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### **Soviet Leftovers in Our Education**

Education in the Ukraine, as it is in all New Independent Countries, is undergoing dramatic restructuring. During the Soviet era, the curriculum was standardised across the republics of the Soviet Union: that is, all schools in all countries used the same basic textbooks and the same lesson plans for each day of the school year. Now the Ukraine is developing its own educational system. In the process of restructuring it is very important to consider the experiences of other countries, especially the ones that have long termed democratic traditions, such as the United States of America.

In spring 1999 I was selected for a fellowship known as the Freedom Support Act Undergraduate Program. Majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language I went to study in Olney Central College, Olney, Illinois for 1999-2000 academic year. As a future teacher I wanted to find out new techniques of educating, incorporate the best features of American educational system. From what I have seen I understood that there is a lot to be said for American education. Its concept has different features that are missing in our school and that are worth considering. In my opinion there are still a lot of "soviet" leftovers in Ukrainian education.

Let's take a look at the way the control of students' knowledge is done in both countries. Ukrainian students are normally expected to recite answers in class, rather than write compositions; multiple-choice tests are rarely used. During the examinations, a teacher asks a student questions, then a student answers the teacher orally, while in America most of the exams use the multiple-choice tests or writing compositions. In my point of view the oral form is not a very good one, and written exams should be preferred. Reciting something learnt previously doesn't require analysing the subject. In multiple-choice there's always an opportunity to simply guess, but I believe this guess would be made using logical thinking. Also, writing compositions helps to develop the ability to analyse and express personal views, something that the old, Soviet school tried to get rid of (successfully – M.V.). The majority of the Ukrainian students is known to be afraid of their own thoughts, are not able to evaluate information and give the feedback. The system where all the students memorise the same information from the same given textbook only makes

everything worse. However, this is the way a lot of the instructors still teach their disciplines. Of course, it is much harder to grade somebody's personal opinion rather than memorised opinion of the author of the textbook. This is the challenge our post-soviet educational system must take.

American schools use interactive way of teaching. Active student participation, cooperation of the instructor with the students, etc. give the students the opportunity to hear several opinions on the same topic (including the opinions of their classmates). Then they don't assume that the teacher is always right. The "cult" of the instructor is another weakness of our educational system. A leftover from the Soviet era, it gives the feeling of "knowledge coming from the above". To be more exact "ideology coming from the above". The common assumption "better please the teacher telling him what he wants to hear" is the shortest way to push the ideology.

Our textbooks are known for using so much terminology that a student almost needs a dictionary to be able to understand them. In my opinion it creates the attitude that the subject is not for everybody, that only a few people can understand it. It develops the complex of being self-unconfident and afraid to say something wrong. We are used to have only one correct answer for everything and it is so far away from us, that we don't even attempt to think about it.