
**Assessing Young Russian Children's Educational Needs:
A Report of Qualitative Interviews with Russian Educators in
Moscow, Novgorod Veliky & Samara**

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Background & Purpose

The Russian sister of the American television series, *Sesame Street*, is *Ulitsa Sezam*, a children's program which has had three successful seasons in Russia beginning in 1996. *Ulitsa Sezam* is an educational program, its curriculum being thoroughly constructed by Russian specialists based on the defined educational needs of Russian children. For the first three seasons, the educational framework for the series was formulated by interviews and formal seminars with specialists in education conducted by the project's former Director of Research and Content, Dr. Anna Guenina and her colleagues. Since the early days of the project, however, there have been many important societal changes in Russia which have largely influenced children's and parents' lives and affected the context of child development. Therefore, in preparation for its fourth season, *Ulitsa Sezam* desires to update its understanding of the developmental needs of Russian children. A first step in the process has been to interview specialists working with children in the project's target age (3-8) in different regions of Russia, asking them about the kinds of messages a good educational program should bring today.

This document presents the results of such interviews conducted in June 2004 during a fact-finding trip to three cities (Moscow, Novgorod Veliky and Samara). The visits involved individual and group meetings with teachers, developmental psychologists, pediatricians, library and museum workers and other specialists working with preschool and elementary school children. During the trip, I visited nursery schools,

kindergartens, schools, centers for children and talked with representatives of local Departments of Education.

The main goal of conducting the fact-finding trip was to gain insights from experts in the field of education, child development and related areas regarding the critical educational needs of Russian children to help inform the production of new material for *Ulitsa Sezam*.

Selection of Regions

Russia is (geographically) the largest country in the World with a population of 149 million and a territory of more than six million square miles. Given the limited time and resources for this study it was impossible to conduct interviews in more than three regions of Russia. Choices had to be made regarding where to interview specialists in education. It was important to interview educational specialists in Moscow, since Moscow educators largely define the school programs, reforms and trends in education for the whole country. At the same time, the provincial cities of Novgorod Veliky and Samara were chosen to represent a variety of economic, ethnic, religious and ecological issues, which were not always present in the Capital.

Interviewing

Being an alumna of Moscow State Pedagogical University, I had personal connections among Moscow teachers and educators, which helped me to find people who work with children in Moscow. Meanwhile, Dr. Anna Guenina kindly recommended leading educators in Novgorod and Samara. Following her advice I contacted the children's center in Novgorod and the Department of Education in Samara, asking their representatives to help organize my visits.

The interviews were conducted in either one-on-one or in focus group format. On the whole, during 7 business days, I conducted 14 individual and 5 focus groups interviews. During my interviews, I was happy to note that all the participants were familiar with *Ulitsa Sezam*. They liked the program and said that children simply loved it. The knowledge of and positive relation to the program were very helpful in setting an easy and productive mood for the discussion.

Trained in qualitative methods of psychological inquiry, I conducted interviews as semi-structured, guided by, but not limited, to the question guide (see Appendix). Having educational needs of Russian children as the main point of interest, I asked questions from the guide and then followed with additional questions, eager to discuss themes in education which seemed most important to participants. Where people were most engaged in discussion, I discovered the most useful information for the project. The individual interviews lasted about an hour, while the focus groups took up to two hours each.

Educational Needs of Russian Children as a Mirror of Rapidly Changing Society

The responses of specialists indicated that the educational needs of Russian children today should be considered in light of the critical changes happening in Russian society. One can state that the economical and spiritual health of the society being reflected in children's lives is quite natural for any country. Yet, for Russia, which over the past fifteen years had experienced dramatic changes in its political, economical and ideological structures, the influence of the societal changes on children is absolutely critical.

When asked about the kinds of messages children need to learn from *Ulitsa Sezam* today, the specialists working with young children repeatedly referenced one or another social problem. Regardless of educational discipline -- whether teacher or librarian, psychologist or museum worker, administrator or pediatrician – each consistently replied to my question about children’s needs with a referral to the current problems of adults. The picture I was seeing more and more in my interviews was not only about children needing help in one or another developmental domain, but mostly about adults being unable to help them in these areas. The Russian society experiencing rapid reformation and development has direct impact on children and affects their development in turn. Children are growing up in a new society and need to be educated to fit in it. Summarizing my interviews with specialists, I present here the educational needs of children as stemming directly from the changes experienced by the whole country, such as social dynamics, changes in parenting, change of values, the fall of collectivism, the development of a market economy, a wave of patriotism, the increasing media flow, the limited access to cultural institutions, changes in early education, and the increasingly unsafe environment.

Figure 1 presents a graphical summary of my findings which are further elucidated in the ensuing sections of this report where I first consider the educational needs of Russian children in the context of societal changes as common to all the cities visited. This is followed by a description of regional differences. The report closes with a presentation of the technical advice that the specialists offered to the producers.

Social Dynamics

Since all Russian educators and even the youngest parents were born to a Soviet state, the teachers and parents today are faced with an immense challenge. They are confronted with the struggle of bringing children up in a new society that adults have just learned to navigate themselves, and in which many of their own experiences of growing up are irrelevant.

One of the most striking changes following the breakup of the Soviet Union and introduction of the market economy has been the emergence of economic layers in Russian society. The teachers and parents themselves grew up under the slogans of social equality, the slogans supported by realities of almost equally poor financial opportunities for all Soviet families. Today, however, Russian people experience rapidly growing financial stratification with many levels of economic inequality. Therefore, it is not surprising that an educational need most often mentioned by specialists in the interviews was the development of tolerance to different levels of financial status. Children react to their friends having better (or worse) toys, clothes, entertainments, etc. But, what makes this problem more difficult is that the child's teacher, who was raised under different conditions, is often incompetent at teaching children how to deal with this. In Russia, the lessons of how to be tolerant to people with different incomes are needed by both children and adults.

A very similar situation is found with regard to other social dynamics. With the break up of the Soviet Union, people have begun to appreciate the freedom to engage in different ways of life. The actualization of ethnic identities, turning to different religions, flourishing of alternative arts, greater personal creativity, more respect to and exposure of

people with disabilities, and coming to terms with non-traditional sexuality, has resulted in the great variety of lifestyles so characteristic of democratic society. Yet, the Russian society itself and educators in particular are not quite ready to accept the change. While more open-minded and younger educators admitted that the main educational need today is developing respect to any personal difference, others would say that, with many unconventional elements and horrible movements in modern society, the child needs to see only 'the healthy norm' on the TV screen. The picture is clear, however, that in the context of the society being increasingly less uniformed, *the need to develop tolerance to any other-ness* is absolutely crucial for Russian children today.

Parental Situation

Another societal change that, by opinions of the specialists, most directly influences Russian children today is that parents work much more than their grandparents did. Without former job security, trying to make ends meet and stimulated by the range of economic opportunities, Russian parents today put in long hours at work. Often it is not one but two or three jobs that both parents have to juggle, and have very limited time to spend with their kids. The consequences of this situation for children are quite obvious. The preschoolers, as well as older kids, spend longer hours at the children's centers and with hired nannies. They miss parental love, warmth and attention. *They need to get better education outside family and they also need to know that warmth, love and family values exist.*

Change of Values

Most of the education specialists suggested in their interviews that modern Russian parents are lost in the process of raising their children. They not only struggle to find quality time for the family, but they are also not sure what basic lessons of morality to teach their children. The old ideology of communism was very active in bringing the moral messages to the young. The “moral codex of communism builder¹” was taught in different ways to people for several generations. Some of the codex norms included basic human norms of morality. Others were specifically oriented to developing the collectivist mindset. However, when the old ideology was thrown away and the common ground of what’s acceptable and what’s not disappeared, the grownups became unsure about what to teach their children. One of the specialists explained in the interview: “People today know they should not hurt others or steal, yet, for instance, if before everyone knew that it’s not good to read a letter addressed to someone else, now people are not sure; maybe these days it’s become OK?” Religion is still relatively weak as a moral guide and the spirit of general relativism present in society makes people lost in ethical norms. The specialists working with children all noted that modern preschoolers are much less polite, less civilized, less respectful towards adults, less caring, and more aggressive and possessive than their peers were 10 years ago. An educational need stemming from these observations is clear --*children need to be taught the basic ethic norms, meanings of good and bad, and to learn respect and etiquette.*

Another problem related to changing values is that in modern Russia the respect of labor and appreciation of different professions, thoroughly cultivated during the

¹ The Materials of the XXII Congress of the Communist Party of Soviet Union, Progress, 1961.

socialist era, are virtually lost to the rash of making money and achieving the higher standards of living. The educators noted that when young children today are asked: “What is your daddy or mommy doing at work?” instead of the previously common answer indicating profession, the child is now inclined to reply: “He/she makes money”. On the other hand, unfortunately, the folk image of a businessman is often criminal, which in children especially creates a false illusion that to have a good life one should not work hard. An educational need here can be stated as *stimulating interest in work and developing respect towards different kinds of human labor*.

The Fall of Collectivism

The rise of capitalism in Russian society is quite naturally being accompanied by the rise of individualism. The common gatherings and celebrations that used to be so characteristic of the hearty Russian culture are becoming rare, and adults spend less leisure time with their friends and family and more time on their own business. The culture of common activities, the work for the commonwealth and the collectivist spirit of “all for one, one for all” are rapidly vanishing. People spend more time alone pursuing their own goals.

In this context it is not surprising that when specialists in education were asked to characterize today’s preschoolers, many of them answered that compared to the previous generation, modern young children were much more independent, self-centered and determined about their own interests. They play less with their peers and are less inclined to help the others. The teachers also noted that Russian children today spend much more time watching TV or playing with a computer. The child of collectivism is giving way to

a child-individualist. Some of the educators suggested that common games among children are becoming less popular following the similar tendencies in adult society. The specialists in education are quite worried about the influence of these trends on children and stated that kids *need to be more engaged in common activities, do more things together, and see other people working or playing together and helping each other.*

Market Economy

The development of the free market economy in Russia also has had its direct impact on children. The great variety of products and services that have emerged have created social demand for individuals to make their own independent decisions and be responsible for their own choices. A representative of the Ministry of Education in the city of Samara mentioned in her interview that the Concept of Modernization² of the Russian school to the year 2010 was particularly oriented to teaching children to be more capable of surviving in the new economic structure of Russian society. While the former Russian school has been conceptualized as an institution providing children with a sum of fundamental knowledge and preparing them to live in the socialist state, the emerging social agenda of Russian schools today is to teach children to be more independent, more autonomous and more responsible for the choices they made. The Ministry of Education is concerned with teaching Russian children how to process the flow of information, how to be communicative, how to make decisions and how to be independent. The other educational specialists interviewed supported this view, suggesting that in the context of

² For more information about the “Concept of Modernization” see the official site of the Ministry of Education and Science of Russian Federation: www.ed.gov.ru

modern Russian life children *need to learn that they have the right to make their own choices, and need to be taught how to choose, and be responsible for the choices.*

Wave of Patriotism

While patriotism has never been lacking in Russia, with the recent years of relative economic stabilization, the higher standards of living and notable national propaganda, the patriotic moods today are very strong. In the children's centers I visited there were plenty of Russian books and tapes on the shelves. The traditional nevalyashka (balancing) and matryoshka (nesting) dolls were in every room along with other toys. Folk textiles, Russian art posters, national symbols of Russia and the portraits of the president were hung on the walls. The traditionally Russian little painted chairs and tables were the main type of kids' furniture. The musical specialists were sharing stories about how children loved singing Russian folk songs or staging Russian fairytales. Yet, in almost every interview the teachers would say that children today were not getting enough information about the cultural heritage of Russia. They were concerned that children did not have enough pride in their country, and many of the teachers insisted on *children's need to know more of Russian fairytales, Russian music and poetry, Russian folk traditions, Russian arts and crafts, as well as important facts of Russian history.*

Related to the wave of patriotism, another educational need was noted by some specialists in Moscow -- there is a need to distinguish between cultural pride and the nationalism/chauvinism. In Russia, like everywhere, the feelings of patriotism are often followed by xenophobia. People need to learn to love their homeland while paying equal respect to other lands and nations. And children especially *need to be taught that one can*

be proud of one's own country and nationality without thinking that ones country is superior to the others.

Media Flow

One of the reasons the interviews for *Ulitsa Sezam* were much welcomed by the teachers, psychologists and pediatricians is that there are currently very few good educational television programs available for young children on Russian TV. *Ulitsa Sezam* was one that both kids and teachers liked. The specialists working with children were very much concerned about the flow of uncontrolled media experienced by children today. While the time children spend in front of TV and computer screens goes up, the amount of cruel, aggressive, poorly made and mostly foreign cartoons and movies is also increasing. Parents and teachers miss the old Russian movies for children and wonderful Soviet cartoons. They are nostalgic about kind characters, humane problems, good music and happy children watching TV. Today, they say, a child exposed to TV is very often overexcited and aggressive. Educators also noted that with commercialization of Russian TV, people working in production of children's programs seem to think more about the profitability of the program than about education and development of children. One of the educators suggested: "Instead of carefully developing children's tastes, the television today is irresponsibly following the undeveloped tastes of children to over-stimulating sights and sounds." Specialists were also talking about the devaluation of the feelings. While ten years ago a preschooler could have been afraid of seeing the fairytale wolf catching a bunny, today's four-year-olds watch horrible scenes of real killings without showing any signs of fear. An educational need stemming from these observations is

creating healthy alternatives to aggressive TV, and developing kind, calm and age-appropriate children's programs. It is also necessary to heighten the level of awareness among parents, caretakers and educators about the influence of uncontrolled media flow on the child, *improving media literacy and encouraging adults to take responsibility for controlling the media.*

Limited Access to Cultural Institutions

The institutions of cultural entertainment such as theatres, museums, art galleries, musical concerts, etc., are getting more expensive and have become unaffordable for many poor families. The teachers were saying: “In my class I have some children, who don't go to theater because they have nothing appropriate to wear, and others don't have money to buy tickets.” The limited access to cultural institutions has consequently created the need to propagate art and culture in alternative ways, particularly with the help of the media. Interviewed educators have specifically mentioned the need to incorporate Russian art, and the idea of national art preservation into TV programs. Another important esthetic need is to introduce children and adults alike to modern art and to the modern concepts of creativity, since the heavily propagated artistic style of Socialist Realism have put the nation far behind in its understanding and appreciation of modern arts. The educational needs here can be summarized as the *necessity to incorporate art and culture in TV programs, with specific attention to Russian art, art preservation and the modern arts.*

Early Education Emphasis

In line with the informational boom, a noted tendency of Russian preschool education to focus heavily on the academic preparation of the children has become apparent. Asked about a typical day in a kindergarten, preschool teachers would name three or four different academic subjects studied during the day. Starting at the age of three, many Russian children in public, and especially private, preschools are introduced to grammar, reading, math and science, arts and music. The first discussions of complicated subjects like physics, ecology, geography or art history can often be heard in kindergartens. The teachers proudly note that today's preschoolers are much more knowledgeable and informed than previous generations of children. However, most developmental and school psychologists interviewed expressed concerns that the current early emphasis on cognition have been causing delays in social and emotional development of children. Psychologists noted that today, more than ever, Russian children *need to develop the relational skills of caring, sharing, playing together, peaceful conflict resolution, along with the skills of recognizing and controlling one's emotions.*

The Unsafe World

In the course of the interviews, educational specialists often pointed to the increasingly unsafe environment as one of the most serious societal problems affecting children in Russia. When crime and terrorism are on the rise, children need to learn how to live in a society that hardly guarantees them any safety. Educators, psychologists and pediatricians have all suggested that *children need to be aware of the more dangerous*

world around them. Children should know how to act in the case of emergency and they should be told not to follow any strangers. At the same time, being aware of danger should not go beyond the state of vigilance and should not transform into the constant fear of life. Children need to be aware of dangers, but for their healthy psychological development they also need to have a place they can call a ‘safe heaven.’ *Children need to believe that adults love and protect them and that things like a safe home and a safe school exist.*

Adding to the obvious risks associated with crime and terrorism, the poor state of Russian ecology creates additional environmental risks for the children. Living in an unhealthy ecological environment, children should learn how to protect themselves from environmental hazards (e.g. filter water) and how to make the environment better (e.g. not to litter, save energy, recycle, etc.). The specialists in education suggested that *Russian children need to be aware of the ecological situation and also need to be taught personal responsibility for their own environment.*

The question of developing the sense of personal responsibility is also critical in addressing the problems of public health, which also have a significant negative effect on children. The rise of asthma and allergic diseases related to the polluted environment, the unceasing Russian problems of alcoholism and tobacco smoking, and the relatively new problems of HIV and drug abuse all find their ways to children. The pediatricians revealed that these days toddlers could find empty bottles and syringes with drugs right in the sandboxes on their playgrounds. The pediatricians and educators are very much concerned with the current state of public health, and particularly with the rise of children’s diseases. One of the directors of childcare centers in Novgorod suggested that

among the three year olds who came to her (non-specialized) center about eighty percent of the children have had health problems. In her opinion, some of these problems were related to parental alcoholism, smoking or drug abuse, particularly during pregnancy. Others were related to poor ecology. Supporting her view, all specialists suggested that *explaining the harm of alcoholism, smoking and drug abuse from the very young age, propagating the healthy life style and developing personal responsibility for the choices one makes regarding his/her health* were among the most urgent educational needs for Russian children today.

Regional Specifics

Moscow

During the first two days in Moscow, I interviewed Professor of Pediatrics, Dr. A. Reizis, School Psychologist, D. Turlygina, Developmental Psychologist and Professor at the Teacher's College, Dr. E. Yudina and two teachers at the preschool center "Raduga": N. Belokurova and D. Hramova. The last day of the trip I met with an elementary school teacher, N. Lokteva and with the Moscow Duma (government) member, the Secretary of the Moscow Committee on Education E. Bunimovich. In Moscow I conducted mostly individual interviews, all of them being extremely interesting and important. I should specifically mention Dr. E. Yudina and the Duma official E. Bunimovich as being most helpful in answering my questions. Both of them participated in reforming the current state of Russian education on the governmental as well as school levels, and both are extremely well informed about the educational needs of Russian children today.

With a population of around eleven million, the city of Moscow today is one of the busiest cities in the World. The rapidly growing market economy and all of the phenomena described above related to the capitalism storming Russian society, are especially vital for Moscow. Moscow has the highest average salary (about \$700 per month) and the largest number of rich people in Russia. While the outskirts and provinces of Moscow may look shabby, the city center is a modern and expensive European city by all means.

Moscow was the only place where I was told that: “One of the critical educational needs today is the development of tolerance to the wealthy and explaining to children that a rich person is rich because he is working hard and not because he is stealing from the poor.” In other places the development of tolerance to economic stratification was mostly discussed with respect to people with lower incomes.

The need for raising tolerance to ‘any other-ness’ mentioned above is also especially critical for Moscow, since today it has the largest variety of ethnicities, religions and life styles Russia has ever had. In this respect, the question of tolerance to people from the Caucasus is especially important. Most of the crime and terrorism in Moscow is currently being blamed on the Chechens. (The police routinely stop people with a characteristic look of a person from Caucasus on the streets.)

Another educational need, mostly important for Moscow children, is the development of independence and autonomy. As making one’s own choices is related to the survival in the market economy, for Moscow it is even more critical than for the rest of Russia.

Finally, the informational boom and related stress of early education on cognitive skills is also at its peak in Moscow. Educational specialists in Moscow pointed to the great variety of centers for early development, teaching children anything from astronomy to horse riding. Yet, in their opinion, simple games that children used to play in kindergartens and common yards can be seen less and less. In the context of overworked parents and more time spent alone, children of Moscow are the ones who need help in the development of social and emotional skills most urgently.

Novgorod Veliky

The visit to Novgorod was organized by the director of the early intervention center for children at-risk, Larissa Samarina. During two days in Novgorod I interviewed child workers at two children's centers. I also visited the State Special Library for the Blind and Handicapped, the musical school, the Novgorod State Museum and the Novgorod Center for Folk Arts and Crafts where I interviewed various specialists working with children in these settings.

Novgorod is a provincial city of 740 thousands people located on the way from Moscow to St. Petersburg. Living between the two main cities of Russia, people of Novgorod not only enjoy the cultural connections with these cities, but they are also very much aware of how much their life is different from the life in the megalopolises. Particularly, they are concerned with the economic opportunities being limited and the standards of life being much lower in Novgorod. An average salary of a preschool teacher in Novgorod is 2000 rubles, which is about \$70 per month. This figure is significantly lower than the one in Moscow and, not surprisingly, many of discussions regarding children's needs in Novgorod centered on the limited financial opportunities of

the parents. However, it should be noted that nowhere in Novgorod did I hear that children were starving or left without education or medicine. Although the economic status of Novgorod is relatively low, the children in the children's centers are well taken care of. The quite high Soviet standard of childcare (which includes every children's center providing children with beds in common bedrooms, playrooms, playgrounds, hot meals, gym and musical rooms, and special subject teachers) is still in place, supported by the impressive devotion of the educators to their jobs.

While all the general educational needs described above are relevant for Novgorod, the most important are the ones related to poor ecology and the wave of patriotism.

The urgency of ecological education in Novgorod is dictated by the presence of several environmentally unsafe chemical plants in the region. In their interviews specialists often noted the inefficiency of the regional administration in protecting citizens from the pollution, and steadily growing rate of lung and allergy diseases as well as the rate of birth defects.

On a different note, the stress on patriotic education is strongly related to the very rich cultural tradition of Novgorod. Founded in the ninth century, Novgorod Veliky is the ancient center of Russian culture, caring for the unique sights and treasures of Russian architecture, religious and folk arts. Novgorod is one of the most important archeological centers of modern Russia. The historical center of old Novgorod has a status of a city-museum. People of Novgorod are very proud of the unique cultural heritage of their city, and do their best to pass this pride onto the next generations. That is why in the interviews in Novgorod, I was constantly reminded of the importance of keeping Russian

culture alive and teaching children to be proud of their country. It should also be noted that the musical schools, libraries and museums of Novgorod are indeed very active in their efforts to preserve and propagate Russian art and culture. For example, Novgorod Center for Folk Arts and Crafts organizes unique courses and classes in folk traditions, arts and crafts, which are creatively developed for young children by the best ethnography specialists. Such classes could become very interesting material for future *Ulitsa Sezam* programs.

Samara

The visit to Samara was organized by the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Education and Science in Samara, Victoria Prudnikova. During two days in Samara I met with the officials at the Ministry of Education and visited three childcare child centers, where I interviewed specialists working with children.

Samara is a large city located on the Volga River in the heart of central Russia. The population of Samara is about two million. Samara is considered one of the most developed cities in the “Povolj’e” (Volga banks) region. The economic life standards in Samara are close to that of Moscow and St. Petersburg. Samara has auto, oil and textile industries and is proud of the highest levels of education and medical care in the region. The history of Samara goes back for five centuries, rich with events like the Razin and Pugachev Cossack upheavals, known by every Russian student. During three years of the Second World War (1941-1944) Samara functioned as a main city of the Soviet Union.

Discussing with specialists educational needs of children in Samara, I heard a lot of the themes described above, which were relevant for Russia in general and for

Moscow and Novgorod in particular. However, in Samara, educators were noticeably more concerned about the safety of the children. The crime rate in Samara is quite high, and a terrorist act in one of the city markets happened just a week before my arrival. Many of the teachers in Samara suggested that an educational need of developing awareness of the more dangerous world is one of the first priorities for children today.

Another specific of Samara is that, being close to the republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, Samara is a very multiethnic city. While several child care specialists noted that children of Samara are used to diversity and know how to be friendly to children of different nationalities, many teachers stressed that for Samara it is vitally important to help children develop tolerance and respect to ethnic diversity.

Some General Comments

In focusing on the current educational needs of children, this report inherently stresses elements that Russian children are lacking. It should be noted, however, that Russian preschoolers are not miserable. They have a lot in terms of care and education that many of their peers in other countries don't have. For example, although the findings presented emphasize the lack of attention to the social and emotional development of preschoolers, it should also be mentioned that the informational/cognitive side of preschool education in Russia is on an exceptionally high level. The salaries of the teachers speak very little about the quality of child care in Russia, where the enthusiasm, creativity and devotion of educators can serve as very good examples for wealthier countries. I was impressed by how much the preschool teachers think and care about their students.

In the course of the interviews the participants provided some technical advice to *Ulitsa Sezam*. Suggestions for improving the program are as follows:

- The street and yard should look more like the real ones; kids say “we don’t have yards like that.” Children want to see the place where they could belong.
- The Muppets and actors are too temperamental and overemotional; they should behave “more naturally” in a Russian sense -- speak more calmly, smile happily only when they feel happy, have more natural body movements.
- Use more treasures of the Russian culture in the program.
- Since *Sesame Street* is an international production it would be nice to let kids see segments on how children of the world live and introduce them to other cultures.
- Make the program more interactive -- give kids tasks to do while they watch a program (e.g. draw, sing, dance, exercise) or afterwards, make a competition of home tasks, show their works, let children participate in the show.

Although none of the specialists interviewed was a specialist in TV production, the technical advice they gave seems to make a lot of sense and may well be useful in guiding the future production of the program.

In conclusion, I should also state some natural limitations of the qualitative study. I did not interview enough specialists in Russian education to make a general claim about the educational needs of Russian children today. Nor did I interview other groups of people (such as parents) who have a vested interest in children’s lives. This study should be considered more as a case study, paving the main directions in the search for current educational needs of Russian children. To define these needs more precisely more

research is needed, including not only qualitative but also quantitative measures of the educational needs and including direct study of not only adults, but, importantly, children themselves. At the same time, it is clear that the interviews and the analyses conducted are informative and can serve well to guide the formulation of the revised curriculum objectives of the *Ulitsa Sezam* program.

Figure 1: Educational Needs of Russian Children as a Mirror of a Rapidly Changing Society

Societal Marker		Corresponding Need
Social Dynamics	➔	▪ Tolerance to any “other-ness”
Parental Situation	➔	▪ Education outside of family ▪ Promotion of family values (warmth, love, closeness)
Change of Values	➔	▪ Basic ethics ▪ Meaning of good & bad ▪ Etiquette ▪ Interest in work & respect for different types of human labor
Fall of Collectivism	➔	▪ More engagement in common activities ▪ Cooperation ▪ Models of people working/playing together and helping one another
Market Economy	➔	▪ Knowledge of the right to make own choices ▪ Skill at making choices ▪ Responsibility for choices
Wave of Patriotism	➔	▪ Increased cultural awareness (learn about Russian fairytales, music, poetry, folk traditions, arts, crafts, history) & pride without feelings of superiority
Media Flow	➔	▪ Healthy alternatives to aggressive TV (need for kind, calm and age-appropriate media) ▪ Media literacy
Limited Access to Cultural Institutions	➔	▪ Incorporate art and culture into TV programs (with specific attention to Russian art, art preservation and modern art)
Early Education Emphasis	➔	▪ Develop relational skills (caring, sharing, playing together, peaceful conflict resolution) ▪ Recognizing and controlling one’s emotions
The Unsafe World	➔	▪ Safe Haven ▪ Awareness of ecological situation and need for personal responsibility toward environment ▪ Promote healthy lifestyle and understanding of the harm of alcoholism, tobacco, drugs, and the need for personal responsibility for choices

Appendix

Question Guide

June 2004 Meetings in Moscow, Novgorod Veliky and Samara

1. May I ask you to introduce yourself including your title? Please describe in what context you connect to preschoolers? How do you see the role of your institution in the lives of children?
2. *For teachers:* What were the major themes that were in the focus of the curriculum in your classroom this year? What types of classroom print materials were you lacking and would like to have to use to work with the children?
3. What do you think about the Concept of Modernization of Russian Education to 2010? Has this concept really been incorporated into the Russian school system? Is it being embraced by educational society?
4. Which of the social changes taking place in Russia today are affecting children to the greater extent?
5. What social issues and other concerns are specifically important for children in your region?
6. What are the most critical educational needs facing young Russian children today? What should we teach them? What educational themes are needed always and what is most important today?
7. Do you ever work with local and governmental leaders?
8. What is the status of children's educational achievement in Russia? Is there a decline of the quality of education? On what stage? What changed in the education for the past 5-10 years?
9. Returning to the program, what kind of families should be portrayed on Ulitsa Sezam? How should they be portrayed?
10. What basic educational concepts/skills should be presented? What sort of behaviors should be focused on?
11. Are there issues confronting older children that could be addressed by the preschool program to help prepare young children to face these issues when they are older?
12. Can you think of other educational objectives that should be included on the series? Do you have suggestions for how to represent these objectives?
13. In the past seasons of the series, promoted by the Ministry of Education's focus on Diversity, Ulitsa Sezam has begun to feature stories of children from all over the country. There is an effort to try to present images of children from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds to help viewers learn more about the different ways children live in Russia. Can you comment on this strategy? What are elements that should most be emphasized? Are there ways that the series can address this issue more effectively?

14. International coproductions of Sesame Street have a history of addressing difficult social concerns such as divorce, HIV & AIDS and trauma that have specific relevance to a particular region. (For example, in South Africa, we have a new Muppet character who is HIV-positive and who presents messages of humanization and destigmatization around HIV/AIDS.) Are there any particular issues facing Russia that should be considered? Do you think that difficult issues such as social stratification, ethnic and religious diversity, divorce, alcoholism, HIV/AIDS and terrorism should be addressed in some age-appropriate way on Ulitsa Sezam? Do you have suggestions for how?
15. How is today's generation of preschoolers different from the generation of the 90s?