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CHAPTER SIX:  
KINDERGARTEN IN RUSSIA'S FAR EAST:  
THE EFFECT OF CLIMATE

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## INTRODUCTION

Guidelines for quality childhood care may include some general principles that apply to all children and families. However, the specific details vary according to life in various parts of the world. Child care and education in the city of Magadan, in Russia's Far East, is no exception. In 2008, the City of Magadan re-organized the programming and renovated the building for Kindergarten Number 3. This chapter addresses how leaders have adapted childhood education in Kindergarten Number 3 to the region's geography, economy, and culture.

## BRIEF HISTORY OF KINDERGARTEN IN RUSSIA

The first private kindergarten appeared in St. Petersburg, Russia in the early 1860s. In Russia, the term "kindergarten" is translated from the original German literally into the Russian words "детский сад" (pronounced "dyet' - ski sod") for "children's garden." It is a combination of the word for children (dyet' - ski) and the word for garden (sod). Детский сад usually includes all-day programming and services for children from birth to age six or seven years (King, 1963; Sandell, Klypa, and Taratukhina, 2010, Taratukhina and others, 2006).

During Soviet times, education was highly centralized and state ideology was a major component of the curriculum. Education in general and, along with it, the kindergarten, was oriented toward work and was used to indoctrinate children and youth with right thinking about cultural and social roles (King, 1963). Those who disagreed with the Soviet government often found themselves sent to forced-labor prison camps, such as those in Russia's Far East. The City of Magadan was established on the Sea of Okhotsk almost 75 years ago as the Far East administrative center for Stalin's GULAG system of prison camps in the region. Millions of people died before the camps were closed in 1956 (Klypa, 2008).

## RUSSIA'S FAR EAST

Russia's Far East includes the most eastern of Russia's eleven time zones. The Far Eastern Federal District (FEFD) includes ten regions (similar to states or provinces in North America) in an area roughly one-third of the total territory in the Russian Federation. The climate and geography mean long, harsh periods of cold and dark among the mountains rich in minerals, including gold, silver, and uranium. Safety concerns include severe winter weather and traveling distances (Bobylev, Alexandrova, & Zubarevich, 2007).

The region includes descendents of several indigenous people groups. The Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East (RAIPON) unites a total population of approximately 250,000 people from 41 indigenous groups, including Aleut, Koryak, Chukchi, Evenk, and Even. The traditional occupations of hunting and fishing continue to provide sustenance to isolated groups throughout the region, as well as for native residents of the City of Magadan (RAIPON, 2010).

The Far East residents themselves refer to the western part of Russia as "the continent," emphasizing their feelings of isolation. The transition to a market economy led to a rise in costs of transportation and weaker economic ties with other regions of Russia. More than 25% of the FEFD population lives below the Russian national poverty level. The decline in jobs was accompanied by a sharp increase in the cost of living and a decrease in life expectancy, provoking serious population losses. Magadan Region lost half its population between 1990 and 2005. The population is less than one person per square kilometer. The City of Magadan itself is now about 120,000 persons (Bobylev, Alexandrova, & Zubarevich, 2007).

## KINDERGARTEN IN THE FAR EAST

Programs for early education and care have existed since Magadan was founded almost 75 years ago. Those earliest programs cared for children of prisoners or soldiers sent to Stalin's camps to cut the timber or mined uranium and gold (Klypa, 2008).

Today, there are a number of early education programs that receive government funds in Magadan. Families are expected to pay about 20% of the cost of care and education for the more than 50 percent of young children who attend institutions. This number of children in organized programming has been decreasing since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, due to demographic, state budgetary and household income reasons (Klypa, 2008).

## LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Borzunova & Vorochay (2010) used the ACEI Global Guidelines Assessment (2006) to review characteristics of Kindergarten Number 3 in Magadan, Russian Federation. This school is licensed for 175 children between 1.6 years and 7 years old. The children may attend school between 7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m., Mondays through Fridays. The children are divided among 10 groups: six groups for general development and four for special education (e.g., serious health conditions or physical disabilities). Groups are formed according to age: from 1.6 to 2 years, 2 to 3 years, 3 to 4 years, 4 to 5 years, 5 to 6 years, and 6 to 7 years.

### Safety, Nutrition, and Health

A security company coordinates video surveillance cameras, a two-button emergency alarm system, night and weekend security guards, automatic fire alarm, and voice warning system. The school practices evacuation drills two times each year. In case of weather

emergencies, children may be housed in the school for long periods until it is safe to return home (Borzunova & Vorochay, 2010).

To teach children the basics of life safety, teachers implement the program "OBZH" approved by the Ministry of Education. Throughout the curriculum, children learn the basics of personal safety at home, on the street, in public places in nature, fire safety regulations, traffic rules, safety rules when communicating with strangers (Borzunova & Vorochay, 2010).

Russia's Far East has a very short agricultural season that limits locally-available fruits and vegetables. Kindergarten Number 3 provides children with balanced nutrition through four meals a day for children in the general education groups and five meals a day in groups of children with special needs. Meals include fruits, vegetables, seafood, meat, and bakery pastry.

According to Borzunova & Vorochay (2010), even sick children are allowed to attend Kindergarten Number 3. There are medical and treatment rooms, including an isolation room and nurse's office ("fiziokabinet"). Positive child health is facilitated in several ways:

- 1) Providing for the psychological security of the child's personality (e.g., a friendly style of communication with adult children, the use of relaxation techniques in the schedule of the day, relaxation visualizations called "psihogimnastika," etc.).
- 2) Improving the educational process (e.g., hygienic procedures, health routines and schedules, consideration individual children's characteristics and interests, etc.).

#### Outdoor Environments

The building and playground is located in the courtyard of a residential apartment neighborhood, away from industrial enterprises and highways. The courtyard is surrounded by many large apartment buildings, which soften the winter winds. The outdoor environment is a well-equipped green area, with a variety of plant species of the Magadan region. The

playground includes slides, swings, arbors, sandbox, small houses, and wooden transportation models (Borzunova & Vorochay, 2010).

#### Indoor Environments

Borzunova & Vorochay (2010) report that leaders have incorporated unique regional elements in the indoor environment. The remodeled building includes: music room, gymnasium, sensory room, promenade terraces, mini-museums, speech therapy room, and a nature conservatory. Each group has its own sleeping room, with individual cribs or beds.

There is a separate hall for physical education classes, with gymnasium, swimming pool, saunas, spaces for physiotherapy and herbal medicine, massage, and a walking veranda. Equipment that promotes strength and flexibility includes expanders, exercise bicycles, a variety of treadmills (called "Hummingbird," "Clock," and "Running on Waves"), and modular equipment for children (including those who are disabled) (Borzunova & Vorochay, 2010).

## CURRICULUM

#### Schedule

In all age groups, organized classes are held according to the ages and psycho-physiological features of children, the normative requirements of state educational standards and sanitary norms and rules. Table 1 shows the number and time of lessons for each age group.

Table 1: Number and Length of Lessons Each Week for Each Age Group

Age Group	Number of Lessons	Length of Lesson
1.6 to 3 years	10 lessons	8 – 10 minutes each
3 to 4 years	11 lessons	15 minutes each
4 to 5 years	12 lessons	20 minutes each
5 to 6 years	15 lessons	25 minutes each
6 to 7 years	17 lessons	30 minutes each

Classes that require higher cognitive activity (language development, familiarization with the environment, nature and social phenomena, the formation of mathematical concepts) are held in the mornings on the days of the highest performance of children (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday). There are also special lessons about artistic literature, painting, appliqué work, modeling, construction, and skills of manual labor. Lessons are divided by ten-minute transition breaks for physical songs and games, known as “fizkultminutka” (Borzunova & Vorochay, 2010).

### Culture

The school has created a mini-museum, “Russian Dacha.” This mini-museum displays the old household items of the Russian people. Conducting classes in the museum helps children to experience the world as a Russian family lived decades ago (Borzunova & Vorochay, 2010). Teachers introduce children to Russian culture music and entertainment, where children sing Russian folk songs, learn the dances, and play instruments. Teachers and children prepare skits and plays about Russian fairy tales for younger pupils and their parents.

The program, “Severyachok: Children of the North,” was developed by Frolova and Davydova (2001) at North-eastern State University’s Center of Indigenous People of the North. Teachers lead children to conduct studies and interviews about the people’s lives and work. Children learn how the natives of the Far North-East used everyday objects in life. Children also listening to stories and examine the familiar scenes depicted on the walls of the museum (Borzunova & Vorochay, 2010).

### Physical Education

Borzunova & Vorochay (2010) recorded that Kindergarten Number 3 uses knowledge gained in the classroom in other non-traditional environments. For example, in the swimming

pool, the teachers also incorporate poetry, music, and topical subjects. Children care for their natural environment in the school's garden and field trips to collect flowers, berries and mushrooms. During the summer months, children participate on hikes and excursions to the mountains and the sea.

In a region where winter weather keeps children indoors for six to seven months of the year, caregivers pay much attention to the physical health and development of the students. In Kindergarten Number 3, 61% of the time that children are in the kindergarten involves some type of active motor activity. Teachers plan for the level of preparedness of children, their personalities, and the type of motor activity suitable for the developmental ability of the children.

The school has implemented a pilot health program, "Healthy Baby," developed to strengthen children with weakened immune systems (Borzunova & Vorochay, 2010). The program includes activities such as:

- 1) "hardening" (contrasting air baths, the total UV, water, rubbing with flannel mittens), to improve the immune defenses;
- 2) swimming pool and sauna, to increase blood circulation and cardiac output of blood);
- 3) physiotherapy (individually prescribed by a doctor); corrective gymnastics classes and phototherapy, inhalation, magneto-infrared laser therapy;
- 4) massage (muscle massage, underwater massage), to reduce bronchial hyperactivity, to improve strength and endurance of respiratory muscles;
- 5) herbal medicine (vitamin drinks, aromatherapy, gargling), to increase the health and resistance for chronically ill children.



The school also implements a series of activities to foster good health among all children: daily morning exercise, fresh air breathing exercises, acupressure, jogging, finger gymnastics, air ionization, physical therapy, and oxygen cocktail (Borzunova & Vorochay, 2010).

## TEACHERS AND CAREGIVERS

Teachers in Russia's Far East are generally prepared by North-eastern State University in Magadan. This university has its roots as a pedagogical institute established in 1961 and includes faculty members related to early childhood education, elementary school, secondary school, and family education. The university has a history of international partnerships with schools in Germany, Japan, and the United States (Klypa, 2008). The university hosts the Center of Indigenous People of the North, which features research and resources on regional studies.

Russia is revising its higher education system to meet principles established by Ministers of Education in the European nations in Bologna, Italy. Teacher preparation programs are looking for scientific approaches, objective assessments, new strategies, and additional conceptual theories (Sandell, Klypa, and Taratukhina, 2010).

## PARTNERSHIPS

### Parents and Families

Borzunova & Vorochay (2010) report that teachers seek to ensure the integrity of the pedagogical process by actively involving parents in the kindergarten. In working with parents, teachers use such forms such as: group parent meetings, consultations, lectures, conferences, surveys, open house, joint celebrations and entertainment.

To celebrate national holidays, parents participate with their children in baking Russian pies and learning songs to demonstrate their abilities and creativity. The school is decorated with dolls, toys, children's drawings, and various panels of natural material made by teachers, children and parents (Klypa, 2008).

### Community

Borzunova & Vorochay (2010) report that the teachers of Kindergarten Number 3 work closely with various organizations of the city: teachers of the Magadan region, Magadan management education, educational institutions, various children's art centers, Pushkin Library, puppet theater, local history museum, health agencies and other public organizations of the city.

The kindergarten has developed its interaction with community institutions: joint activities, excursions, puppet shows, plays, teaching activities, sporting activities. The advantage is that the educational-teaching process involves not only teachers but also parents and teachers from institutions for additional education (Sandell, Klypa, and Taratukhina, 2010).

### SPECIAL NEEDS

Kindergarten Number 3 includes children with a variety of developmental and physical challenges, including speech delays and cognitive delays.

Speech therapists provide corrective training for children who have impairments in speech in a logopaedic office. The office includes individual, adjustable child desks with built-in mirrors, diagnostic and didactic material, games, massagers, posters and other equipment. The therapist uses the materials to diagnose and identify children with speech disorders, for the production and automation of sounds, correction and development of phonemic processes, lexical and grammatical structure of speech and non-verbal processes and functions.

Classes in a sensory room are integrated on several fronts: prevention (prevention of neuroses), correction (development of cognitive processes, creativity and motivation) and relaxation (calms, increases the level of confidence). This therapy has many positive effects: reduced restlessness and aggressive behavior, improved emotional state, stress, increased brain activity, or lowered hyperkinetic muscle tone. To achieve these goals, the sensory room is divided into zones, equipped with: lights that form a "Starry sky," a "Waterfall" from microscopic fibers that change color, transparent tubes with bubbles and a mirrored wall, tactile paths, rotating mirror ball, aromatherapy, tactile cube, and sensory board.

## CONCLUSION

The development of Kindergarten Number 3 in Magadan, Russia demonstrates the commitment of the community to provide for its youngest citizens in an area that is dark, cold, and isolated for much of the year. Teachers and parents incorporate elements that celebrate the geographic and cultural heritage of the region.

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