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1. What did you learn from the Heritage Institute course ED545W?

- 1 This book was real and personal. It was about struggles and dreams, listening and changing, hard work, perseverance, failing, succeeding, standing up for what you believe in, discovering what you believe in, honesty, celebration of gifts, trust, relationships. Ultimately, it was about the vital importance of valuing each person for who he is, where he is and teaching him from there.
- 1 Respect begets respect. I learned about human rights and human dignity. If a person does not feel it himself, he cannot show it to another. If a student in a class does not feel respected, if his voice is not heard, he cannot hear the voice of his peers or teachers.
- 1 I learned the system works for many people, so change is resisted. There is fear in the unpredictable, the unknown. The status quo quiets the fear. Students who want to learn outside the traditional means are pushed out of the system and identified as losers.
- 1 I learned a lot about myself, surprisingly, sometimes exploring my beliefs and experiences to the point that I considered it to be what therapy must be like! The book was an intimate look into the lives of people in different roles and stages of their lives: students, teachers, administrators, Americans, Russians, children, parents, teen parents, professors. It was a story about a school with heart and ultimately, how teaching and learning are dependent on caring relationships. Traditional schools are designed in a way that stifles the development of natural relationships. The interactions between students and teachers are a superficial, artificial, one way exchange of information. This story highlighted the beauty and gifts of each individual student and the value in honoring the contributions and journeys of each person.
- 1 There were many nuggets of wisdom tucked into the experiences of the characters in this story. All students come to school with a history, experiences that have shaped them into who they are. They must be considered by teachers. Students have fears of rejection, not belonging, exclusion. Our innate need for love and belonging will prompt students to fill that need with whatever means are available. If it doesn't happen in school, students will find a way to meet their needs. Acceptance means taking a kid where he is and moving him forward from there. It does not mean that the skills and tools are not taught. School is a game with rules that creates winners and losers. Students who don't play within the confines of the rules, lose.

2. What aspects were most useful and why? Which assignments were most effective and stimulating?

- 1 I loved this book. I loved the feedback to my responses to the readings and assignments. Looking at my experiences through the lens of model teachers was a valuable exercise. Mostly, I enjoyed reading and responding to the questions. Aspects of the book that stand out: the stages of a teacher, sparks in the students and teacher, focus on the dangers in the manipulation of rewards and lectures, recurring theme of equal value in all populations of people.
- 1 This course was inspiring and gave fuel to a spark for my own dreams, not to take a group to Russia, but to pursue other non-traditional means of realizing the potential of students. I will certainly share the courage found in the stories of the unique characters in this book with colleagues, students and parents.