Two Years In Moldova

Peace Corps Masters International Program Paper

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Part 1: Narrative

Introduction: Where in the World is Moldova?

In the spring of 2005, I was working as a lecturer at the University of Kansas, having graduated that fall with a Masters in Language, Literature, and Composition. And, I was anxiously looking forward to departing for the Republic of Moldova. For me, Peace Corps was a chance to see get some more teaching experience, learn a new language, and see the world. It was also something that I had wanted to do for quite some time. I had a Masters degree, three years of teaching experience, and some foreign travel experience, but what I was really looking for was a break between my MA and Ph.D., and while I did get to read some books for fun, Peace Corps was anything but a vacation.

Aside from learning a language and learning about a new culture, Peace Corps gave me the opportunity to become a more conscientious, reflective teacher. My approach changed from thinking about "how can I survive this lesson" to "how can I teach my students something during this lesson." I also learned that the concept of "university" is not universal by any means. I also learned that when people are under pressure, they will make decisions that I would consider to be unethical. More importantly, I learned that if I want to work with people, I would be more effective if I try to understand their situation, rather than judging it.

Throughout my twenty-seven month stay in the Republic of Moldova, I braved the coldest winter in a century and the hottest summer in half a century. I helped raise pigs, chickens, and ducks. I used an outhouse, took bucket baths, and got sick. But I also made friends, learned a new language and found a somewhat new direction in my professional career.

Staging and Pre-Service Training

I'm embarrassed to admit it, but when I found out that I was going to Moldova, I looked it up in the dictionary (I didn't even have internet) to see what it was and where it was. After a seemingly endless goodbye to my students, friends, and family, I traveled to Philadelphia for a

two-day staging event. As our first exposure to Peace Corps, we signed release forms (in case we died overseas), got our first in a long series of vaccinations, and we began to learn about the myriad rules and regulations that Peace Corps has. We also met our fellow volunteers.

In my group, there were 18 TEFL volunteers and four of us were slated to teach at the university level. Even though two of them would ET (Early Terminate) before the end of our service, I ended up spending the majority of my time with these three men in our Pre-Service Training.

The first ten weeks we spent in Moldova were reserved for Pre-Service Training (PST). We were divided up and there were eight other volunteers in my village, each of us living with a different host family. We went to Romanian school Monday, Wednesday and Friday in the mornings for five or six hours and then we would go back in the afternoon for a few more hours. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, we would go into a larger village and to TEFL training in the morning and more language in the afternoon. These days were long and exhausting because we were constantly adjusting to a new life, new culture, and for me, a new way of thinking about teaching. This was my first exposure to thinking about "the four skills" and about the various teaching approaches such as audiolingualism, total physical response, and communicative language teaching. We attended seminars on how to teach reading, writing, listening and speaking. For example, we learned how to do pre-listening activities, during listening activities, and post-listening activities. Then we did the same with reading, writing and speaking. We were taught by the volunteers who had come before us; some of them had been foreign language teachers before Peace Corps, and this training was invaluable to our success in Moldova. In turn, the next summer, we taught the next group of teachers.

The majority of the TEFL volunteers in my group had a BA in Education, or experience teaching and working with youth. Therefore, we learned from each other as much as we did from the trainers and this camaraderie was invaluable as we were separated into individual sites in the fall. Because we were taught communicatively, we had the opportunity to speak about our ideas and our experiences and to brainstorm with each other. For example, our teachers would often activate our own background knowledge about the topic of the training session, be it teaching speaking, or teaching writing, or designing materials. Then they would give us some new information about the topic, discuss how they would teach it and then we would do an activity such as a jigsaw. The end of each training session usually culminated in some sort of presentation by each group discussing how we would apply the skills we learned in the session to our own teaching practice. Eventually, we would learn that this was the structure of the Peace Corps lesson plan format, cleverly titled the 4-Mat lesson plan.

In addition to large group training sessions, we also had some sessions where the university teachers met by themselves. At first, these sessions were very intimidating because they had titles such as "Teaching without Textbooks." This was one of the first things that I realized about the university system in Moldova: textbooks are not necessarily mandatory when building a curriculum. We also had training sessions on how to teach critical thinking and how to deal with multi-level classrooms. In these break-out sessions, we were mostly taught by the other two university volunteers who were getting ready to leave Moldova. By sharing their experiences with us, they helped us create modest expectations about the work we would be doing in the country. For example, one of our trainers told us about his experience teaching at the best university in the country. His students did not come to class regularly, they routinely came to class late, they did not do homework and in addition to this, the schedule changed at a

moment's notice. He would be in his classroom with his students and other teachers would come in and interrupt the lesson, quite frequently asking for other students, or needing to use some materials that were in the room. Students who failed to come to class still passed the course because the dean changed the volunteer's grades. These were very sobering facts and the moral of these stories was undoubtedly: Don't take yourself too seriously or you'll go mad.

Language Training

Aside from our technical training in how to teach EFL, we also were well trained in language during our PST. One of the best things I can say about Peace Corps is that they have an excellent language program. In the beginning of our PST we were introduced to our two Language and Culture Facilitators (LCFs). These two brave young women taught us not only Romanian, but also about Moldovan culture, traditions, and history. The first day we met, we began learning the alphabet and then some survival terms such as: hello, good bye, yes, no, thank you, excuse me, I'm full, and I don't drink alcohol. We swiftly memorized and used these lexicalized chunks before we were taken to our host families' houses. This is where the true beauty of the Peace Corps system occurs. We were taught by professional teachers in very small classes for several hours a day and then we went home and practiced what we had learned in an authentic context with our host families at night. For example, one day we learned the names of the vegetables and fruits in Romanian. Then, I went home and my little host sister and I went to the garden and I practiced naming all of the fruits and vegetables that we had and she would correct me which really helped me acquire those terms. Often my host sister would correct my homework and my host mother would help me practice for my oral examinations by asking me the kinds of questions she thought would be on the test. In essence, the entire community was

invested in our education and we were able to practice with them and learn from them more rapidly than we ever could have learning Romanian as students in the US.

The fact that our LCFs taught us lexicalized chunks also helped us acquire the language more quickly. What they did was very similar to the audiolingual approach wherein they said a phrase "Eu sunt o voluntara in corpul pacii" aloud and we would repeat. Then I would say it, and my colleague would say it, and we would go around the room each repeating it out loud. Then we would say it as a group a few times and repeat. By the end of the session, we could all say (in fairly decent accents) "I am a Peace Corps Volunteer." Only then, after we had mastered the chunk, would they write it on the board and we would actually learn that we were saying seven separate words. This technique worked very well for aural learners, but not as well for the older students who couldn't hear as well or for visual learners who would have rather read the words first and then put them together in chunks. By the end of our first two or three lessons I could say quite fluently: Hello! My name is Sam. I am a Peace Corps Volunteer from the US (or from Kansas). I am an English teacher. I am 26 years old.

Another technique that our LCFs used was similar to TPR. They would give us instructions, such as raise your hand, lower your hand, stand up, etc., and we would follow. We also had a game we called "minge" (ball) where we would stand in a circle and conjugate verbs by throwing the ball around the circle. For example if the verb was "to be" I would say "I am" and throw the ball across the circle where the person who caught it would say "you are," the next person would say "he/she/it is," and so on. Then we would try to pick up our pace and work together as a team.

Periodically, we were tested orally. The LCFs would team up with teachers at the village school where we were meeting to examine us. Each room was turned into a different scenario.

One room was an open air market, another was a clothing store, and another was a grocery store. We would go into each room and there would be two teachers: one would be the vendor and the other would be the recorder who wrote down everything we said in Romanian. We would talk with the vendor and try to use our vocabulary and expressions, answer questions, and "purchase" items (or in some cases negotiate cab fare or order food). Then, the teachers would collect the written records of our test and tell us what aspects of the language we needed to work on. This was very effective and I remember there being a real sense of competition because many of the "recorders" were our host mothers who each wanted their volunteer to be the best (much like their own children). This is why they helped us prepare for the exams.

At the end of our ten weeks, we took the LPI (Language Proficiency Index) exam. It consisted of a half hour conversation with a tester who tried to establish a floor and ceiling for our language ability. They would ask questions of increasing difficulty until our language basically broke down and we couldn't really respond or we had to do maneuver around the question. In my exam, we talked a lot about pedagogy (which I did have the vocabulary for because that is what I was taught) and somehow, we ended up talking about spirituality. I know the moment I hit my ceiling was when I started thinking "I'm not sure I could answer this question in English, let alone Romanian." The goal is for every volunteer to reach the Intermediate Mid level after 10 weeks. The levels are set up as follows:

Novice Low
Novice Mid
Novice High
Intermediate Low
Intermediate Mid
Intermediate High
Advanced Low
Advanced Mid
Advanced High
Superior

Volunteers who did not receive Intermediate Mid had to take more classes and got more homework but this was only about fifteen percent. I got Intermediate High and one person (a fluent Spanish speaker) got Advanced Low after ten weeks of being in country. After PST, we all moved to our individual sites and met up for two weekends a semester for more language training and testing. We took the LPI again after six months and once more before our COS (Close of Service). In these additional language trainings, we received more instruction on professional vocabulary that was pertinent to our jobs as teachers as well as grammar review. Also, while we were at site, PC paid for each volunteer to have four hours of individual tutoring per week for the next 21 months. The success of this tutoring depended on the volunteer and the tutor he or she hired. For example, my host mother found a great Romanian teacher who taught in a Russian school. Essentially, she taught Romanian as a Foreign Language (RFL) and was the perfect tutor for me because she already knew how to teach RFL. This is where I also worked on writing in Romanian because our LCFs had a much more aural approach, but as a writing instructor, I didn't want to be illiterate. My new tutor, Mrs. Zina, also taught me about Romanian poetry, songs, fairy tales, and she was a great friend throughout my two years at site. At the end of six months, I tested Advanced High which was a real accomplishment. However, after 27 months, I tested Advanced Mid. I was very discouraged about this at the time, but then at AU, I learned that language learning is a U-shaped curve and that backsliding is normal. Then, I felt a little better that I didn't get Superior before I left.

Cahul State University

After PST, we all moved to our sites where we were going to be living and teaching for the next two years. I was stationed in the southern city of Cahul and would be teaching at what I call Cahul State University (it's a translation/Americanization). The university was only six

years old when I got there which was relatively new. I taught in the philology department. The philology department taught language teachers and students could choose between a few options: English, French, Romanian, and Russian. They could also be double majors in English and French or English and Romanian. After completing four years of college study, the students then took state teaching boards. After graduation, many of the students were placed in towns or villages as language teachers in elementary schools, middle schools, or high schools. A few students would go abroad or go to graduate school.

The English teachers of the philology department were the youngest group in the school. We had twelve teachers. All of them had either a BA in English and a few had MAs in English. Our chair was only 31 years old when I met her and had finished her MA two years prior. Some of the other teachers had just graduated the previous year and moved right into faculty positions. We only had one male in our department as well, and I got the impression that because we were a young, predominantly female department, that the administration did not take our concerns as seriously as perhaps they would with the law department or public administration department.

Students were divided into cohorts based on their native language. Therefore, Romanian speaking students were in one group, and Russian students were in another group regardless of whether or not they spoke French or English in their classes. Each cohort had its own classroom where they had classes for six hours a day and the teachers would move around to each class. Because there were not enough rooms in the school to accommodate all of the classes, there were two separate schedules: the morning schedule (8-1), afternoon schedule (1-6), but we had class until 8:00 pm because there wasn't enough space in the building during the day.

Courses at the university were not designed around the credit system as our courses are, but rather are calculated by the number of hours spent in the class. For example, each period was

fifty minutes and this was considered to be one hour of credit. So, if a class was a 14 hour class, then the class met only 14 times for 50 minutes. Students could be taking up to twelve subjects at any given time and would spend several hours a day in classes, much like they did in high school. Some of the cohorts were quite small (five students) and others were larger (14 students), but each group was like a tight family. These students studied together, they lived in the same dorms, and they were in classes together all day long. Each class had a faculty advisor who was responsible for making sure that the students passed the class and that they got all of their work done. In essence, there is a lot of nurturing at the university level that American students do not really experience.

A negative aspect to this intense sense of community within the cohort is the fact that students feel immense pressure to graduate with their class. For example in the US, if a student becomes very sick and misses several classes, or becomes pregnant, it's not unusual for the student to take a semester off and continue studying after they had fully healed or delivered their child. In Moldova, students absolutely do not want to leave their cohort. This means that they come to class some of the time and ask to make up work or take exams after they have been given so that they can pass and move on with their class. In turn, the classmates give these students their notes, help them study for exams and generally fill them in on the class content, but this cannot replace being present in the lesson. The students are graded on a 1-10 scale and 5 is passing.

The Pass/Pass System

Another reason that students feel that they can miss several classes and still pass on to the next level is because Moldova has what I call the Pass/Pass system. In the US, if a student misses several classes he or she can take the course again the following semester. In American culture,

the onus is on the student to complete work and to pass all of the exams. However, in Moldova, the onus is on the instructor or the faculty advisor to make sure that the student passes the course. For example, if a student fails a course, he or she can take the final exam again. If they pass the final exam, they can pass the course. If they do not pass the final exam, they can take it again and again until they pass, but this is more work for the teacher who is most likely ready to begin vacation. Therefore, it is virtually impossible to fail a student in Moldova and this was my biggest struggle throughout my two years here. It created conflict between me and my students, between me and my administration and between me and my colleagues. I lost respect for my colleagues and my dean who encouraged me to "just go ahead and pass them, please." I feel that it de-valued the education I worked so hard to give my students when the best aren't rewarded accordingly. The best students feel frustrated because they work very hard and when someone doesn't work hard, there are no consequences.

Throughout my two years teaching in Moldova, I struggled with the Pass/Pass system and tried my best to come up with an equitable solution (which was testing and re-testing students over and over) until they learned enough to pass the exam. In one case I had a student that Julia (the previous volunteer) had even failed, meaning that this student failed two years in a row and she was passed through in the end. I understand that it would compromise Peace Corps' mission in Moldova to take a hard and fast stance for failing students, but this was an educational issue that I had not imagined encountering. In the end, I decided that if the Moldovan educational system wants to reward mediocrity, laziness, and absenteeism in order to keep students paying tuition, then there is not very much I could do about it except present the American cultural perspective.

Aside from the difficulty I had adjusting to the Pass/Pass system, I found the students in Moldova to be on the whole very eager to learn, very smart and hardworking. Throughout my two years at Cahul State, I taught sophomores, juniors and seniors, and I taught three courses: American Culture, British Culture, and Conversation. Some of my class periods were the standard 50 minutes and others were double sessions (100 minutes). Also, in each level, there would be combined classes and separate classes. For example, for sophomore level American Culture I could have 30 hours with the Romanian speaking group, 30 hours with the Russian speaking group and then another 30 hours with both groups together. This means that I would have to plan lessons for ten students and also lessons for twenty students. Also, it didn't really matter when we held these classes even though we had a scheduled time. For example, when I was sick my second year with mono, I missed almost a month of class. This wasn't a problem because we just scheduled three and four lessons a week whenever we could all agree to meet and cram all of the hours in right before exams.

Quantity Versus Quality Teaching

Having such a "flexible" scheduling policy was a relief when I was sick, but the more I thought about it, it really affected the quality of education adversely because it encouraged cramming. Instead of having two lessons a week and asking students to develop skills over time, for instance, drafting and revising essays, they could all be crammed together, not allowing students the time to reflect and actually digest what they were learning so that they could *acquire* the language. I can see how this system would work for other subjects that don't necessarily need to be taught communicatively like language does, but for our department especially, I feel like this was a detriment to the education we were able to offer our students. There were times when I remember my colleagues having four lessons a day in order to finish their hours with their

students and while this intensity was nice, there wasn't the consistency which is also necessary to acquire another language. Also, it is not fair to the students to make them attend courses at the teacher's will.

Resources

The first thing that I realized in my PST was that I had a training session titled "Teaching Without Textbooks," indicating to me that I was going to bear the majority of the responsibility for developing materials. The volunteer who was at Cahul State before me had developed an American and British Culture curriculum and left it for me, but I soon discovered that I was teaching the same students she taught, and therefore could not use her curriculum. So, I was faced with my first experience of developing curriculum from scratch. Evidently, because the university was so young, and they had only had American PCVs teaching American Culture, Conversation and British Culture, there was no set curriculum for these courses. None of the teachers had required textbooks for their syllabi. What they did was purchase a class set of books which stayed in the English Resource Center and students came in to copy from those books whenever they needed. This same system of copying went for all materials that the teachers designed. For example, if I designed a worksheet for my students or wanted them to read a short story, I made a copy, gave it to the class leader and she would then collect money from the students and make copies. There was a little kiosk in our building that housed a lonely girl and a copy machine and her job was to make all the copies for the students in the school at a competitive price. Unfortunately, when the students got short of cash, they decided to copy pages not only front to back, but on a reduced scale so that they would have maybe four or six pages per sheet. Reading these incredibly tiny pages must have been difficult for the students to take notes on.

American Culture

The first thing I noticed about the previous volunteer's American Culture curriculum was that it was very safe and avoided anything potentially thought provoking and controversial. She had lessons on holidays, food, sports, music, and television, all relevant topics, but the longer I stayed in Moldova, the more I realized that a culture is not a set of holidays and food. Therefore, I looked at the resources in the English Resource Center and decided to take a more historical perspective to American culture by talking about immigration in the US. Moldova has a very complicated history regarding immigrants. Many of my students' parents were forced to move to Moldova by the Communists from the Ukraine, Russia, or Bulgaria and many of them dreamed of moving to the US or Great Britain and that was one of the primary reasons they studied English. I wanted to show my students that American culture really is not homogeneous, but rather we have American "cultures." Essentially what I did was compile some short articles and readings about various cultural groups in the US and that formed the bulk of my American culture curriculum.

American culture started with a short unit on Native Americans, followed by readings about European immigrants. We read about Emma Lazarus and her poem "The New Colossus" which is on the Statue of Liberty. We also read excerpts from Amy Tan stories about Chinese immigrants and we studied readings from more traditional American culture textbooks that I could find. It was very hodge-podge but I felt like the themes were relevant to the students and that I was presenting them a more complicated view of American culture than they had previously been taught. I designed all of the quizzes, worksheets, and exams. I had a lot of freedom to do whatever I wanted in my classroom. However, if I were to do it again, I would change some things.

My American Culture class was essentially a class for native English speakers. I did not focus on actual language forms in my course. We learned vocabulary and I did a lot of the things I had been taught such as pre, during, and post activities (for listening, speaking, reading and writing). I also utilized individual work, pair work and group work as I had been taught. Even though I did my best, if I were to teach this class again, I would pay more attention to the language forms that I wanted my students to learn. I think had I paired the course with a grammar book (with some sort of sequence), it would have been more effective in the long run. For instance, I could have had them practice subjunctive when talking about whether or not they wanted to move to the US (I would like…) and we could have spent more time talking specifically about tenses, especially the past tense and past progressive. I think this would have helped my students to be able to communicate more effectively about what they were learning in the course.

Another thing that I would be more mindful is the skills that I taught my students. For example, because it was a text based course, I could have focused more on explicitly teaching students how to skim and scan when reading and to make predictions about texts. This could have helped them become very textually savvy students.

Teaching Composition in Moldova

When I went to Moldova, I had just finished my MA in Language, Literature, and Composition. Therefore, I expected that the English department would want to utilize my skills and education and ask me to teach a lot of writing courses. However, there were no writing courses in the curriculum. This comes from what I believe is a common ailment of many foreign language departments: the fear of teaching writing. Moldovan universities do not have “comp” classes in Romanian or Russian and the concept of teaching writing specifically, in its own

course does not really exist there. Of course my students write and they know how to compose sentences in English, but the concept of creating a thesis statement, utilizing sources to make an argument, using counterarguments, and all of the other elements of writing that I had spent the previous three years studying how to teach are not in their curriculum. When I first met the department chair, she told me that I could teach a writing class, but what that turned out to be was an "optional" class that a few students attended the first few times but eventually trickled off and died. Therefore, I tried to incorporate writing components into my courses but this was met with resistance.

Students resisted writing long pieces for my courses for several reasons. The first is that I required them to be typed. While I knew that my students had access to computers in the English Resource Center, the library and in internet cafes in the town, what I hadn't ever considered was that my students did not know how to type. When they saw the speed with which I typed, they were amazed at how I could manage to move my fingers so fast. In a country that has only recently gained access to computer technology, it makes sense that their educational system had not caught up with this technology, or that it needed some time to catch up. Because I had taken typing in seventh grade like the rest of my class, I assumed that my students had as well. It took them so long to type their papers out that they complained quite a bit about having to type even two to three page papers.

Another reason that students resisted writing longer pieces is that they simply weren't accustomed to it. This wasn't a regular part of their curriculum and they resisted being asked to put in extra effort for an assignment that they did not know how to complete. Therefore, I soon had to drop all pretention that I was going to teach writing in Moldova. They simply were not

open to it and the ones who were open to it, did not have time to really compose anything substantial.

Conversation

Conversation was another course that I had to design from scratch. The first thing that I noticed about this course (other than that lack of syllabus) was that I was given 14 hours with my sophomore students to do a conversation course. I wondered how much could really be accomplished in fourteen 50-minute lessons. This class actually met twice a week which meant it was over in the first seven weeks. From my background in the US, I knew that conversation classes usually met every day or for intense amounts of time, allowing students the time to practice their speech and to develop fluency by experimentation. What I eventually decided to do was to evaluate students by recording a conversation between the student and me and playing it back while taking notes. I could assess their fluency, grammatical accuracy, use of vocabulary, level of complexity in speech, and their holistic performance. What I did was design a set of lessons around building and working with vocabulary. For example, in a few lessons we talked about describing a person's physical features by putting adjectives with nouns such as skinny nose, flat nose, round nose, etc. Then for the test I would have students randomly choose a picture of a person that I cut out of a magazine and have them describe what they saw to me.

I also assessed the students in group and pair conversation which were much more low-stakes assignments. I would have students prepare interviews with each other and then grade them on their oral performance. Or, I would have them draw scenarios out of a hat and ask them to ad-lib a conversation based on the scenario and grade those as well. Throughout both of these situations, I would take notes and then give feedback to the students regarding grammar and vocabulary. Generally, I felt pretty confident in the course given my limited materials.

One thing that really surprised me about how others received my assessments was the fact that the other faculty members were very surprised that I was using a tape recorder to record students in my conversation classes. I was intrigued that they surprised because it seemed like a really wonderful tool to assist in assessment and I wondered why they hadn't used them before. Having students listen to their own conversations and also having the benefit of playing them over and over in order to take notes and give good feedback seemed like an obvious choice to me. The fact that they were impressed that I had even though of recording students illustrated to me the general fear of educational technology in the Moldovan educational system. This, coupled with the fact that students never used computers to complete assignments, told me a lot about the kinds of teaching techniques that my colleagues were using. Either they were not comfortable with the technology themselves, or they hadn't thought about using it as an aid in teaching. What I later learned from observing a few of my colleague's courses is that they generally lecture their students, using copies from textbooks and exercises. Thus, grammar translation and lecturing were alive and well in English language pedagogy in Moldova.

British Culture and Civilization

While I was not completely comfortable teaching American culture and conversation, I felt that I could come up with something decent for my students because of my teaching background, because I was American, and a native speaker of English. However, I felt completely unqualified to teach British Culture and Civilization. As I later learned, at least I had been to Great Britain which was more than any of my colleagues, but that still did not qualify me to teach the course.

My approach was to utilize the materials in the English Resource Center to their fullest as well as my British friends and family. Because I had a sister-in-law from England and a good

friend from college who was also from England, they agreed to be “pen pals” with my class. What we did was, I collected questions from my students about British culture and sent them via email to my sister-in-law and my friend (and his father who is also English). They would write back and we would discuss their answers as a class. We would also try to compare British culture with American culture and Moldovan culture.

Another thing that we did was read authentic texts, which is something that I believe is very important in the language classroom. My good friend from college wrote a weekly column for a small newspaper in Missouri. The newspaper had archived his columns and I searched through ones where he compared British and American culture and we read those in class together. These worked well because they used a diverse vocabulary, more formal style, and they were the appropriate length (1-2 pages). Because I was not an expert in British culture, these texts (emails and news articles) helped give me some credibility with my students and helped me feel more confident that I was providing them with accurate, first-hand, authentic accounts of what British culture is like.

I supplemented these texts with materials from the English Resource Center dealing with the things my students reported that they wanted to learn about in a needs assessment I did early on in the class. They were interested in learning about food, holidays, and customs like drinking, tea. In order for the students to feel their needs were being met, I used the textbooks I could find, and therefore felt as though I struck a balance between teaching the students from authentic texts and covering topics that they were interested in discussing.

If I were to create that curriculum again, I would of course, focus more on the language features (as with my American Culture class) but I would also take some time to talk more about the British Empire. I think that it would be particularly interesting to trace the history of English

via the development of the British trade routes and the British empire so that by the end of the course, the students would not only know something about British culture, but also *why* we were studying English in the first place in Moldova. Knowing what events led to the acceptance of English by much of the world would also, I believe, help my students find their place in it.

Reflection on Teaching at Cahul State

In terms of the teaching I did at Cahul state, I believe that I offered my students not only the benefit of a native speaker, but that my classes were communicative and academically challenging, which I'm not sure can be said for all of their other coursework. Having observed a few of my colleagues in action, I can also say that more English was spoken in my classrooms than in other classrooms. However, this is not to say that there aren't more things I would have changed.

If I were to go back to Moldova, after finishing my MA: TESOL, I would try to use my education and training to more carefully inform my teaching practice. For example, I would think more about linguistic sequencing (which I learned in SLA and ELT II) when designing my syllabi. I think that I was definitely a "Focus on Meaning" teacher. Getting students to communicate in English was definitely the focus in my classrooms. We did some work on pronunciation and I did some error correction but I think I could have balanced more on Focus on Form(s) in my classroom and I believe that my students would have really appreciated this.

What I learned (especially in Language Assessment) is that the techniques that you use to teach students and to evaluate them must have face validity (meaning that they must have credibility with the students). Since my students were used to grammar/translation, I think that I took them out of their comfort zones quite a bit and that they may have benefitted from dictation every once and a while to bring them back into their comfort zones. I think the students and the

teachers as well might have appreciated it if I paid a little homage to their teaching techniques and this, in turn, might have made them more open minded to my teaching techniques.

I think another reason that I could not function at my best teaching level all of the time in Moldova is that I felt like I was inventing the wheel every time I walked into the classroom. Even in my second year, I taught the same groups of students I had taught in the previous year, so I could not repeat my curriculum. This meant that I was constantly searching for or developing materials and with the unstable nature of our course schedule, I always felt like I was in crisis mode. There would be times when I would come to school not knowing that we were on a different schedule or that class was cancelled altogether. In fact, there was one semester when I had been assigned a course and no one told me until a month into the class. In these cases, we had to make up the classes in half the time which made the whole course feel rushed and I felt even more frazzled.

After taking Curriculum and Materials Design, I realize that I could have done a needs assessment to get a better idea of the forms that my students needed to develop and skills as well what the department needed me to do for them rather than simply asking them the topics they wanted to discuss. Even though I asked the students what they wanted to learn, I really needed to analyze what they already *had* learned and I could have talked with my colleagues more to get a better idea of how my curriculum could fit into the program as a whole. I think what was really missing was continuity and if I'd had a more developed professional vocabulary (especially regarding linguistics and grammar), I'm sure I could have communicated more effectively with my department. The missing continuity is also partly due to the fact that there was a relatively high turnover rate (PCVs only stay for two years) and it seemed that the leadership in the department had several other more pressing concerns than making sure our curriculum fit in with

the rest of the departments'. In fact, I really was not aware of how my courses fit into the students state board exams either. Having an overall sense of the department's direction and curriculum goals would have helped me feel more like a part of the department and also better prepare my students for their future as English teachers.

Secondary Projects: Workshops

Each Peace Corps volunteer, in addition to doing their primary work (in my case, teaching), becomes involved in extracurricular or secondary projects. Peace Corps required that we each give workshops for the teachers in our region. Moldovan secondary teachers generally get together once or twice a semester for professional development workshops. There is usually a locally appointed coordinator but most often, a PCV had to organize these workshops themselves. I heard stories of PCVs setting up, preparing snacks, handouts, and materials and no one attending. This is a testament to the level of disorganization present in the Moldovan educational system and of how excited they were about our professional development offerings.

However, in my case there was a Moldovan coordinator in my region who had worked very closely with my Peace Corps predecessor. Therefore, he was willing to work with me to set up a time when I could come to the regional meeting and present a workshop for the high school teachers. This was odd for me because I was not exactly sure what I had to offer high school English teachers. However, I agreed because I was told by PC that I was supposed to provide this service (at least twice) during my two years. However, it seemed as though these meetings were doomed in some aspects. For example, they were often scheduled during my university classes which they assumed I would cancel, I think. Then, one time it was scheduled at the last moment which was frustrating.

The most memorable workshop I gave was titled “Minimal Marking” (see part 2) and was based on a system of marking students’ writing that I learned from composition instructors at KU. I had scheduled the workshop with the local coordinator and had come up with a time (90 minutes) for the workshop. I prepared the materials, went to the school and met with the teachers. These were English teachers who came from villages around my city. Most of them worked for long hours with very little money. They got up early to tend to animals (cows, goats, chickens, and pigs) and they worked in large gardens after school. As I was talking with the teachers, one asked how long my presentation was going to be. I responded that it would be the scheduled 90 minutes. He replied, “But you can make it shorter can’t you? We’d like to go to the market and do some shopping while we’re in the city.” This telling comment let me know that even though there might be a desire on the part of some to learn about new teaching techniques, these were occupied with other concerns.

English for Beginners

During my second semester in Moldova, another PCV and I began teaching a class for professionals in our community who wanted to learn English but had no prior experience with the language. We held our classes at a women’s health center in Cahul because the main audience for our course were the gynecologists at the center. Their main language goal was to be able to write grants for their center in English, which was a large task.

The course was designed similarly to the way we learned Romanian in Moldova. We tried to teach the students the alphabet, then greetings, then lexical chunks such as “I am a teacher” or “I am a doctor.” Because the students spoke no English, the language of instruction was Romanian, which I felt was a linguistic accomplishment for myself. Even though we modeled our class off of the language training we received in Peace Corps. However, once we

began to teach about vowels and spelling, it became very sticky. Romanian has an almost 1:1 sound/letter correspondence which we took for granted when we designed our lessons. This was the first of many issues that we ran into teaching English from scratch.

After a while, our attendance faded and my PC colleague decided that it wasn't worth her time to pursue the course. I, however, was really enjoying the freedom of experimenting in a low-stress situation for me (outside of the university). Even though I had maybe five students per week, I continued to meet with my students throughout the rest of my time in Moldova. When we talked family members, I drew a chart of my family, illustrating all of the various relationships. When we talked about grants, I showed them a copy of the grant proposals I had gathered and the call for proposals. I tried to make the texts as authentic as possible, but realistically, students cannot learn English in an EFL setting by meeting one time a week.

Ultimately, the course became a kind of get together every week where students would ask questions about American life and we would actually do some work in English, but it was more of a social meeting rather than an educational meeting. When I left Moldova, we had a class party with lots of food, flowers, and I even made certificates for them, but hardly a word was spoken in English.

English Camp

My major secondary project while I was in Moldova involved working with an intensive week-long national English camp. The camp was sponsored by Peace Corps, American Councils and the Association of Professors of the English Language (APLE). Each organization provided English speaking counselors and had its own camper selection process and selected between 30 and 40 campers. All in all, it was one week of all English, all the time with 27 counselors and around 100 campers.

What was very unique about English camp (aside from the fact that it was the only intensive English camp in the country) was that we actively recruited campers and counselors from all of Moldova. What is not well known is that there are two semi-autonomous regions within the universally recognized geographical boarders of the country. Gagauzia, in the south-eastern part of the country was settled originally by people of Turkish descent. They elect their own representatives, speak Gagauz and Russian, and have their own traditions and customs. This is also one of the poorest regions in Moldova.

The other semi-autonomous region in Moldova is called Transnistria, which is on the eastern side of the Nistru river. When Moldova separated from the USSR, Transnistria, which is predominantly Russian, wanted to remain a part of the Soviet Union. Consequently, a civil war was fought between Moldovans and Transnistrians and the Moldovans won; however, Transnistria elects its own president, prints its own currency and has its own border guards. It considers itself to be a separate country from Moldova even though it is not recognized by any other countries, not even Russia.

One thing that most people don't realize about Moldova (and probably about most former Soviet Republics) is that language equals identity for these people. When the communists took over Moldovan territory, they forced the people to speak Russian. I have friends who talk about being in medical school where the language of instruction one year was Romanian and the next year they had to study in Russian. This is why we still have Russian language groups and Romanian groups at my university. The Moldovan still spoke Romanian and also learned Russian, but the Russians didn't learn Romainan. The communist policy of displacing people from all over their territories, forcing them out of their country and into Siberia or to another republic created on the one hand, a very diverse linguist population in Moldova, but on the other

hand, it created tension between the oppressors and the oppressed. People who only spoke Russian wondered why PCVs would learn a "peasant" language such as Romanian and Moldovans would question why PCVs would be taught the language of oppression, "Russian." A very telling detail is the fact that the Moldovan national anthem is called "Limba Noastra" or "Our Language" meaning Romanian, which in Moldova is called Moldovan.

Therefore, English camp presents an opportunity for Moldovans of all languages and backgrounds to come together and speak, ironically, English (which is considered another language of oppression). It is one time when a person's L1 is de-politicized and everyone has to speak English. And, because in our second year, we won a Small Democracy Grant from the American Embassy, we taught our students about democracy and diversity.

My second year in Moldova, I was a co-director of English camp. In preparation for the camp, the other directors and I (one from each organization, plus a new organization "Young Generation") composed a Small Democracy Grant (worth 9,000 USD) to fund the camp. Our theme was "Understanding Diversity" and the camp was seven days long. Students had to take six classes a day and four were required: human rights and development, sports and games, conflict resolution, and ecology. We also offered electives like crafts, dance, and drama.

I think one of the most unique things we did at this camp was called "listening groups." Each staff member was assigned to about seven or so campers at random and they met every day for about 20 minutes to talk about camp and life and whatever was on the campers' minds. Because I was the director, I mainly asked my group how they were enjoying camp and if they had any suggestions about how to make camp better. One of my group members, who was from Transnistria and I still email each other. He is now in Russia studying computer science in his freshman year at the university.

English Department Alumni Association

One of the last things that I worked on in Moldova was forming an Alumni association for the English department at our Cahul State. The rector of the university considered it a pilot program that he wanted to watch to see if it similar programs could be started university-wide. Basically, the idea is that most colleges and universities in the US have active alumni associations where former graduates give donations to their schools. For example, if an alumnus gives enough money, the school can name a building after them or a department chair or something to that effect. Because the concept of school pride or even personal philanthropy doesn't exactly exist in Moldova, setting up an alumni association takes a lot of delicacy. Many of my colleagues admitted that they would gladly give some lei every year to the English department to pay for materials for the English Resource Center (which they also had access to) but they did not want the dean or the rector to be able to use the money. We also had to publicize the project, and decide how people could give money and how the whole thing would be administrated. It had to be sustainable and transparent and it had to meet the community's needs.

The first thing we did was design a survey. We wrote a survey for the students to see if they even wanted to give money to the university after they graduate and my colleagues administered it to every student in the English department. Then, we had to discuss what activities we would have and the budget for each. Part of the impetus for starting the alumni association was that the way the English department got materials and resources in the past was through grants. Sooner or later, the Peace Corps, the American Embassy and the British Embassy might tire of giving the English department money and want to give it to some other deserving organization. So the idea was to ask for money from the graduates, which is more

sustainable. Their numbers will grow every year, increasing the donor base. They speak English, and several have moved abroad, meaning that they could have more money to give. Also, because each cohort was so close while they were studying, they would want to keep in touch with each other and find out who got married and who had a kid, and according to our survey, they wouldn't mind giving money if they knew it would ONLY be used for developing materials at the English Resource Center. So, in order to set up our Alumni association, we decided that we needed a few things.

1.) An alumni newsletter. People who give money can see their names in print and will know exactly how their money is being spent because articles will be written about new developments and resources, creating a high level of transparency.

2.) A database. The database should be created and maintained in order to keep track of alumni so we can ask them for money.

3.) Seminars. We must have seminars to inform the alumni committee about fundraising, making a newsletter, and creating a database.

4.) A homecoming Party. We decided to have a party where we can gather the graduates and alumni, wine and dine them, and ask them for lots and lots of money.

5.) An account. We needed a bank account where the association can receive money.

My colleagues and I wrote a Small Project Assistance (SPA) grant, which is a Peace Corps grant program, to help us set up the association and I recruited fellow volunteers to conduct training seminars in Cahul to train us. The grant committee was comprised of me and three other colleagues from the department as well as some junior students (ideally, they could take over the next year). We won approximately $1,000 USD from the SPA grant and used most of the money to pay for printing the alumni newsletter and for food and materials for the party as well as travel funds for the four seminar presenters.

In the end, we executed the grant with several hiccups (I could write a novel) but printed a lovely newsletter and had a successful homecoming fundraiser/party. With the proceeds, I bought a VCR for the English Resource Center and speakers for the computers so that students

and staff could listen to English recordings on the computer. Unfortunately, the volunteer who came to the university after me, did not take up the mantle of the alumni association and without a driving force, I never heard of any more activities that came out of it. This is a common theme in the development world, however. It is difficult to get people excited about a fundraising donation project when they do not trust their administrators, and when most of them do not want to invest in their school, but in their own futures. This is the reason why most the students in my department chose to study English—so that they can leave Moldova.

If I were to repeat my experience over again, I would have worked more closely with the rector of the university. He had been excited about the program but my colleagues distrusted him and wanted it to be an English department alumni association, and were concerned that if money went to the university as a whole, that the English department would not receive the benefits. Caught in the middle of university politics that I did not quite understand, and knowing that my colleagues would be the ones who would have to eventually execute the grant, I decided to work more closely with them and told the rector that our program could be a pilot program for the entire university. Unfortunately, nothing ever came of the program after I left and maybe it would have been more sustainable if I had worked more closely with the university administration or if I had tried to bridge the gap of distrust between the department and the university.

Even though the project was not sustainable, I'm proud that we conducted a needs assessment, wrote a grant, executed the grant and organized seminars and a large fundraising party. The newsletter gave the students who worked to compose it valuable experience and provided them with an extracurricular activity and when I left, there were more resources in the English Resource Center than when I left. And, there's nothing to say that if I had stayed an extra

year that it would have been successful. There might not have been the capacity to support the program and the university (and culture) may simply not have been ready for it, or at least that version of it. Overall, it was a good experience and I learned a lot about the intricacies and delicacies of working in a developing country and in an emerging educational institution.

Reflection

My twenty-seven months in the Republic of Moldova taught me a lot about being flexible and about how to be a good teacher. I consider my training in Peace Corps to be one of the most influential experiences on my current pedagogical philosophy. To this day, I still think about what I learned in my training. For example, I try to keep the ratio of teacher talk to about 20% and student talk to 80%. I think about how I put my students into groups, making sure that stronger students are paired with weaker students. Sometimes, I try to give everyone in the group a job such as note taker, time keeper, and task manager, as I was taught in my training. There are countless techniques that I learned and still continue to think about in my teaching.

Even though I was armed with communicative theory when I went began teaching, which helped me feel like more than a native speaker, I wish I had thought to take a grammar book or some TESOL textbooks with me. I had a literature book and I knew a lot about composition theory, but this really wasn't what they needed (or wanted). I would also have taken some more realia from my culture: things like concert programs, restaurant menus, bills, supermarket items, and anything that would give my students a better idea of what American culture was like and give them some authentic texts to read and work with would have been very useful. If I went back now, I'm confident that I could have done a needs assessment of my students and of my department and have designed a course (or two) and actually trained a Moldovan to teach it after I left. That would have ensured that my work had been sustainable.

Overall, the experience taught me that EFL is a very difficult environment to create authenticity in. When teachers do not conduct EFL classes in English and may not feel confident in their own language ability, and the university functions on the pass/pass system, this means that it is possible for students to graduate with a degree in English Teaching and not really know how to speak English (as I discovered). However, I met several dedicated language teachers who were excited about learning new techniques and who took the time to develop their students. Generally, these people (mostly women) were overworked, underpaid and underappreciated. I'm grateful that I had already been teaching for three years when I went to Moldova and that it wasn't my first time walking into a classroom and designing a curriculum; however, I didn't expect it to be such a dire situation where the scaffolding for a curriculum didn't even exist. This experience changed my entire concept of what a university actually is. In Moldova, it is simply a building with classrooms. The students have very few materials, cannot afford books, and the ones they have were donated and usually out of date. The heat rarely worked and there was no cooling system. We had classes at night and the lights did not always work or many times, one overhead light worked and the others did not. The situation was austere, and it seemed like everything was subject to change at a moment's notice. I think it is a great testament to their desire to learn English, their teachers' motivation to guide them, and their own pure talent that my students could speak English at all. And many of them spoke excellent English.

This experience made me dedicated to English Language Learners and is the reason that I applied to the MA: TESOL program after returning home from Peace Corps. I have come to see English learning as a development tool. Ideally, my students could use their English to communicate with the global community or to foster tourism in their country. It would be a tool that they could use to raise their own country out of the economic and political muck that it is

currently trying to get out of and help them, ideally, become a member of the European Union. There is no doubt that Moldovans have the talent and the drive; however, sometimes their system holds them back.

Part 2: Accompanying Documents

Introduction

Part two contains documents from my Peace Corps experience that further illustrate those discussed in the narrative. The first is the "Darea de Seama" which is the yearly report I completed for my first year of teaching at Cahul State. In it, I described the activities I participated in during my first year there: workshops I did, workshops I attended, my extracurricular activities. I also recorded how many people attended each activity. This document is a good example of the kinds of reports I had to do for the department and it also shows the format that we used in the department (catedra).

The next two documents are sample lesson plans using the 4-Mat plan. These lessons show how I conducted American and British culture class and give an idea of what kind of lesson planning we were required to do by Peace Corps. Every semester we were required to turn in two lesson plans to Peace Corps which were put into a file for other volunteers to use. They were also a way of providing us with a format for teaching and of keeping track of the kind of instruction that we were providing to our students.

The next document is the plan for a workshop I gave to teachers in my region entitled "Minimal Marking for Developing Writers." This is the workshop that I really felt confident about giving to the teachers, and I was excited about it, but the teachers were more interested in going to the market, so I had to cut it short. This was disappointing to me but I learned a lot about my audience's needs that day.

The final document is the American Culture Curriculum that I helped develop for my department while they were going through an accreditation process (during my second year). I took the syllabus prepared by Julia, the previous instructor, and added it to the curriculum that I developed. Essentially, it is an outline of all of the lesson plans that I devised. It was also one of

the only documents that I wrote that I think really helped the department reach some of its goals (like getting accredited). I left all of my original materials in notebooks in the English Resource Center and could only bring home with me what I had on my external hard drive. I hope that the students or the next volunteer used them or got something from them but I will probably never know if they did.

And finally, I'm concluding with just a few pictures of my time in Moldova to put some faces with some of the characters I talked about in the narrative. Many of them are of people from the Alumni project because these colleagues and students really worked hard to make that project happen. It was also my first experience designing and implementing a project from beginning to end which made it very special for me.

UNIVERSITATEA DE STAT "B.P. HASDEU" DIN CAHUL
FACULTATEA DE LITERA
CATEDRA DE FILOLOGIE ENGLEZA

DAREA DE SEAMA
2005-2006
ANUL I

PARKES SAMANTHA

Professional Activities: Seminars and workshops given.

9/17/05 Gave workshop entitled "Teaching Critical Thinking for Advanced Students of English: Breaking away from the 5 paragraph Theme" at the APLE conference in Chisinau (English Language Teachers' Association) to audience of 25 or more.

10/26/05 Gave workshop entitled "Integrating Creative Writing into your language Class" for my catedra (9 present).

11/3 Technical IST in Chisinau. Presented "Critical Thinking and Problem Solving" with Tom Penninston (55 present).

3/2/06 Gave a seminar for students and teacher (19 students present) on Professional Development at 9:30 am till 10:30 am in the ERC talking about 1.) How to get good recommendation letters from teachers 2.) How to write a good cover letter 3.) How to write strong essays for the personal essay portion.

3/5/06 Led a session for University Teachers and Partners at the Environmental Education In Service Training on using the Environmental Education materials in the university classroom (for conversation classes and writing/literature classes).

6.) Seminars attended:

0/21/05 Participated in a course entitled "Computational Linguistics" from 8:30-5:30 given by Daniella from the University of Balti.

11/20 Participated and contributed material to workshop entitled "Literary Analysis and Creative Writing" with Rodica Panzaru, Margareta Motatescu, and Olga Scripnic (day-long).

1/23/06 Attended English Teachers' Workshop at ETRC, Chisinau (Ion Creanga) lead by Dr. Glenn Deckert on English for Special Purposes (11:00-2:30)

4/19/06 Went to a seminar at Ion Voda and observed Olia Coliceva lesson. Met Domnule Baban, and the director of the Ion Voda school and they asked me to teach an "optional" hour with their students once a week as kind of a conversation/English club thing.

7.) Miscellaneous activities:

I have had the great opportunity to contribute to the professional development by writing letters of recommendation for three students, a total of five different letters.

I have also participated in an English conversation group which began December 17, 2005.

2/6/06 Taught English Language class for Adult workers of NGOs with Krista Atchley to be held every Monday and Thursday from 4-5 pm for 30 lessons.

2/14/06 Talked about volunteering to Ecaterina Casaidi's 7th form students at Ion Voda school.

2/21/06 Went to Ion Voda with Natalie Rizov and spoke to the 9th form English class there.

2/22/06 Went to ion Voda for Tania Pinzari's class (9th grade) and stayed for the 12th grade and ended with the sixth grade, so talked with six classes about PC, American Life and answered their questions.

2/23/06 Talked to two classes at Ion Voda about American culture and volunteerism.

2/24/06 Went back to Ion Voda to talk to the class at 11:00 am about the differences between the Moldovan and American educational systems.

3/31/06 Went back to Ion Voda to Olia's class and talked with tenth and eleventh graders about everything.

4/5/06 Organized a reception/viewing of Molly Lampear's book "Shattered Destinies" at the ERC with over twenty in attendance.

4/13/06 Spoke to seventh and eighth graders at Ion Creanga about American culture and volunteerism.

4/20/06 Took my FE 301 and 302 students to the lake and did a clean up. We collected over fifteen large bags of trash and had a great time. Snejana got us gloves and bags and a tractor came and took it all away.

5/22-23/06 Served on the jury at the "Students' Conference" for the Dept. of English

Lesson Plan

PCV name: Samantha Parkes
Grade: FE 401/402

Title of the Lesson: Introduction to American Culture
Day/Date/Time: Monday, September 3, 2006, 3:30 pm.

Objectives of the lesson (knowledge, skills and attitudes to be developed):

1.) Establish classroom rules for the entire semester

2.) Acquaint students with the syllabus and answer their questions.

3.) Assess students' speaking abilities, reading abilities, and ability to work in small groups.

4.) Introduce the topic of the year and let students know what I expect.

5.) Expose the students to several kinds of texts and get them excited about the class.

*** I am including this lesson plan because I think the first lesson is the most important lesson pedagogically as it sets the tone for the entire semester.**

1. Beginning of the lesson. Organizing the class, warm-up activity: 10 minutes.

Goal: Get organized. Give the students time to think about the class and practice writing.

* Tell the students to FREEWRITE about what they think about when they hear the phrase "American Culture." Explain that Feewriting means writing all of your ideas down without stopping. It is not for anyone else to read or see, just for you to organize your thought.

* Then ask for volunteers to read or dicuss what they wrote. This allows you the teacher to see where they are verbally and ideologically with the course.

*While they're writing

Take roll

Have someone go copy the syllabus

3. Motivation before presenting the new material *(Attract, engage, and create an experience) (15 minutes)*

Goals:

1.) Motivate the students for the class

2.) Expose students to several different kinds of texts that we'll be reading throughout the semester

3.) Practice listening skills.

4.) Practice verbal skills.

Read the following texts out loud:

1.) The Declaration of Independence

2.) “Immigrants” by Pat Mora

3.) “The New Colossus” by Emma Lazarus

4.) “Theme for English B” by Langston Hughes

5.) “America” by Alonso

First ask students what the understood, what they liked, etc.

Short discussion: What do they have in common, what is “American Culture” and why is this difficult to define?

4. Information *(Integrate the experience; teach new concepts and new material)*

20 minutes

Goals:

1.) Students practice reading aloud

2.) Students become familiar with my expectations

3.) Students have the opportunity to ask questions about the class (verbal practice).

Go over syllabus together: we will have a quiz over the syllabus on Thursday and over the Labor Day reading.

Students take turns reading the syllabus out loud, and then after each section they have the chance to ask questions and discuss classroom policies.

Things to mention about this text: make sure the students each make a copy of the syllabus.

5. Practice *(Practicing the new material taught at the lesson)* 20 minutes

Goals:

1.) Prepare students for what the quizzes will be like

2.) Assess what students already know about American culture

3.) Teaches them something new about American Culture

4.) Students will practice working in small groups (group work)

Everyone in groups answer questions to the American Culture Quiz, to see what you already know. You should know everything on this sheet by Thursday.

*Students are always surprised that America has NO official language and it surprised me that they didn't know how many states are in the US.

6. Application *(Application of the new material taught at the lesson) in class work*

Goals:

1.) Students practice speaking out loud

2.) Students learn the correct answers to the quiz

3.) The teacher learns how much the students already know (or what kind of information) they already know about American Culture.

Talk about answers to the quiz. Students volunteer to read their answers and I ask the class what is correct and then tell them. In this way they discuss if they are correct or not first before I give them the answers.

7. Home assignment:

1.) Study for Syllabus Quiz and 2.) Read handout on Labor Day and 3.) First Things First (Brit-Think /Ameri-Think)

Notes: Was a great way to start off the semester and got the students really excited about learning about American Culture! I got to assess what levels I'm working with verbally and what information they know and don't know. A very important class that fulfilled many goals.

Lesson Plan

PCV name: **Samantha Parkes**
Grade: University Level British Culture

Title of the Lesson: **Brit-Think, Ameri-Think, Moldova-Think**

Objectives of the lesson (knowledge, skills and attitudes to be developed):

1.) Students will learn about how British and Americans approach life and how different these approaches are.
2.) Students will analyze their own culture by reporting what Moldovans-think.
3.) Students will practice speaking in front of the class by presenting reports.
4.) Students will practice reading out loud in small groups.
5.) Students will practice writing by doing their "free writing" in class.

1. Beginning of the lesson. Organizing the class, warm-up activity: 5 minutes

Ask the students to "free write" (write without stopping) about what they remembered from the text "Brit-Think, Ameri-Think." This exercise prepares students for writing long essays in class and also forces them to think about their words. The fact that they cannot stop forces them to just keep writing even if they get off topic, but they will be writing in English.

2. Motivation before presenting the new material *(Attract, engage, and create an experience)*
* Objectives of the "Motivation" phase: 10 minutes

-To help students feel comfortable talking about the text.
-To give each student a chance to voice their opinions orally

Short discussion:
1.) What did you remember from the text? (several volunteers can read or say their responses)
2.) What questions did you have? (students may ask about anything they didn't understand)

Each student talks shortly during this portion of the class, warming up their tongues and minds!

3. Information *(Integrate the experience; teach new concepts and new material)*
* Objectives (skills and abilities to be developed during the "Information" phase of the lesson): 15 minutes

1.) Students will practice reading portions of the text out loud.
2.) Students will practice summarizing texts out loud.
3.) Students will learn about how American's Think

*I have found it useful to assign a text for students to read and then re-read it out loud in class (or at least parts of it) so that even if they didn't read it or understand it completely, they have a chance to learn so the lesson isn't completely lost on those who don't have time to read

Text to be presented: *Students read from* Brit-Think, Ameri-Think *(the first six short sections, and we will only read the Brit-Think sections (which are a few paragraphs long each). After one student reads a paragraph, switch students. After students read a section, have someone summarize the section orally (or two students).*

4. Practice *(Practice of the new material taught at the lesson)* 20 minutes

My theory of teaching American Culture is that there is no point to learning about another culture unless you use that information reflexively—to learn about your culture as well. In this section students will be divided into six groups (according to the six sections of the text). Their task is to

1.) Meet with your group and read your section out loud
2.) Discuss the major ideas of your section (be able to summarize it
3.) Discuss what the Moldovan-equivelent thinking would be for each situation: ex, How do Moldovans think about Death, Money, Choice, etc. (according to the texts).

5. Application *(Application of the new material taught at the lesson)* (20-30 min)

In this section of the lesson, each group will present their information in small presentations in front of the class.

1.) They must summarize the section they read (The Brit-Think part).
2.) Then they must discuss how Moldova-Think corresponds in their opinion with these ideas
3.) Then, I ask the class if they agree with what their classmates said about how Moldovans think. (This sometimes produced a heated debate which was cool).

If there is extra time: hand out the reading assignment for the next class and "pre-teach" some concepts/vocabulary to make it easier for students to read the text.

6. Home assignment:

Each student is to write a one page typed essay articulating their opinion about the differences between the way Americans think and the way Moldovans think. They should focus on Grammar and fluency as well as depth of ideas (which should they should have no problem with as we have already discussed them in class).

Evaluation: This was a great lesson. The text *Brit-Think, Ameri-Think* from our ERC is a wonderful text that's not difficult but excellent for teaching American and British culture because it compares the two. The students really enjoyed the text and this lesson does a good job

of incorporating the four skills. The essays were stronger because we had prepared for them beforehand as well.

Minimal Marking for Developing Writers

When you leave here you should:

1.) Know about what minimal marking is for students studying a native language

2.) Know about the benefits of minimal marking for grading students' writing

3.) Be acquainted with one way to adapt this system to teaching students of a foreign language

4.)Be able to apply this information to your own practice of teaching students of a foreign language

5.) Feel empowered that you have options when it comes to grading students' writing

Some words on theory

Rebecca S. Anderson and Bruce W. Speck in their work on grading have defined four basic types of grading practices teachers can use to grade students' writing: "minimalist grading techniques, cassette grading, collaborative grading, and portfolio grading" (23). Richard H. Haswell in his article entitled "Minimal Marking" discusses the many benefits of using a minimalist marking system for developing writers. In his general discussion of what effective evaluation entails, he sites Knoblough and Brannon who say that grading must

1.) facilitate rather than judge

2.) emphasize performance rather than finished product

3.) provide double feedback, before and after revision

4.) help bridge successive drafts by requiring immediate revision (600).

Haswell argues that his system of minimal marking meets all of these criteria. Essentially, all surface errors are left unmarked within the text itself and are indicated in the margin with a check. These checks are totaled and the essay is then given back to the student who has the opportunity to search for, circle, and correct all of his or her own errors. Haswell states that this system is beneficial because not only will students correct 60-70% of errors on their own, but in addition

1.) it makes grading easier and faster

2.) it challenges students with a puzzle

3.) it reduces the amount of teacher comment, avoiding mental overload

4.) improvement is self-motivated

5.) progress is easily seen (603).

In this way, can each student isolate his or her own problems, also helping the teacher to analyze the nature of the errors being committed, helping him or her know what to focus on during class time. Huff and Kline agree, saying that "for average and above average students, minimal marking with self-correcting is the recommended approach." (qtd. in Jones, 85).

But how does this translate to the foreign language classroom?

Throughout my experience teaching in Moldova, I have realized that while correcting every error for my students overwhelms and depresses them, they need more feedback than a series of checks on the margins on their papers. This is why I've devised a compromise for grading writing that can hopefully be adapted for use at every level. I do not correct students' errors, but I do mark where there is an error and give them a hint as to what kind of error they have. Searching through the text, deciphering which error has been committed, and correcting it are still the students' responsibilities. At the beginning of the semester, I give a short seminar on my minimal marking system and then use it consistently throughout the semester. Students revise their papers two or three times before I put a grade on them.

Sam's Minimal Marking Key

(circle) = something isn't quite right about this word. It could be

1.) Tense

2.) Spelling

3.) Agreement

squiggly line = these words are in the incorrect order

carrot = you need to insert something. It could be

1.) punctuation: a comma, semicolon, etc.

2.) article: a, an, the

3.) pronoun: this, that, etc.

comma splice = you have put two sentences together with a comma. They need to be separated with

1.) a semicolon

2.) a period

3.) a comma and a subordinating conjunction

4.) a coordinating conjunction

right word= this is not the right word. Use a different one.

question mark with brackets= I'm confused. Can you look at this part again and explain it more clearly?

Formulating Your Own Minimal Marking System

1.) Determine what are the most common errors your students commit.
2.) Choose clear symbols.
3.) Teach your students what the symbols mean. Be sure they understand what each symbol represents so that they can correct their own errors.
4.) Be consistent.
5.) Try to grade for those particular errors only. Remember if you write too much, they will be overloaded and their brains will shut down.
6.) Give students the opportunity to revise their essays/homework.

MINISTERUL EDUCAȚIEI AL REPUBLICII MOLDOVA

UNIVERSITATEA DE STAT "BOGDAN PETRICEICU HAŞDEU" DIN CAHUL

FACULTATEA DE LITERE

CATEDRA DE FILOLOGIE ENGLEZĂ

Specializarea

Limba si Literatura Engleza

PROGRAMA ANALITICĂ LA DISCIPLINA

American Culture and Civilization

CAHUL – 2005

CZU

Samantha Parkes: Programa analitică la disciplina « American Culture and Civilization »

Anul IV, Filologie Engleză.

Programa aprobată la Şedinţa Catedrei

de Filologie Engleza din_____2005.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The study of American culture and civilization is a study of not a culture or a civilization, but many cultures that have come together to form what we now term "American" culture. We will of course study the main ideals and events that shaped the country with its current governmental structure and help give America its identity as a nation. However, quintessential aspect of American culture is that it is not homogenous, because the United States of America is a country made of not only native peoples, but also of immigrants from every country. The American English language borrows words from all other languages. Therefore, this course will focus on American *cultures*, analyzing what makes America unique through its diversity of ways of living.

The present course of lectures deals with three main areas of study:

- Geography and historical background;
- Governmental structure;
- Movements and media.

Language teaching is also concerned with teaching students how to develop and form pupils' habits and skills in *listening, reading, speaking* and *writing.*

The focus of this class will be to develop students' listening, reading, speaking and writing skills with an emphasis on analysis. Students will be asked not only to speak about texts, read texts, write papers, and listen to discussion, but to analyze and think critically about all of these areas of communication.

The students will be taught how to conduct scholarly research and to enter discussions within the academic community. The course will focus not only on knowledge of dates and factual events, but on being able to intelligently discuss their importance within American history and what effect they had on the present American cultures.

As these students are learning the English language, it important for them to also learn the cultural values attached to American English. This course will familiarize them with these cultural values.

General objectives of the course are:

- to introduce students to American geography;
- to develop critical thinking skills;
- to teach about the development of American system of government
- to teach about immigration's impact on American culture
- to teach about the Civil Rights Movement as a movement within one American culture
- to be aware how advertising affects various cultures, especially the youth culture
- to have an idea what Christmas means in American culture.

Specific aims of the course:

- to familiarize students with America's fifty states, position on the globe, natural resources, etc.

- to teach how a governmental system affects the country's culture
- to teach about various waves of immigrants and how they created many cultures within the USA
- to teach how to do scholarly research on American culture
- to teach what are the parts that make up an effective advertising campaign
- to teach about the American university system
- to teach students how to work effectively in groups
- to teach how to appreciate variety and diversity within their own culture
- to teach students to look beyond the surface of every kind of text

Expected results: Students should:

- Be more knowledgeable of American history
- Be more aware of American geography and be able to identify different states
- Be capable of discussing the American governmental structure
- Be able to identify different American cultures
- Be able to write well-researched essays
- Be able to communicate effectively to others about American culture without stereotyping
- Be able to identify different cultural values Americans may possess
- Be able to think critically about their own culture

Examination and Grading:

The final grade for the course is estimated as following:

1. Class participation and seminars 30%
2. Attendance 25%
3. Project work 20%
4. Final examination (research paper) 25%

Semester IV and semester V (2nd and 3rd year students)

Nr.	Contents	hours
1.	Introduction • Answering the question "What is American Culture?"	2
2.	American Geography Introduction. • Course goals; • Structure of the course; • Study the 50 states.	2
3.	Quiz on American Geography, Introduction to Native American Life	2
4.	The Founding Principles of the United States of America • The Declaration of Independence; • The Bill of Rights.	2
5.	Immigration waves: • African slave trades • Irish Immigration • Asian Immigration	2
6.	Immigration waves continued: • Mexican and Cuban Immigration • New Immigrants	2

7.	Quiz on Immigration, Intro to Electoral Process: • Voting • Campaigning	2
8.	Quiz on Electoral System, mock Presidential debates	2
9.	Introduction to Movements: Civil Rights Movement	2
10.	Civil Rights Movement.	2
11.	Women's Movement.	2
12.	Quiz on Social Movements; Discuss Projects	2
13.	Work on Projects	2
14. **15.**	**Project Presentations** **Holiday Party** **Total**	**32 hours**

Lecture content

1. **Introduction**
   - What is American Culture?
   - Factors that influenced the development of American Cultures.
   - Introduction to teacher and course.

2. **American Geography**
   Basic Knowledge of American Geography.

   - Fifty States

   - Regions

   - Rivers and Mountains

3. **Quiz on American Geography; Native American Life.**
   - Who were the "Indians."

   - How did they live?

   -What happened to them after Europeans came to the continent?

4. **The Founding Principles of the United States of America.**
   Read and discuss documents that are used to define our rights, values, and cultural morals.

   - The Declaration of Independence

   - The Bill of Rights

5. **Immigration Waves.**
   "Give me your tired and poor…" from the Statue of Liberty. America has opened its doors to all kinds of Immigrants who have come in "waves."
   -African Slaves
   -Irish Immigrants
   -Asian Immigrants

6. **Immigration Waves Continued.**
   More current waves of immigrants come for monitary as well as political reasons:

   - Mexican and Cuban Immigrants
   - Current Immigrants

7. **Quiz over Immigration Waves; Introduction to Electoral Process.**
   General overview of electoral process and what are the rights of the voter and who is the elecotrate:

   - Who votes and when?

   -The electoral college.

8. **Quiz on Electoral Process; Presidential Debates.**
   Students will assume the role of candidates for president and have a debate moderated by the teacher.

9. **Introduction to Movements: Civil Rights Movement.**
   Not all groups of people gained freedom from the Bill of Rights. Discussion of sexism and racism in American culture

10. **Civil Rights Movement**

    What was the civil rights movement? Who were the leaders? “I have a dream speech.”

10. **Women’s Rights Movement.**
    Women’s rights movement began in the 1800’s with the suffrage movement. Leaders and important dates, and documents such as the Declaration of Sentiments, and the Feminine Mystique.

11. **Quiz on Movements; Discuss Final Projects.**
    Final projects for the first semester are group projects. Students select an area to research and to “teach” in an interesting and creative way. Must provide lesson plans and content for lessons.

13. **Work on Final Projects**

Students will work on projects with assistance of teacher. Class will be in the ERC.

14. **Final Project Presentatons**

    Students present lessons to the class.

15. **Holiday Party!**

    Discussion of seasons and the importance of Christmas in American culture.

Photos

This is my university “Universitatea de stat “B.P. Hasdeu,” which means State University B.P. Hasdeu, who was a famous Romanian writer and philologist who the university was named after. This is the one and only building.

This is what the typical classroom looks like at the university. Students share desks in partners, making it easy for pair work, but difficult for group and even individual work sometimes

This is me with one of my practice school classes during PST.

This is me and the Alumni Association Committee after we won our grant.

This is our first seminar for the Alumni Association where we learned about fundraising from another PCV (Brad, in front). It was conducted in our English Resource Center.

Here is a picture of the entire group at the end

This is Peter, another volunteer, conducting a seminar for the Alumni Association on how to write for and design an Alumni newsletter.

This is me and two of my Moldovan colleagues from the Alumni Committee at the third seminar, learning how to format our newsletter.

Here we have one table of students at the Homecoming Fundraiser.

This is the final party of my adult English class—where hardly any English was spoken.