for the purpose of staying fit and healthy. Competitive sports are rare. Sports are only offered in the high school years, but it usually not offered as a school program. It is also possible to have dancing classes, but this would also be offered as a specialized program after school. The university's requirements for physical education are 324 hours of class time in the first three years. In the winter this consists of swimming, and during the warmer months of the year, the hours are spent at a local stadium for track and field events. Some universities specialize in training athletes and would have a great deal more time in this intelligence area.

In Ukraine, practical training is seen as very important. Several courses fit into this intellect category as hands-on, practicum courses for the degree specialization. It

is possible that this degree has a greater amount of practical training than most. The following courses were part of this training:

- Techniques of Sewing (306 hours)
- Sewing Shop (204 hours)
- Pattern Design (136 hours)
- Techniques of Cooking (119 hours)
- Manual Art (136 hours)
- Technical Drawing Practicum (68 hours)

These courses with the Physical Education add up to a total of for 1293 hours of class time. The total time spent for courses related to Bodily/Kinesthetic Intelligence make up approximately 23% of the class time for this degree (Lena Yakim, personal communication, October 25, 2005).

Musical Intelligence

Ukrainian elementary school and middle school students are required to be in singing classes. Bands are also available, but they are not required. Music classes are no longer required for the general high school age student. During the high school and university years, students only take music classes if this has become their specialty. There are special schools for these music students. Music classes are reserved only for those students who specialize in this intelligence at the university level. For the general university population, including Yakim's education major, 0% of the class time was given for Musical Intelligence (Lena Yakim, personal communication, October 25, 2005).

Interpersonal Intelligence

Interpersonal Intelligence is “the ability to perceive and make distinction in the moods, intentions, motivations and feelings of other people” (Armstrong 2000:2). This intelligence can be difficult to evaluate in the explicit curriculum. There are also no group meetings at high school for school spirit or pep rallies that might encourage “a group of people to follow a certain line of action” (Armstrong). A general school assembly would be held if the whole school needed to do better at their studies. These general assemblies were often held once per month. This is an example of the group-oriented approach Ukraine takes towards its educational system.

At the university level, four courses are taught at the Kiev Pedagogical University which could be considered an Interpersonal Intelligence course. They include:

- Politics (108 hours)
- Ethics (48 hours)
- General Law (64 hours)
- Ukrainian Law (64 hours)

These account for 284 hours or 5% of the class time during the five-year degree program. There are no general assemblies held at the university level of education. The country, unlike the United States, has still not moved to a service-oriented economy, thus the need for Interpersonal Intelligence training has not yet been seen (Lena Yakim, personal communication, October 25, 2005).

Intrapersonal Intelligence

“This intelligence includes having an accurate picture of oneself (one’s strengths and limitations); awareness of inner moods, intentions, motivations, and desires; and the capacity for self-discipline, self-understanding, and self-esteem”

(Armstrong 2000:2). In Ukraine, there are no Psychology or Sociology courses at the high school level. According to Yakim, “The school in Ukraine never does anything for a student’s personal benefit – only for the sake of their studies. There is also a lot of pressure to succeed” (Lena Yakim, personal communication, October 25, 2005).

The idea that a teacher should help the student discover their own potential is not part of the Ukrainian education system. Yakim also commented that the schools “never teach us how to perceive ourselves. They don’t teach us about temperaments or personality differences. The old philosophy of the Soviet Union is still here which says that everyone is the same and that there are no differences” (Lena Yakim, personal communication, October 25, 2005).

At the university level, 404 hours are now given for classes which relate to this intelligence, including:

- Psychology (210 hours)
- Philosophy (140 hours)
- Religion (54 hours)

This total concentration of formal education makes up 7% of the total class time (Lena Yakim, personal communication, October 25, 2005).

Naturalist Intelligence

Gardner added this intelligence to the original seven intelligences on his list. He wrote, “Those valued human cognitions that I previously had to ignore or smuggle in under spatial or logical-mathematical intelligence deserve to be gathered together under a single, recognized rubric” (1999:52). In Ukraine, elementary, middle and high school students all have several classes about nature such as Biology. Children

are given different projects with nature at school; such as, taking care of animals, or taking care of plants in the classroom. *Internats*, or elementary schools for orphans and abandoned children, often have greenhouses for the students to learn gardening techniques.

At the university level, there is very little explicit curriculum in this area because a lot of the Naturalist Intelligence is part daily life in the culture. There is a great deal of training in the home, especially in the villages and small towns. The only course in this intelligence was Ecology for 54 hours, which is less than 1 % of explicit class time in the curriculum. (Lena Yakim, personal communication, October 25, 2005)

Summary

Through this example, the explicit curriculum shows that the three intelligence areas which are stressed are Bodily/Kinesthetic (23% of class time), Linguistic (22%), and Logical/Mathematical (20%). The two intelligence areas that do not appear to be part of the general, formal education are Naturalist (1%) and Musical (0%). In the Ukrainian culture, these Intelligences appear to be outside the realm of general education and are specialized degrees. The other three intelligences, Spatial (8%), Intrapersonal (7%) and Interpersonal (5%) only receive a small amount of attention in the university classroom.

Galina Maxeemetz taught for 30 years at Kiev's Shevchenko University, the most prestigious university in the country. As a language professor she examined this report and claimed that only a few universities in Ukraine are reading about

educational theories such as multiple intelligences. Only a few colleges desire to improve their educational system.

The universities in Ukraine are using the same curriculum which they used over 20 years ago. They are using the same books because they can't buy new ones. The professors are teaching the same material because they cannot afford to go for more training if they wanted to. But why should the teachers try to better themselves as teachers? There are no possibilities for extra finances or a better salary and their students don't care anyway. (Galina Maxeemetz, personal communication, October 26, 2005).

Maxeemetz said that many of the university directors in the country are involved in corruption and are stealing the students' tuition money. This money could be going into teachers' salaries or to improving the education at the school. "To sum up the problem in Ukraine you could say, if there is no money, there will be no desire to work" (Galina Maxeemetz, personal communication, October 26, 2005). There will also be very little desire to evaluate which intelligences are being addressed in the classroom, or how to improve the explicit curriculum.

IMPLICIT OR THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM IN UKRAINE

Very little research has been done concerning the implicit or hidden curriculum in Ukraine's educational system. Yet some generalizations can be made from observations and interviews.

Teach only by the book – Do not add or subtract

Ukraine boasts a strong tradition of higher education, and the Soviet educational system maintained high standards for educating (and indoctrinating) its youth. In theory, a schoolboy studying at a particular location in the USSR should have been able to pick up his

studies on the following day – in any other Soviet location – at the precise point where he had left off. (Dalton 2000:63)

Although the Ukrainian system is not as strict as the old Soviet system, many characteristics are the same. Yakim said, “High School classes are very boring. Everything is lectured according to the written curriculum. They are no additions and no subtractions” (Lena Yakim, personal communication, October 25, 2005). In one person’s estimation, over 90% of class time is spent in lectures.

Respect for the teacher must be shown at all times

When a guest or a teacher enters a classroom in Ukraine, all of the students stand up at their desks as a sign of respect. This tradition begins at the lowest grade and continues through the years at the university. If a question is asked by a student in the classroom, the student must raise their hand and stand up next to their desk. If a student does not stand up, it is disrespectful. (Galina Maxeemetz, personal communication, October 26, 2005)

Parents are responsible for the bad grades of their own kids

At regular parents’ meetings for elementary students, scores and grades are openly shared with the entire group. Students that are doing well are praised and those that are doing poorly are chastised publicly. Yakim said, “The parents whose kids are failing will be burning at the meeting. The implication is that if the students who are doing poorly – the parents are supposed to do a better job. Parents are partly blamed for the results of their kids” (Lena Yakim, personal communication, October 25, 2005). Parents are told to spend more time studying with their kids.

Good grades are vitally important!

Every year during the exam weeks at the universities, people hear of suicides committed by students who were worrying about getting good grades. At the university level, bribes are used to get the good grades from the teachers. (Galina Maxeemetz, personal communication, October 26, 2005)

Cheating and bribes are a normal part of education

Teachers sometimes encourage the students to write their own cheat sheets, but then they are told not to bring them to the exam. But cheating has become a normal part of life in the Ukrainian school. Many teachers look the other way now. Yakim commented, “If you don’t share your cheat sheets with someone else at the exam, you are the bad guy. You must share” (Lena Yakim, personal communication, October 25, 2005). Some missionaries have concluded incorrectly that the cheating was happening because of the group orientation in the culture, but the reasons for cheating probably stem more from the pressure to get good grades.

Paying administrators to get into college and giving bribes to the teachers in order to pass a course is also common. A recent news article reported that “... 32 percent of students in Kiev, the capital, said they had paid bribes at some point over the course of their studies, according to results of a poll taken in May 2004 by an independent center for sociopolitical research” (MacWilliams 2005:par.4).

Lingenfelter said, “One of the pedagogical benefits of experiential learning is that students must employ intelligences other than the linguistic and the mathematical, which are traditionally the focus of schooling” (2003:95). As seen in this explicit curriculum evaluation, practical training is very important in the Ukrainian education system. Lectures were only 50% of the actual class time for this degree. There was a great deal of experiential learning practiced in the classroom. This included hands-on training in design, the making of patterns, and actual fabrication (Lena Yakim, personal communication, October 25, 2005).

In the year 2000, the Great Lakes Consortium for International Development organized a three-country educators Globalization conference including teachers from Ukraine. Through an 8-day experiential learning event, educators from three very different countries learned how to develop lesson plans concerning the democratic process.

The three country participants reflected an interesting political and economic mix:

1. The United States: a developed country with a long tradition of democratic decision making;
2. Hungary: a country with a sophisticated economy that is eager to be part of the Western community and to push forward with market capitalism; and
3. Ukraine: a country struggling to re-establish its political identity and to develop a new relationship between its economy and its political structure (Kudow and Crawford 2001:84).

The result of this case study was that the educators from each of the countries not only grew in their knowledge of globalization, “but actually were able to practice democratic techniques and to apply them in the context of creating and teaching lessons” (Kudow and Crawford 2001:84). This is a good example of how experiential

learning is being modeled to teachers who can then put it to practice in the classroom. As experiential learning is used, more of the multiple intelligences can be reached.

Although Gardner advocated teaching to all the intelligences and increasing experiential learning in the classroom, he also promotes teaching the classical subjects. He said, “I advocate teaching those disciplines – history, science, the arts, and literature – that will present to students their culture’s image of what is true (and not true), beautiful (and not beautiful), ethical (and not ethical)” (Scherer 1999:13).

CONCLUSION

Every teacher has the difficult task of reaching his students. Each student has different needs and learns in different ways. The cross-cultural professor has the even harder task of taking into account the cultural differences he faces in the classroom. The first place to start is to consider the norm of formal education in his host country’s universities. Hopefully this evaluation will be a starting place.

Ukraine’s students are a special breed of students. In November and December of 2004, thousands of university students set up tents in downtown Kiev to stage the largest peaceful revolution the modern world has ever seen. Current President Yushchenko wrote about these students:

I congratulate the young generation of citizens that during hardship stood up for freedom and democracy of their country. I am proud of your courage, honor and faith in your own strength to struggle and to be victorious. Together with you I have gone through the difficult way of struggle. Along with you I stood on the Independence Square that has already become a symbol of the people’s will and courage.... We have won. The renewed Ukraine is full of the hopes for the best. We will be working together so that the hopes of Ukrainians become true. Your experience, your civic activities and

patriotism will be needed. I am fully convinced about it
(Yushchenko 2005:par.1,4)

CITED REFERENCES

- Armstrong, Thomas
2000 Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom. Alexandria, VA: Association for Curriculum and Development Publications.
- Dalton, Meredith
2000 Culture Shock! Ukraine. Portland, OR: Graphic Arts Center Publishing Company.
- Gardner, Howard
1999 Intelligence Reframed. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Kubow, Patricia K. and Crawford, Suzanne H.
2001 Building Global Learning Experiences: A Case Study of a Hungarian, Ukrainian, and American Educational Partnership. Higher Education in Europe, 26 (1). Retrieved October 27, 2005, from EBSCOhost/Academic Search Premier.
- Lingenfelter, Sherwood G. and Judith E.
2003 Teaching Cross-Culturally. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- MacWilliams, Bryon
2005 Ukraine Chief Assails Corrupt Admissions. Chronicle of Higher Education July 8, 2005. 51(44). Retrieved October 26, 2005, from EBSCOhost/Academic Search Premier.
- Scherer, Marge
1999 The Understanding Pathway: A Conversation with Howard Gardner. Educational Leadership. 57(3).
- Shchepetova, Anastasia
2003 U.S. vs. Ukraine Education. The Ukrainian Observer, Issue 190. Retrieved October 25, 2005 from <http://www.ukraine-observer.com/articles/190/250>.
- Wolcott, Harry
1982 The Anthropology of Learning. Anthropology and Educational Quarterly. 13(2).
- Yushchenko, Victor
2005 President of Ukraine Message to Pora. Retrieved October 28, 2005 from <http://pora.org.ua/en/content/view/768/2>.