

Chapter 8

Teaching Revolutions: Radical Andragogical Leadership in Mexico, Russia, and the USA

Mattius W. Rischard

University of Arizona, USA

ABSTRACT

The Russian and Mexican Revolutions resulted in distinct socioeconomic programs during the 20th century; yet they produce comparable trajectories of political leadership and cultural discourse on adult educational reform. Using Soviet and Mexican educational materials from the revolutionary era, it is possible to compare the policies and practices produced in revolutionary contexts to the U.S. andragogy established through study of Mexico and Russia. The adult outcomes of schooling became a site of negotiating cultural hegemony that revolutionary groups used to design radically productive and disruptive teaching and learning theory, while at the same time indirectly modeling the progressive reforms employed in the U.S. Yet, since the dawn of the 21st century, both have struggled to refine their approach to adult learning in the context of the digital turn because of how the networked flow of information works to both support and undermine the institutionalized tenets of the revolutionary ethos.

*“I felt resentment at those adherents and eulogists as well as critics and enemies, who, I felt, had misled me with constant talk and writing about Bolshevism and Communism, leaving me ignorant of the more basic fact of a revolution—one which may be hinted at, but not described, by calling it psychic and moral rather than merely political and economic, a revolution in the attitude of people toward the needs and possibilities of life.” – John Dewey, *Impressions of Soviet Russia and the Revolutionary World*, 1929*

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INTRODUCTION

Educators in the United States know the content they plan to deliver in class, and how to assess the extent to which students make progress in learning that information. They may even have a specific learning objective or state standard in mind while determining the learning outcomes of a given lesson. But beyond measuring cognition by teaching to tests, how does one know actual progress has been made beyond the ability to regurgitate the required answers on exams? To properly gauge student progress, one must first define that progress. According to the U.S. Department of Education, there are three steps to negotiating the definition of achievement: “to determine the performance level for all students assessed by the State assessment system...to summarize that information for the school to determine the extent to which the students are attaining the proficient and advanced performance levels...[and] to determine whether the school has made adequate improvement over the previous year and the extent to which the students are attaining the proficient and advanced performance levels.” (US Department of Education, 2009). The statistical nature of the State’s discourse is important here, as it forces the public conception of progress into the semantics of quantitative assessment and scientism. At the same time, it establishes critical norms of school performance for locating institutions that are struggling to meet ideal government and industry standards of achievement, and measuring the extent to which students in general are acquiring the necessary abilities for available employment.

This form of centralized planning through statistics based on common learning materials and outcomes is not new—the Soviet Union had perfected such a system in primary and secondary schooling, while universities and higher education institutes generally held their own series of content-specific oral exams, essays, and interviews for admission and assessment, subsidized by the State. However, both the Russian Federation and the U.S. have moved even further towards universal standardized testing and centralized standards through the institution of the EGE (Unified State Exam) to prepare for higher education and the Common Core (No Child Left Behind) that funnels students towards college readiness in their respective nations, whilst Mexico, a State once known for its radical forms of pedagogy and andragogy in its Indigenous training programs during the early Revolutionary period, has attempted to do away with revolutionary-style trade schools since the crystallization of the revolutionary party into the modern state institution, i.e., the “Institutional Revolutionary Party”—never was there a more oxymoronically named organization.

The ultimate aim of this study is to examine, via a historiographic comparison of Russian, Mexican, and American radical educational traditions, how andragogical leadership has been exercised in unique circumstances of agency within higher education to promote not just social change, but also cultural *progress* relative to the History of prior civilizations and non-Western nations. Educational psychologists and policymakers have struggled with defining the ethos of the educational apparatus: i.e., the political authority and credibility of the institution, defined by the ultimate aims and goals of public (adult) schooling since its mass institutionalization. U.S. Progressivism, as an early 20th Century educational, movement sought to meet the educational needs of a growing proletariat increasingly made up of English Language Learners (ELLs) and first-generation immigrants from outside of Western Europe. The movement has undergone several transformations since the demand for more public-access trade schools, night schools, and apprenticeships in U.S. urban centers became a national concern in the late 19th Century. While statistical measurement and standardization were several of the techniques advocated by early reformers and fetishized by modern policymakers, these forms of analyzing outcomes for mass populations of students were only part of the Progressives’ initial aims: i.e., to liberalize public educa-

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