Burnt Tongues and Other Lessons:
A Scrapbook Chronicle of a Peace Corps Service

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Kyrgyz Republic
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1: Introduction

This chronicle is essentially a reflection on my Peace Corps experience and the way it relates to my growth as a teacher. In a way, I found this assignment wonderfully similar to my Peace Corps service itself. That is to say, it was ambiguous and unusual, limited only by a few broad strokes of the pen, a handful of rules written on paper, and by our own will of what to do with it. Each was limited more organically too by the actual circumstances I lived in and by the experiences that I actually had.

My approach therefore was to treat ambiguity with creativity, to create a piecemeal non-fiction genre that is part chronicle, part academic analysis, and part scrap book of official documents, e-mails, journal entries, notes from training, and more. Keeping the main focus throughout on my teaching career, I have tried to select passages that best give the reader a visceral feel for my experience and then framed these with somewhat more objective commentary. As we will see, the hybrid aspect of this work also mimics my own personal response to the cross-cultural encounter.

1: The Assignment (Summer 2004—Spring 2005)

> *I was on the opposite side of the desk, facing a wide open window and an empty seat. Nervously twisting the silk closures on my Chinese shirt, I sat up straight and tried to look worldly, or tried to look at least ready for whatever assignment the recruiter was about to bring. The slight remnants of ink on my fingers from having my fingerprints taken threatened to stain, but the colors of each*

matched too well. I thought back about how I had walked into the interview that morning thinking I would perhaps go to South America or Africa, but the recruiter told me there were no English teaching programs available in those regions. She asked me to choose what was more important to me—work sector or country. "I want to teach English," I told her, surprised at how adamant I suddenly felt about continuing with a profession I'd stumbled into years earlier as a part-time tutor. I said I was willing to go anywhere, and was at that moment just waiting for her to tell me what places there were to go. She came back after a few minutes with an open file in her hand, sat down across from me, and asked the second question that day that would change my life.

"How do you feel about Central Asia?"

"Sure!" I blurted out eagerly, then realized I had no idea what part of the world she was even referring to. I paused momentarily. I felt myself on a precipice looking into a future that had no basis in the past, no stereotypes that I could conjure, no history lessons that I could recall, not even a clear sense of what part of the world I'd be living and working in for 27 months. I added: "Can I see a map?"

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Dear Future Volunteers!

Congratulations on being nominated to serve two years with Peace Corps in the Kyrgyz Republic. We are sure you will love the country for its stunning beauty, generosity and the hospitality of its people.

– "Your Assignment," Peace Corps, April 2005

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(Image from CIA World Factbook)

I had to do quite a lot of research initially, but I eventually learned enough about the country to write most of these facts from memory: Kyrgyzstan is a country of roughly 5 million people situated in a mountainous region of Central Asia, and is bordered by China, Kazakhstan,

Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Historically the people lived as nomadic tribes but were influenced by surrounding Turkish and Mongol populations, as well as other travelers on the Silk Road, which passes directly through modern day Kyrgyzstan. Islam was introduced to the area between the 10th and 12th centuries, and remains the predominant religion today, even if it is seriously practiced by few. Russian populations played a major role as well from the 18th century onward, claiming the area for the Russian czar in 1865 and later creating the Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1926 (Peace Corps, 2005). Since 1991, the country has been struggling to reestablish itself as an independent, democratic country while managing the social tensions of a fairly diverse population. Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, and Russians (64.9%, 13.8%, 12.5% respectively according to a 1999 census; Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2009) make up the majority, though there are sizable groups of Dungans, Uighurs and Ukrainians as well.

In fact, tension and struggle marked political and historical events affecting the country in the months leading up to my arrival. In March and April of 2005, the Tulip Revolution resulted in the ousting of a corrupt president and widespread destruction and looting in the capital and several other areas. In May of the same year, the Andijan massacre in southern Uzbekistan left hundreds dead because of a government crackdown on protests, and caused a small influx of Uzbeks to flee into nearby Kyrgyzstan and seek refugee status. At the same time, difficulties between Peace Corps Uzbekistan and the Uzbek government caused the office there to close, leaving other Central Asian volunteers and arriving trainees with a feeling of precariousness.

Peace Corps had been hosting volunteers in the country since 1993, with at least 300 volunteers serving between the start of the program and my arrival, but had closed briefly during the aftermath of September 11, 2001. By 2005, there were roughly 112 volunteers serving as both English teachers and business volunteers. (Peace Corps, 2005)

2: Training (September—December 2005)

> *"Training is an essential part of Peace Corps service. Our goal is to provide you with the information you need to live and work effectively in the Kyrgyz Republic. You will receive training and orientation in language, cross-cultural communication, area studies, health and personal safety, and technical skills relevant to your specific assignment. The skills you learn will serve as a foundation upon which you will build your experience as a Volunteer in the Kyrgyz Republic. You will study either Kyrgyz or Russian, based on the language used most at your future site." (Volunteer Handbook, Peace Corps, 2005)*

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Hello all!

I have had some email trouble (apparently Gmail is not so easy to load
at certain internet cafes, but fortunately there is a new one that

opened up here 2 days ago and has a great connection) but I thought you all would like to know that I have arrived safely and have started training in a little village called Al-Chaloo, 20 minutes from our hub center in Tokmok. I live with my kyrgyz host mother and father and two of their grandsons, age 4 and age 14 in a little farmhouse. There are 5 cows (which my family tried jokingly to get me to milk my first day there), a couple of horses, guard dogs, a kitten and chickens running everywhere. There's running water and electricity, but the sink where I wash my face is (I just found out) not attached to a pipe, but rather has to be refilled in a little space behind the mirror. Bath wise, it only happens once a week but it's an intense Russian style steam bath, and I'm going to get my first one this afternoon.
Toilet wise, ahem, let's just say it's the biggest drawback I've found in Kyrgyzstan so far.

I've been placed in the Kyrgyz language group along with about 2/3 of the 66 Peace Corps trainees in my year (the other third are in Russian--lucky bastards!) and 4 days a week I get intensive Kyrgyz lessons with the 4 other volunteers in my village. We all meet at our Language and Cross Cultural Facilitator's house and kneel on traditional Kyrgyz rugs around a long coffee table and take our best shot at learning this funny language.

We also have other trainings on two days with the whole group in Tokmok (it's a little city on the Kazakh border, about an hour outside Bishkek), and just one day off so it's kind of like the Peace Corps' boot camp. I'll get to write again on Tuesday or Wednesday (internet is once a week, but we made a special trip today) so please write me before then! I'd love to know what's going on and how you're doing. Also, please let me know if you'd like my paper address. Paper letters would be wonderful too...

Peace!

Megan

--E-mail, October 2005

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There were two aspects of training in particular that helped me to become a better English teacher: Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) training, and language training.

TEFL Training

> *She teaches English.*
> *Does she teach English?*
> *She doesn't teach English.*
> *Doesn't she teach English?*
>
> *--Notes from a training session on grammar, November 2005*

The connection between TEFL training and my skills and abilities in this profession should be fairly transparent. During the Pre-Service Training (PST) that occurred between late September and early December of 2005, we logged 36 hours of TEFL training, as well as 64 hours of "community assignments." Part of these assignments included a short practicum in our village schools that allowed us to observe other teachers, teach our own lessons, observe and be observed by our peers as well. Added to that was the roughly 15-20 more hours of training in this area that we received during the week of In-Service Training after 3 months of service. I also participated in a special workshop on curriculum design and lesson planning for a select group of TEFL volunteers in April 2007; the workshop was conducted by Peace Corps in order to help us create and publish a supplement to the national curriculum that would be distributed to English teachers nationwide, which I am including here despite the fact that it is not a perfect chronological fit.

In these trainings our program managers, specialists in TEFL, attempted to balance instruction from our volunteer colleagues with visits from language teaching professionals—local teachers in public and private schools, as well as one one Senior English Language Fellow serving in Osh who traveled north on two occasions to conduct sessions. The English Language Fellow I remember being a particularly effective presenter. The first time she came she was charged with the incredible task of trying to sum up English grammar as best she could in an hour and 30 minutes, and began by having us all stand up and stretch our arms in the air and swing them down to the floor on the final words as we yelled, "The most important part of the English language is...THE VERB!" I had learned a fair amount about English grammar from the graduate TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) class I had taken as a senior in college, but this was a critical point that her emphasis, along with the amusing and dramatically kinesthetic reinforcement, made it hard for me to forget. On the second occasion, she spoke about critical thinking, framing it using Bloom's Taxonomy of thinking skills, and provided us with a packet of activities that covered each of these thinking skills. Since then I have regarded these thinking skills as a central concept in my teaching, and have consciously tried to ensure that students are evaluating, synthesizing, analyzing and applying knowledge rather than just remembering and classifying.

I also remember a session conducted by one volunteer who had a reputation for being a stellar language learner, and who gave advice that I have also consciously incorporated in my teaching since then. He talked passionately about the best ways to learn a language, giving idea

after idea that stuck with me. *I only have three rules for students,* he said: *try, pay attention, and respect. Recollection is harder than recognition; if you're doing flashcards or reviewing vocabulary some other way, try to get students to go from their native language to the target language. Charades works with a lot more things than you think it does. Try to always be thinking of names for the things around you—think in the language you're trying to learn.*

There were also tricks of the trade that many volunteers used and loved in their classroom. One thing I learned was that a ball was an extremely useful learning tool that allows the teacher to choose students and the students to choose each other in a more entertaining, interactive, and kinesthetic way. Students can easily review vocabulary or ask and answer questions in this way. Still today, I always have a ball with me in the classroom, and have learned that a wadded up piece of paper will do in a pinch. (My students in Kyrgyzstan once even made me a very nice ball out of paper and tape when my regular ball was stolen.) I also learned several games which are described in my repertoire of games below.

Although isolated activities (the quickest and most pragmatic way to teach a group of people to teach—give them an arsenal of games and activities) seemed to be the main focus of our training, there was some focus on lesson design as well. One session in particular laid out the important elements of a lesson plan: objectives, activities, materials, topic and time. The presenters emphasized the importance of preparedness, and the need to use it as a platform for flexibility in the complicated and uncontrollable reality of the classroom. This is a philosophy I have espoused regarding my own teaching as well.

In terms of overall approach, when it was discussed at all, communicative Present, Practice, Produce (PPP) was explained as the indisputably most appropriate way to teach forms. In my notes, I wrote on a single page both, “Present rule first, then get lots of practice,” and “A good grammar lesson is based on communicative needs...should be presented in context...includes both form and meaning.” This was the approach also taught and promoted in the week-long workshop on curriculum and lesson design that I participated in in April 2007.

More specifically the main way we learned PPP was in conjunction with Bernice McCarthy's “4MAT” as a means of addressing variation in student learning styles. “4MAT;” which classifies learning styles as dynamic, imaginative, common sense, or analytic, can be seen as a means of organizing lessons in the traditional deductive fashion, but in a way that is more sensitive to individual differences. We were taught plainly that each lesson should consist of 1) Warm-up: a short 5-10 minute activity that includes elements such as pictures, stories, songs, movies, or active games to engage imaginative learners; 2) Presentation: rules, forms and/or vocabulary are presented to engage analytic learners; 3) Practice (Controlled and Semi-Controlled): fill-in-the-blank, sentence formation, or other types of controlled exercises are provided to engage common sense learners; 4) Application: the material is finally applied to real-life situations to engage dynamic learners. I appreciated having a clear template that would allow me to organize my lessons effectively, and I certainly appreciated the idea that I needed to vary my activities so that all students' needs were being met. I generally tried to use the 4MAT template for lesson planning, particularly after the workshop gave me the chance to really explore and practice the concepts.

At the same time, I felt a certain level of intellectual dissonance with the 4MAT template. My primary problem was that I find it somewhat hypocritical to treat the problem of individual differences and the complexity of human identity by taking the problematic one-size-fits-all view of human beings and simply multiplying it by four. I felt personally constrained by these categories and while my colleagues enjoyed learning about themselves through the “Learner

Type" quizzes we were given to fill out, I found myself unable to share their attitudes either during training or during the workshop roughly a year and half later. I refused to compact and essentialize myself as a learner into what I viewed as hopelessly inadequate categories, and I bristled at the thought of subjecting my students to that as well. Furthermore I disliked the idea of addressing each type of learner in turn, rather than finding ways to keep them all engaged in a single activity. In my teaching today, I wholeheartedly accept the idea that people are different and learn in different ways, but I no longer use such a simplistic format, and I never try to fit my learners into distinct and constrictive categories; I feel strongly that the categories are a merely a heuristic tool for understanding human variation, and that they should not be applied to individuals.

In general, however, our PST focused very little on different approaches and methods or any larger principles; it aimed instead to give us the tools we needed to teach in as short an amount of time as possible. Given the circumstances and the fact that few volunteers planned to teach after their service, I feel this was an appropriate route to take. I gained a great deal of practical knowledge, a larger repertoire of activities, and a several broader ideas that influenced my teaching today.

Language Training

> *I remember that day too that my host father was the* animator*, the life of the party, at the lunch [where we all met our host families]. He took an apple out of the gleaming bowl of fruit in the middle of the table and indoctrinated me with its Kyrgyz name. "Alma," he said, and had me repeat it two or three times until it sounded right to him. Then he pealed it and gave me a piece. "Alma," he said again with the flesh of the fruit in his hand, and then gave one piece to each volunteer at the table in turn. "Alma," he echoed each time, giving tangible meaning to the sounds, raising a language in us from scratch, giving us a new childhood in an altogether different world. I think we might all remember that word till we die, even when we have forgotten every other word of Kyrgyz we ever knew. "*Maga alma jagat*," I told him, remembering the phrase that had sounded so comical on the MP3's that Peace Corps had sent us to study before we arrived. "I like apples."*
> *--Journal, November 2005*

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> *After language class the other day, I found my host mother standing beside a new lemon tree in our yard.*
>
> *"What's this?" I asked.*
>
> *"Limon," she said, slowly and exaggeratedly, as though my native language didn't have an almost precise cognate. She made me repeat it once or twice, and I humored her, wishing I knew the word for "same" so we could stop this charade. Then, without*

warning, Apa launched excitedly into a stream of sounds that later turned out to be my first invitation to a Kyrgyz feast; the neighbors were breaking the day-long fast of Ramadan that night at seven, and they had invited me and my family to come. I listened, straining to extract any of the handfuls of words that I knew.

"Seven?" I parroted, solely because it was the only word that had emerged to the surface.

"Yes, seven o'clock tonight..." she said, encouraged by the false impression of understanding that I gave. She continued to talk, and more and more sounds managed to form some level of meaning in my head. "Dinner...house...break the fast...our house...all children here...older brothers and sisters, their children too...lots of people, lots of food."

"Tonight?" I asked, eyebrows raised, dumbly lingering on a topic we had abandoned, and exposing my lack of awareness that this was in fact, a second, separate invitation.

"No, no, no!" She took me inside to show me on the "Scenes of America" calendar I had brought them as a gift upon arrival, an over- sized set of glossy, airbrushed, incongruous pictures of Mount Rushmore, the Statue of Liberty, and ten other icons of American culture. She searched for the right day, momentarily confused by the placement of Sunday as day one and not as day seven. Then she pointed to Saturday.

"Hmm, ok...," I said hesitantly, still only having understood that we were talking about one event and not two. "So, Saturday then, not today?"

"Not today," she confirmed with an emphatic shake of the head.

"Ok, good. Saturday then," I said, feeling content at having concluded another successful Kyrgyz conversation. I put my bag down in my room, cleaned up for a little while, turned on my laptop, and changed into sweatpants and a sweatshirt. I was just about to get my laundry off the line outside when I bumped into my host mother again.

"Are you ready?" she asked. "It's almost seven."

"Seven!" I repeated, this time with genuine understanding beginning to sink in. I looked down in horror at what I was wearing, tugged at the baggy sides of my sweat pants demonstratively, and gave her a shocked look, as though I were Cinderella still in cinders.

She gave a dismissive wave of her hand. "Let's go."
--Journal, October 2005

At117.5 hours of classroom instruction, and 20 official hours of "self-planned and experiential" learning, language training was easily the largest portion of our entire PST. The relationship between this and my growth as a teacher may not be as direct as with TEFL training;

yet I would argue that language training had as much of an impact on me in this respect as TEFL training, if not more. I found that the way we were taught Kyrgyz was extremely effective, particularly because it placed us in immersion situations that were supplemented with clear classroom-based instruction.

What I learned from the immersion, as evidenced by the journal entries above, was invaluable to understanding the situation of my students studying English in the U.S. I learned the incredible value of learning through real objects, actions, places and instructions. Many times when I tell people I teach ESL (English as a Second Language), they ask me how I can teach people when we don't share a common language. Though it's certainly not always easy, I can recall learning words like *apple*, *tablecloth*, *carpet*, *sit*, *drink*, *eat*, and *goodnight* all through simply talking with people who were not afraid to speak to me in their language, and to help me with dramatic gestures, blunt indication, and modified speech.

I also learned what it feels like to feel the internal conflict of being both child an adult, of wanting to be linguistically coddled and wanting at the same time to show that you're an intelligent person. I remember feeling frustrated that my host mother had me repeat the word *limon*, and because of that I try to be cognizant of what my students do know, of the international words, the cognates and common vocabulary, the words that we can use as a hinge for intelligent conversation. I also remember feeling frustrated at the stark contrast between her belittling instruction, and the unmodified string of speech that followed; my frustration only increased when the misunderstanding became comical. On the one hand this teaches me to try my best to communicate in an accessible way and to check understanding of instructions to stave off problems. On the other hand it also teaches me to have a little sympathy for myself and my students when misunderstandings occur because I am more familiar with the complexities of communication across linguistic and cultural barriers, and I know that we cannot always intuit precisely each others' thoughts.

What I learned through “classroom” (or more precisely, my neighbors' living room) instruction was significant as well. Essentially, the strategy Peace Corps used was to give us a few critical phrases and words at first, then move us through the language methodically in manageable portions—basic tools, and then elaboration. We used a text written by employees of Peace Corps Kyrgyzstan with ten chapters, each of which began with and were driven by long lists of vocabulary and sets of conversational chunks. This, perhaps more than anything else, has contributed to my belief that teaching vocabulary and chunks is generally more useful and more motivating to students than teaching grammar. I realize that much of grammar, however, is also essential to communicating meaning (and what is not essential to meaning at least facilitates discourse). For this reason, each chapter also included grammar with clearly stated rules and opportunities to practice. Often, rather than simply filling out the exercises, we would move directly to creating our own sentences orally and in writing. This was an aspect of teaching that I appreciated enormously because I had always found exercises tedious and felt impatient waiting to get to really use the language. Our instructor never tried to control our practice too tightly and prevent us from making mistakes; instead, she knew that we already communicating and making mistakes all the time, and this is also a point of view that I take towards my ESL students today.

In terms of activities we would generally start each day by reviewing vocabulary thoroughly and quickly with a game of “word ball,” in which the instructor said one of the words in either the L1 or TL, threw the ball to a student, and then had the student give the translation. This may sound tedious in its description, but at that point in our language learning this activity, from my point of view, mimicked the actual language learning process in the fact that we were

already translating in our heads, and this just facilitated the development of neural pathways between the two languages. Another central activity was to create written (prepared) and spontaneous dialogues throughout, allowing us to practice and obtain feedback on the same conversations we were constantly, ineptly having in our daily lives. Both of these activities are ones that I've incorporated into my teaching since then in various forms, and I feel strongly that they can be very useful and effective.

Our instructor, Ratbu, was also very cognizant of our affective filters, and helped us to manage our stress in a number of ways. She noticed that we were brimming over with questions, and with our input, consciously decided to devote 30 minutes of each class to answering our language and culture questions. Generally when our motivation began to flag and our frustration levels rose, she would have us play a game, even if the learning component was not very high. She knew that there were times when persisting would only have made the situation worse, and that sometimes students just need a break. Lastly, she would generally speak in the target language as much as possible (particularly for small easily gestured questions such as, “Can I erase the board now?”) and increased her use of the TL in and out of class thoughout the months that we were with her. There were, however, times when she knew that using the L1 would both decrease our stress levels and reduce our cognitive loads for greater learning, times such as when she was teaching a new grammatical structure, or explaining an aspect of Kyrgyz culture. As an EFL teacher there, I also tried to balance the benefits of TL exposure with the stress and difficulty that using the TL could create.

Essentially, ours was a very creative, communicative, and sensitive classroom, and I have consciously and unconsciously incorporated much of my experience there into my teaching today.

4. Service and Identity (December 2005—November 2007)

Hello everyone!

I found out where exactly I'll be living in Kyrgyzstan for the next two years and right now am visiting it. I'm going to be on Lake Issyk-Kul, the second largest alpine lake in the world, in a little village of about 1500 people called Tamchy. If anyone has access the
Lonely Planet Central Asia, it's listed there as a good place to go to visit the beach, and I definitely agree (although in the summers I might be a little overrun with tourists). My house is maybe about 500
meters from beach and you can see the water from many of the classrooms in my school, and the mountains from the others. There are
a few little cafes and stores, a post office, but no internet. The nearest internet is in Cholpon-Ata, a larger and more touristy city about 45 minutes away (where I am right now, since I'm visiting my site), so if anyone wants to write me paper mail I'm including all my

new contact info at the bottom of this email. I'm not going to be living here permanently until the beginning of December, but the post office will hold any mail that arrives for me until I get there.

I'm really super happy with my placement so far, and everyone seems incredibly nice. My host family consists of a 51 year old mom, her 27 year old son and his 27 year old wife and their 4 year old daughter. They've had volunteers live with them before so they're really patient with my awkward Kyrgyz and know a lot about American culture. The house is big and in the summers the family has rooms that they rent out to tourists, so maybe I'll be able to help them out with translating if need be. I'll also probably get to learn a lot of Russian when the tourists come (it's a bilingual Kyrgyz speaking community with only a handful of Russians who don't know Kyrgyz).

My school, no joke, held a small assembly yesterday to introduce me to all the students. The class leaders handed me huge bunches of colored chrysanthemums, which are a very common flower in this area, and gave me welcome speeches, some in Kyrgyz and some in English. Their English is good, but not perfect (the 2 English teachers in the school make a lot of mistakes, such as, "Don't cry!" instead of "Don't yell!" and they taught their kids a song that goes, "Where are you live?", much to my shock). The more incredible part though is that the kids gave a small concert in my honor. They sang Kyrgyz songs, performed Kryrgyz and Uzbek dances, performed part of the Manas poem (an ancient epic poem that takes 3 days to perform in its entirety and is a major source of pride for the Kyrgyz), and even wrote a little play to demonstrate Kyrgyz wedding customs for me. I'll try to write more about Kyrgyz wedding customs later, since my current host sister is getting married in a little over a week--I'm so excited!

So here's my contact information for the next two years, starting in the beginning of December:

11 Musa Isakbekov street, Tamchy village,

Issyk-Kul Rayon, Issyk Oblast
Kyrgyzstan

You can write it in English letters, and the post office will understand. I'm the fifth volunteer that's been at my site, although there haven't been any American volunteers for a little while (there's a Japanese volunteer right now though, with the Japanese version of the Peace Corps--he's teaching computer classes and Japanese language, and unfortunately he speaks Russian and only a tiny bit of English, so we can't communicate very well).

Also, my phone number at the house is 03943-21180. If anyone would actually like to call, www.uniontelecard.com *is supposed to have cheap rates.*

Hope everyone is doing well at home! Please send me updates, either by the post or by email.

Love,

Megan

--E-mail, November 11, 2005

In discussing what I learned from my two year service, I have chosen to focus on three main aspects: my role as a teacher, my role as a foreigner, and the secondary projects I worked on in my role as a Peace Corps Volunteer. Each of these aspects represented a developing part of the identity that I bring, in one way or another, into my classroom today.

I am a teacher

*Ms. Calvert was enrolled in the Peace Corps on December 1, 2005. She was responsible to the Ministry of Education during her service in the Kyrgyz Republic. Ms. Calvert served as a teacher assigned to Tamchy School, Tamchy Village, Issyk Kul Region, Issyk Kul Oblast, where she was one of approximately 38 faculty members. The school offered **11** grades of study and had an enrollment of approximately **425** students. Ms. Calvert reported directly to the director of the school, Orozbaeva Jangyl Karasartovna, and was*

responsible for teaching the following courses:

Year and # of School Days	*Subject*	*Grades*	*#of Students*	*#Hours Per Week*
Winter 2005-Spring 2006	***English***	***6-11***	***100***	***19***
Fall 2006-Spring 2007	***English***	***4-11***	***100***	***19***
Fall 2007	***English***	***5-11***	***150***	***18***

While working at Tamchy school, in addition to regular class hours, she held English clubs 4 days a week for 2 hours each day. Students generally enjoyed these clubs and many attended regularly. Every club included 30-60 minutes of conversation as well as a variety of games and topics such as grammar, songs, holidays, short stories, plays, movies, vocabulary, cultural differences, tradition, gender roles, planning for the future and critical thinking. Occasionally Ms. Calvert was also able to offer an additional 2 hours each week of French club and/or French tutoring.

--Description of Service (DOS), October 2007

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At present the education system in the Kyrgyz Republic is to much degree a legacy of the soviet system, which was characterized by extreme centralization of schooling, dogmatic treatment of political and social issues, and curriculum inflexibility. English is the most popular foreign language taught and it is a compulsory subject in secondary schools' curriculum. Volunteers are expected to be flexible and willing to adapt and change. You will be working not only in a culturally different environment but in situations with very limited teaching resources.

At present there is no funding for new textbooks, computers, teacher training, or building construction and maintenance. You will be expected to bring new teaching styles to the [schools], introduce communicative approaches in teaching the English language, and develop new learning and instructional materials.

– "Your Assignment," Peace Corps, April 2005

The teaching conditions at my site were perhaps not ideal, but could certainly have been worse. The school was typical of others in the area in many ways. The heat worked poorly because the administrators never bought enough coal, and students and teachers regularly kept their coats on in class until the administrators would come by and chastise them, upset that their

poverty (or corrupt misappropriation of funds) might be exposed to the public. The classrooms sometimes lacked enough chairs, and in larger classes some students ended up sitting two to a seat, or putting two chairs together to create a bench. The furniture was poor quality, and would break quite frequently; the back of each classroom became a sort of furniture graveyard. Each room also had a chalkboard, many of which were donated by the Soros Foundation a year or two before my arrival to replace the broken boards; yet, these two were of extremely poor quality and the finish had begun to wear off in a way that made the chalk illegible. Soros had also donated a few other underused items—textbooks which teachers left on the shelves because they didn't have time to learn the new material; a copy machine that teachers never used, either because they didn't know how it might be useful to them, or because they were discouraged from wasting resources; a computer lab that ended up being the sole domain of the Japanese (JICA) volunteer until he left a year after I arrived.

The school had plenty of English textbooks too, which was a blessing compared to many places. But the books were extremely outdated, and even the two local English teachers had to pick and choose the parts that would still translate. I copied several excerpts from these books just because what was written in them was so fascinating to me. A typical example, which I copied word for word and punctuation mark for punctuation mark, leaving everything intact, or in some cases absent:

Back to School Again

Today is the 2nd of September. Yesterday the new school year began and we had our first Komsomol meeting after classes. Asan, our Komsomol organizer, said <<Today we shall speak about those useful things that we have done this summer. First I want to tell you a few words about myself. I went to Kiev, the capital of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, where I took part in the All-Union swimming competition.>>

<<I swam for our Kirghiz Republic.>>

<<Did you win any prize?>> Aisha asked.

<<I worked hard before the championship but I was afraid that I should not win any prize because there were good swimmers who could swim quicker than I. But I was lucky and you see I have brought a bronze medal.

<<We are glad to congratulate you, Asan! we all shouted. Then Asan said, <<Well, Bolot, you headed the group of our girls and boys who worked on the collective farm. What will you tell us about the work?>>

Bolot answered, <<There were eighteen boys and sixteen girls in our group. We made hay in the Tien Shan mountains. The weather was fine: it did not rain, the sun shone brightly and we remembered the English saying, <<Make hay while the sun shines.>> We have made enough hay for a lot of sheep, cows, and horses in winter>>.

<<And I want to tell you about three girls of our group>>, Anar said. <<They could not work in the mountains and we

decided to leave them on the milk farm at the foot of the highest mountain. They like animals, you know. So every day they got up earlier than we did, they looked after lambs and calves, they grazed them on the hills. Soon they learnt to milk cows and sent a lot of milk to us.

Our work on the farm was very useful for the country and for us, too. You see, we have got sunburnt, strong and healthy. We are ready to study hard at school>>, Jumach said.

Other readings in these texts detailed the life of Lenin, the history of Marx, the stolen aphorisms of Benjamin Franklin, the pitfalls of capitalism and the superiority of the Soviet Union. Every passage was propaganda for a world that no longer existed, written in language that was was borrowed and changed when we were that lost world's enemy. Because of this, I ended up using the textbooks only rarely, and opted instead to create my own materials.

Even if I felt like there was very little of these texts that I could use and I was essentially left without textbooks, they did offer quite a bit of insight into the hybrid soviet-capitalist education system that Kyrgyzstan had developed, a system which was in itself part of the challenging teaching conditions I managed every day. This account of an English lesson from another textbook we had, for example, typifies a number of aspects of school-related life that remain true today:

AT AN ENGLISH LESSON

We have our English lesson twice a week. When the teacher comes into the classroom the pupils stand up and the teacher says: <<Good morning, children>>: The pupils answer: <<Good morning, teacher>>. The teacher goes to her desk and says: <<Sit down>>. All the pupils sit down and the lesson begins. The teacher asks questions. Some pupils answer very well. The teacher says to them: <<Very good. I give you <<five>> or <<I give you four>>. Some pupils do not know the lesson very well. The teacher says: <<Your answer is not good, I give you <<three>>.

The teacher speaks English all the time and the pupils understand her and answer the questions in English. The pupils read the text in their books and the teacher asks them to speak about it. Then the teacher gives them their homework.

We all like English lessons.

This passage illustrates the ritualized greetings, the teacher-centered and textbook-focused instruction, the impressionistic assignation of grades, and the consistent positive regard for the subject matter that were core to Kyrgyz education. Children learned English through routine and memorization of identical words, and for the most part their capacity to understand and produce spontaneous, natural speech was quite limited. This is something I struggled with. I wrote in my journal on April 7, 2006: “So many teachers here think that education is primarily rote memorization of facts, particularly language. But to me language is a medium of free expression, unfettered possibility of new creation.”

Bringing my own more liberal experiences and ideas about education into the classroom, I took the communicative approach that Peace Corps taught us and encouraged as much natural target language interaction as possible. My classes always included speaking and listening activities even when they were grammar-based, and I tried as much as possible to talk to my students in English outside of class. Though nearly all of my students demonstrated considerable difficulties with spontaneous, authentic speech and listening, many of them made considerable gains by the end. My counterpart (another English teacher at the school) also benefited enormously from interaction with me, and though we struggled with conversations in the beginning, by the end we could talk for hours with very little trouble.

My own limited experience as a classroom teacher also proved to be a challenge during my time in Tamchy, particularly in the area of classroom management. In this journal entry I describe a situation I had with students early on in the spring of 2006:

> *My 11th form doesn't come to class. They lie to me. They don't participate. They don't do the homework, even though I know it's easier for them than for other classes. They don't listen. They don't help me. I asked them to help me prepare for open lesson. I told them my plan and asked them if they understood. Yes, yes. Do you want me to say it in Kyrgyz? No, we understand. Do you think you can prepare this in one day? Yes, sure. It's not too hard? No. And yesterday they did nothing. They sat bewildered, not understanding the project, and not asking questions. Some who didn't understand said it was too easy, they knew the tense, could they leave and go somewhere else? Others said, well can we make a fifth group? Some said, well it's too hard, how about I just don't come the day of the presentations? Or worse yet, he doesn't know anything, can I just work alone? If I wasn't standing over them telling them what to do, they were just sitting playing games in their weird little notebooks (the ones with pasted in pictures of people from magazines). I gave them an extra day to prepare, and it was even worse the second day. They took two days to write out the charts and then I asked them what games they had prepared, as part of the requirements. Game? What? No. Well when will you prepare it? We aren't preparing a game. It was like trying to pick up 10 kilos of jelly all at once with nothing but my bare hands, my open fingers, everything falling through. Where are your papers? I have a lot of papers--I don't know where those went. Ms. Megan, can I go to the post office? Hell no.*

It took a long time to understand that I had lost control of the class because there were a number of connections that I was failing to make. I had given them an activity that was not only unfamiliar to them, but quite difficult and failed to scaffold it in a way that made it accessible to students. I had failed to check their understanding effectively and monitor their work. I had also failed at finding an activity that was meaningful and interesting to them; rather than addressing their needs and motivating them through that, I had simply told them what to do at an age when they should have been able to give some amount of input as well.

Clearly I struggled with my older, often less motivated classes; but the situation was even worse with my younger students. For the 2006-2007 school year, I was assigned a small 4th form (roughly equivalent to 4th grade) class, but had even less experience working with such a young age, and even less understanding of their needs. These students would regularly stand up and move around the room, and I rarely felt as though I could get the whole class's attention at once. In my quarterly Peace Corps Progress Report, I tellingly wrote about my issues with this class:

> *I have tried to call the director in more than once, but her response is always smiling and tepid. The class teacher seems indifferent, as do other teachers during the afternoon shift—the bells are never rung on time and students are always roaming the halls and the courtyard when they should be in class. Last week I was reading them the Very Hungry Caterpillar when two boys got into a fist fight that left one bleeding. My counterpart then came to the class and threatened to bring the police in if they continued to give me trouble...*

Even though this was one of my greatest challenges, and something that I still have not completely overcome today, I also feel that this was one of my greatest areas of progress. Rejoyce Milam, one of my fellow volunteers who had an M.A. in Early Childhood Education and several years of experience was kind enough to visit my class in March of 2007 and help me understand how to manage them better. Amongst other things, she taught me the importance of making my expectations clear, the value of using games as rewards, and need to tolerate nothing less than attentive behavior. I wrote in my journal:

> *I've never seen my kids so raptly attentive or as interested in working and learning as when she came...She doesn't tolerate the noise. She doesn't just teach through it. She lets her students know what she expects of them, and games and the opportunity to do things in class are always a reward for good behavior. They are so desperate for approval and the opportunity to prove themselves that just giving them that opportunity is a treat. They like attention so much that even negative attention is better than nothing for them*
>
> *One thing she said that was just key for me understanding what I'm doing wrong is that I have to do what I say I will do, or they will never believe me...Last semester when I was giving tests, the kids in my 9b actually corrected me on what I threatened to do. I said I'd take their papers and give them 2's if they talked, and one said, "No, you'll get mad, but you won't give us 2's." Here is the strategy laid out in perfect simplicity: Step 1: Explain your expectations clearly before there is opportunity for misbehavior. 2: Give 1 warning for violations of those expectations, and only 1 warning. 2: At the second violation, enforce the consequences. (See Appendix G for continuation)*

Problems continued, but I was able to use my improved understanding of classroom

management more effectively than before. Following Rejoyce's visit I wrote:

> *Today I was reviewing for tomorrow's test with 9b and the boys as usual were not paying attention. I told them calmly but in a serious tone to either pay attention or leave the room and get 2's for the day. Most of the boys turned and began to finally write what I had written on the board. They all stopped talking and I had this sudden feeling of discomfort. I suddenly realized my class was fuller than it had been before, and the "new" students were at a level much lower than the level at which I'd been teaching. Five minutes later I noticed that Azim and Adilet were not paying attention, but rather writing homework for another class. I walked to the back and verified, then I told them to take their things and get out of the room. I got a little bit angry, but not over the top. I told them in English, and then in half-assed Kyrgyz that if they didn't want to learn, I didn't want to teach them. They didn't move. I knew I had to stick to what I said, and that if I didn't they'd never respect me. I waited. Some of the students whispered to them to say they were sorry, that they wouldn't do it again. I said I wouldn't forgive them, and that if they did it again next class, they'd get another 2. I said it was too late. I told them there were 15 minutes left to the class and I wouldn't teach until they left. Finally they left. I felt so powerful. I felt like my word was actually being respected. I actually had the class under control. I had weeded out two useless students, who were only weakening the attention of the others. They could be good kids, but they wouldn't have learned anything in that lesson anyway. It was the smallest sacrifice for the greatest benefit. The only problem was again, I was teaching at a level too high for my mental newcomers.*

The last line of this journal entry shows the other side of classroom management that I was only beginning to understand and be able to address—the fact that the least attentive students were prevented from participating because the lessons themselves were inaccessible to them.

Not all of my successes were derived from such difficult challenges, however. I actually thrived in an environment with limited resources and happily "bellied up" to the challenge of getting students to use language in a more authentic and spontaneous way. I felt that these were little more than opportunities to put my creative capacities to good use. I made stacks and stacks of detailed drawings to illustrate vocabulary words and story events. I invented and adapted a number of games and activities, a portion of which are described below (see Appendix E). I bought poster paper and made game boards, drew diagrams for students to label, and turned many of my favorite songs, TV shows, and subjects into lessons. Even though I've learned far more effective methods of curriculum design since then, I also enthusiastically filled the calendar plans I had to write for my classes with activities I thought would be fun and motivating as well (see Appendix F for an example).

One of my most successful activities was the weekly "Dear Ms. Megan" letters that I assigned as homework to my older classes. I would give students a different topic each week,

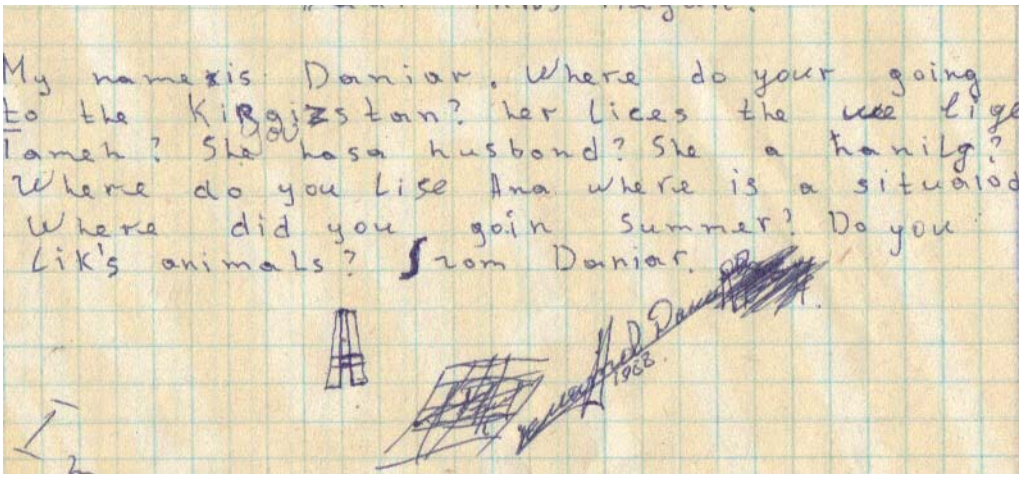
and ask them to write me a letter on that subject. I described these letters in my Progress Report:

> *Not only have students learned that cheating and copying are unacceptable and impossible to hide with these assignments, but a large number of students have come to enjoy writing them. I work hard to make the topics (within their ability) thought-provoking, which helps to keep them motivated and develop their critical thinking and personal values. Students also respond to the premise of a letter more than that of an essay, and will sometimes use them as a means of communicating with me privately, and asking me advice on personal issues.*

Essentially I think the real advantage of this assignment was to capitalize on my position as a source of curiosity in the village, and pose myself as an authentic English-speaking audience for them. Students responded well, and many who had never tried to write before were motivated to do so because of this assignment. One of the letters from an 11th form student I kept, not because it was of great quality, but simply because the student's genuine effort to rely on his own resources (a dictionary perhaps) and make himself understood were so transparent, and even surprisingly effective:

> *I mukambet tfubak 1989 11-february*
> *tamchu village mother simple family mother worker*
> *school papa worker farmer I pupil*
> *schoolboy 11 class, I football game play can*

Another student, who struggled even with the formation of letters in the English alphabet, wrote:



Relative to textbook exercises, these letters were more enjoyable and authentic not only for the students, for me to read as well. (I included more examples, as well as letter topics in the appendix below.) The letter writing proved so enjoyable to the students in fact that I decided to write to an old high school teacher and arrange pen pals for a number of my students as well.

Some of them have even reported that they are still in touch with those pen pals to this day.

Overall the accomplishments that I made as a teacher were meaningful, if not always tangible or clear. In my journal after our Close of Service (COS) conference in the fall of 2007, I wrote

> *One of the activities we did was writing sticky notes to put up under categories and superlatives. Under Biggest Accomplishment, I remember: sending someone to Germany, getting students to learn more than they ever thought they could, being called a local of my town, completing successful projects, having a fifth grader make a complex sentence. Mine was, "Inspiring students to learn and excel who weren't interested before I came." I was thinking mostly of [my student] Saltanat, and how Bilim eje said she wasn't really that interested in English before I came. Just my being here made her into the absolute best English student in the school, a girl who could hold her own against some of the best students around.*

If nothing else, as I learned that as a teacher we can not necessarily change the lives of all our students, but we impact them nonetheless. Doubtlessly, being a caring and dedicated teacher will lead to profound and meaningful change in the lives of some, and if we are lucky we will be able to reflect back with pride on the skills and knowledge that were fostered through our efforts.

I am a Peace Corps volunteer

In addition to our primary assignments, all volunteers were expected to work on secondary projects. I detailed these in my DOS when I completed my service:

> *While working at Tamchy school, in addition to regular class hours, she held English clubs 4 days a week for 2 hours each day. Students loved these clubs and many attended regularly. Every club included 30-60 minutes of conversation as well as a variety of games and topics such as grammar, songs, holidays, short stories, plays, movies, vocabulary, cultural differences, tradition, gender roles, planning for the future and critical thinking. Occasionally Ms. Calvert was also able to offer an additional 2 hours each week of French club and/or French tutoring.*
>
> *Ms. Calvert also managed to organize 4 school wide English parties, one for each semester she worked at Tamchy School. Two parties were Halloween parties for which students were asked to dress in costume, participate in holiday games and contests (such as bobbing for apples, pumpkin carving) and perform scary skits before judges. One was a general spring English party which included an English song and dance talent show, voting for class superlatives, and games of twister, amongst others. In Spring 2007,*

she also successfully hosted an English Festival in which 7 groups of students from 3 classes performed 5 minute original skits entirely in English before a jury of native English speakers. This festival was the culmination of an entire quarter of hard work and preparation by students and included dance, music, and cultural performances, certificates for all participants and handmade gifts and a thank you meal for members of the jury. All 4 parties were successful in motivating students to practice their English as well as sharing aspects of American culture (the 2nd goal of the Peace Corps).

Ms. Calvert was also quite successful in improving the resources and facilities of Tamchy School. Her major accomplishments in this area are: 1) the development of a foreign language "resource room" for students and teachers and 2) the acquisition of a large donation of English language textbooks. The foreign language resource center is a classroom that she and her counterpart decorated and stocked from scratch. In the winter of 2005-06, with the help of money sent from home and the volunteered time of students, she painted a large-scale mural on the back wall of the room which offers students a detailed multi-colored map of English and French-speaking countries of the world. She reorganized some of the English books already available and stocked the shelves with 3 shipments of books from Darien Book Aid. With the support of her community, she wrote a SPA (Small Projects Assistance) grant to provide her school with a TV, DVD player, tape player, secure storage/display cabinet, and over 35 English movies and Russian language documentaries.

Noticing the insufficient quantities and lamentable quality of the soviet era textbooks with which Tamchy School's busy English teachers were forced to conduct their lessons, she took initiative and was successfully able to solicit a full donation of English textbooks from Macmillian Education in August of 2006, and retrieved the books from their offices in Almaty, Kazakhstan the following year. Since then the books have been distributed to almost every class between grades 3 and 11, teachers have been able to offer more interesting lessons with less time and effort, and students have become far more enthusiastic about learning.

Additionally Ms. Calvert conducted summer English courses for children and adults, was active in host country national or volunteer-driven projects such as summer camps and teacher's seminars, and worked diligently at integrating into her community...In October 2007 she was again tested by certified ACTFL examiners and received a score of Superior In Kyrgyz and

Intermediate Mid In Russian.

What I learned as a teacher from the secondary projects that I worked on was the idea that I should take my skills beyond simple classroom instruction no matter where I work. I am proud of the work that I did above and beyond my every day duties, and I would be proud to embark on similar efforts today. This can be as simple as sharing materials and ideas, improving curricula, answering questions from non-native English speaking colleagues, supplementing my classroom supplies with my own funds, participating in professional development conferences. It can also mean more—soliciting donations or writing grants if necessary, organizing events for teachers and students, or doing action research and working to share the knowledge gained with my colleagues.

I am a foreigner

It may not at first be entirely evident how being a foreigner helps me as a teacher, yet I would argue that this was the most meaningful part of my service both personally and professionally. What I gained from this was a thorough understanding of how confusing, how exhausting, how terrible and how wonderful all at the same time it can be to live in a world where you are the unknown, and everything is unknown to you. Far more than any of my professional training or education, and maybe more even than my experience as a language learner (though the two are indisputably intertwined), my experience as a foreigner has allowed me to empathize with my students in the U.S. and their constant daily struggles. It makes me more aware of what they know, what they need to learn, and what they can ignore.

I can understand better, for example, what it's like to have those early feelings of astonishment at everything around you, and to be missing the cues that are embedded only in traditions and in people's minds. In the story about the lemon tree and the invitations that I began earlier in this paper, I went to the neighbors house for my first guesting. After watching the official close of fasting for the day on local television in one room, and feasting on small plates in another room (“Two types of bread, plates heaped with grapes, apples, pears, walnuts, peanuts, raisins, dried apricots, persimmons, bowls of jams, bowls of pasta with vegetables, sauce and bits of meat, candy, and curious desserts covered literally every part of the table...”), I continued on. I wrote:

> *The third room was a surprise. After eating my fill, I was shuffling out of the room, heading towards the door in line with the others, towards what I assumed was home, when the line took an unexpected turn into another room. This room was only women--the men were across the hall. Was it like in Gone with the Wind, I wondered, where the men retire to drink and smoke and the women retire to take naps and gossip about the men? Where were the cigars? Would these people be hypocritical enough to drink alcohol at a Muslim feast? When the tablecloth came out and was spread out on the floor, I realized that what I had feared suspiciously was true--that we were actually going to eat again. A*

> *young girl in a head scarf came around pouring hot water over everyone's hands, and then food came down on us like an avalanche. Two or three big plates of Beshbarmak, sheep meat over noodles, and enough bowls of steaming broth for every person. "Ich! Ich!" they said to me as they handed me my bowl--"Drink! Drink!" I made a surprised face as I assessed the shimmering oil cooling on the liquid's surface, shrugged and lifted the bowl to my lips. It burned my tongue, but the women laughed, pleased and amused at my effort.*

This may have been confusing and strange, but in the first few months expectations from both self and others were low. It is far easier to deal with not knowing guesting etiquette than the more fundamental issue of trying to truly understand and relate to the cultural tendencies and beliefs around you. There were certainly times when I encountered things I did not understand, and things that I struggled to explain in ways that were not mere projections of my own cultural values onto others. In August of 2006, already irritable from months of constant stomach problems, I described the very visceral reaction I'd felt to behavior that violated my culturally-based sense of morality:

> *But God, when I saw Alia, four years old, baselessly kick the cat quite literally across the kitchen rising and thudding back, dully, painfully, I couldn't help but give a little cry of admonishment. After all such behavior in America is seen as actively sociopathic, a precursor to the egotistical and insensate life of a serial killer. We don't find it amusing to hurt animals without a reason, but I knew my host mother were laugh if I told her why I'd yelled at Alia. I didn't want to say it, but there I was feeling disgusted, wanting to yell more, explain why I thought what she was doing was wrong, and there my host mother was, wondering if she should discipline her granddaughter or not. So I told her. She laughed. I felt sick to my stomach. I went to my room and shut the door and squeezed a few hot tears from my aching head, like oil from a stone.*

Even when I did manage to find cultural explanations for behavior I found disconcerting, I often did it by invoking tools that we had been given in our training from the contrast-culture framework. I was suspending my interest in the complicated individuals around me, manipulating stereotypes in order to to see and understand the broader tendencies:

> *Here's the thing about Kyrgyzstan that I've been synthesizing and struggling to express, struggling to proclaim with all my focus on critical thinking: The Kyrgyz love artistic things, but they don't like creativity. They think that is it necessary for all people, all children, all educators in particular, to show some ability to make useful and visually appealing things for the home, such as clothing, shurdacks, or birdhouses, or else to be able to provide entertainment in some way, either by singing, acting, dancing or writing. This serves the*

dual purpose of first making communities and households with limited resources more self-sufficient and second upholding traditions. It's the latter part that explains what appears to Americans to be a paradox--creativity would mean the undermining and possible loss of tradition. I think that why breaking tradition is so scary for Kyrgyz people is because their society is so hierarchical. The lower ranks perform the most menial tasks, do the most work for the least reward, get the least respect for others and suffer quietly under the assurance that as they age and move up in rank, they will gradually gain more and more respect, do less and less work, and will always be earning the right to dominate over a growing number of people lower than them in rank. Because even the smallest child participates in this increasing order of rights and respect it is only logical that nobody would want to alter the very system that they've been paying into for the sole reason of attaining their promised rewards. Everyone in the system, be they old or young, has a vested interest in the status quo.

---Journal, Saturday, April 29, 2006

Notably though, I was still examining the culture as an outside observer in this passage, but by June of that year, I was starting to observe more from the inside as well. I felt an internal clash between self and other, between my version of my identity and theirs, between my ideals and the ideals of my host family. My host sister, Nurmira, was roughly my age and also my colleague at school. At the end of the school year, we tried to organize a field trip to the mountains together for a 9th form class that we both taught, but the more relaxed Kyrgyz way of organizing was alien to me, and the clash it provoked was extended in my mind to other complicated and unpleasant struggles I'd been facing:

So today I heard Nurmira on the phone making plans to go tomorrow...I'm not going I told her. I can't go, it's uyat *[shameful]. I already moved the date once, I can't do it again. They won't come. She didn't really push me or express any regrets. She always seems vaguely annoyed with me. It made me sadder.*

[A guest of my host brother] who tried to kiss me the other night even though he's married showed up and started having tea. So I sat down to have tea too. I sat there thinking about how I have no control over my life. I thought about what I wanted to tell Nurmira about her recently instituted uborka *[cleaning] in my room every Saturday and why it made me feel like shit. I wanted to give her a long speech about how every other aspect of my life has been out of control—what country I live in, where I work, who I work with, who I live with, where I live, my schedule, my classes, my administration, my ability to communicate with my students, my ability to get work done, my ability to get projects started,my ability to understand and be understood, my obligations, the food I eat,*

when I eat, when I bathe, how I bathe, when I talk to my family, when I hear from them, when I can go home. I can't even fucking walk around my house and feel comfortable doing things. I don't know how to get rid of trash. I still haven't really figured out how to wash dishes. I don't know what pots and utensils to use. I don't really feel like things are clean. If you get sick I get sick. If I try to cook, I can't really do it right and I flounder. And then your friends come over and laugh and me and say out loud that I'm like a small child because they think I don't understand and then they realize I understand and still talk about me and say, look, she understands, she's smiling. Yeah I'm smiling because I'm fucking embarrassed...But in a life of all this lack of control, my room is the one place I feel like I have some control. So if you tell me I have to clean it every Saturday, not only are you making me feel like more of a child when I am trying desperately every day to live out my life as the functioning adult that I am, but you also are taking away the one aspect of my life that I have any control over. So as I was thinking this, watching them eat food that they were not offering me, I burnt my tongue on the cup of tea in front of me.

It should be noted that tea is an exercise in patience. You can't consume a hot cup of tea rapidly. You must stir it a while, and then take little sips off your teaspoon and wait 4 or 5 minutes and then you can take little sips from the cup directly and then you have to wait another minute or so between each sip to let your tongue cool, let the roof of your mouth cool, let your insides breath out all the hot steam they were just bathed in. You wait and you stir and you take a little more jam or sugar and swirl it around just to have something to do.

Today I failed the exercise in patience.

I didn't want to drink any more goddamn hot liquid. I walked away from the table without explaining (I remembered one time that Alia burned her mouth and Nurmira yelled at her for being stupid and not waiting. "Don't you know tea is hot?" she yelled.) I went to the bathroom, leaving the light on in my room (the path to least suspicion) and then directly from the bathroom I left the house. I saw Gulai apa [my host mother] at the gate on the way out and told her to please turn the light off for me. Except I said, "you to me turn off your light please. I forgot."

I walked all the way down the beach until I got to an impasse—a place with overgrown trees blocking the shore, and a still pool of water striped across the inner beach. Breeding ground for mosquitoes. I came back with red splotches all across my hands and ankles. But I felt better--I decided to go on the damn field trip tomorrow.

I clearly was struggling with feeling a loss of control and a loss of identity at that point, but I was

also learning strategies for dealing with these issues better. That was only one of many times that I took long walks in my village to clear my head and recenter, and physical distance sometimes allowed me to gain cognizance of the means by which I could integrate better and gain more respect. I try to recognize these feelings in my students now too, and try to make concessions and recommendations for them when I can on how to cope with these feelings. I also try to help them find ways to feel more adult and more in control of their learning processes.

I find it necessary to address these issues in a language classroom, however, because I find that feelings of cultural distance and difficulty are not just limited to the emotional realm. In this journal entry from August 31, 2006, I specifically linked my frustrations with the culture to my frustrations with language learning:

> *Our cultures are just separated by this immeasurable gap. We come here thinking, this place is nice. It's not so different from home—people drive cars, go to jobs, get paid, live in houses much like ours, have lots of clothes and belongings just like ours, hell, they even have natural blonds running around, weaving in and out between the battered structures of their culture...Then there is the first wave of shock over the visible things, which becomes funny and eventually subsides. But the second shock is not a wave. It is like hail if hail came one hard bullet at a time, over a year of time, gradually accumulating as language improves...*
> *So many of the things that are important to you, are unimportant to me. And vice versa, clearly. You call* uyat *[shame] at a female child who laughs too much (probably because the vodka you gave her) or talks with too low a voice (because of the genes you gave her) or a woman with a wrinkle on her clothes, or a little stain. You use words like, "*uyat*" and "*namyc*" and "*iman*," words that can only be translated inefficiently with whole lifetimes and upbringings worth of explanation. And by the same coin, how can I tell you in Kyrgyz what we value? There is no word to talk about a kind person without giving some ambiguous sense that they might just be attractive. And if I say they are good, what is your idea of good? What is your idea behind the words you use for honesty, honor, respectfulness? There are no words. No efficient words. You'd need a lifetime, or at least an upbringing, worth of examples to explain it.*
>
> Menin seuzderum tilingerde jok: *My words are not in your language. Your language does not have my words. My words your in tongue no. How can I explain to you anything that is dear to me? Of course you would laugh. Of course. (And with my accent, my twisted manipulated of all these vowels harmonizing with each other but not with my mouth, who could understand anything anyway?)*

This was a lesson that's hard to forget—that language and culture are inseparably connected, and that sometimes my students sense that they are losing a part of themselves in the translation is

entirely genuine, no matter what language level they have attained. Learning a new language effectively often requires a rapprochement between two cultures.

The linguistic and cultural gaps that I encountered were often difficult to navigate in my professional life as well. I moved back and forth for a long time, trying to find a place where I could fit in and do what I had come to do:

> *I want to break their molds a little, give them a role model that doesn't follow all their traditions and isn't married by 22 and isn't domestic or demure. But I don't want to get my kids in trouble with other parents and teachers either. I don't want to turn them into uyatted outcasts in the village life the majority of them are confined to. And I don't want to alienate myself from the very community whose respect I need to be at all effective in my job. I want to push the line, not cross it. But I'm floundering feeling like I don't even know where the line is, or notice that just by being who I'm am, I've already been living beyond that line for most of my life.*

Gradually the clashes became less frequent and I found ways to cope with them, integrating new changes and skills into my identity. In January of 2007 I wrote about a turning point in my cross-cultural experience that was almost cliché because of its common occurrence:

> *Things that used to bother me immensely about the Kyrgyz no longer do. I have begun to accept them more, as they accept themselves. My idealism has faded, but the spaces it once dominated are colored now by empathy. Last night at Bolot's birthday party I sat with Rahat and Nurmira for a little while, listening, understaning about 85% and trying my best to participate. We sat in a row on the sofa, children running, tumbling near our feet, bouncing against the teusheuks [floor pillows], plov boiling away on the plitka [hotplate] beside us. I liked being with young people, mixed up amongst them like I was one of them. I am not so much a strange element in their lives anymore. I can follow their conversations. I can sit where I like (and will get called in if need be, for 100 grams of vodka and a toast to the pretext). I enjoy these facts. It is time to take advantage of them.*

I also began to put the sweeping generalizations aside, and started to treat the people I encountered more as individuals than as representatives of their culture:

> *Today I ate a bowl of spinach Parmesan noodles for lunch (one of the packets generously donated to me by [a volunteer who was leaving]) and sat with my host sister while she cooked over the fire. She told me she missed working at school sometimes, because it was fun working with the kids and having concerts all the time. I realized her job makes her about as beloved as a tax collector, or the svetchiler [electricity bill collectors] who reduce people to*

> *silent prisoners in their own homes, as they close the gates and pretend not to be around... Another interesting thing she explained to me was that when Gulai apa leaves, Nurlan and Nurmira can have a lot more fun together. They can snuggle and she can play with her daughter [Alia], and they can laugh and do silly things. Last night for example, I walked into the middle room and saw the three of them all lined up in front of the mirror, trying to answer this persistent question of, "Who does Alia look like more?" Megan, we're playing around, she explained. Tell us who is right—whose forehead does Alia have? And they all hiked up their hair in front with one hand and faced forward so I could get an appropriate angle. Uh…Nurlan's, I guessed. They laughed, and it seemed to settle some bet... I wish they could have that kind of life all the time.*
> *--Journal, February 1, 2007*

The effect of this closer integration became apparent when the feeling of being a foreigner had begun to subside:

> *It took a long time, but I love this place. I feel invested in it. I no longer have to think about why I should stay, but rather why I shouldn't.*
> *--Journal, April 12, 2007*

In many of these passages there is evidence that I did not so much become Kyrgyz, nor did I remain fully American; rather, the result was something entirely different. I began to see volunteers as unique in this respect. In the spring of 2007, I wrote, "We live with ingenuity and determination, carving out our own hybrid culture, even hybrid language—English peppered with local words that a translation could never properly express." In some cases this hybridization was a form of biculturality, allowing us to move easily between one identity and the other:

> *In Kyrgyz my name is Meerim, "kindness, mercy," a word that emerges often from people's lips when they misunderstand what I say the first two or 3 times. Having a name familiar to people makes me more real to them, lets them relate in a way they couldn't before, however false or genuine it might be. I've often noticed if I tell someone my name is Megan here, they struggle with it for a bit, and probably forget it right away, but they never respond to me as warmly and openly as when I tell them my name is Meerim. Meerim is the persona that they want to become their daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, or wife. Meerim is the kelin, Meerim is the one that fits into the social fabric. Megan is a foreigner. The drunk at the teachers' party didn't fall in love with me, he fell in love with her. My Meerim, my Meerim! He kept calling out. And I can take her off and put her on, quicker than clothes. On for the toast, off for the drunk.*

--Journal, October 7, 2007

Understanding this level of biculturality helps me to better visualize the goals I have for my students and find ways to facilitate that achievement. Yet, at the same time, the most valuable thing that I attained from any of this was to really see the Other, beyond exoticism, beyond disdain, beyond struggle or fear. To see my students as people like me, to be able to sort out the individual, the culture and the human being is what all teachers should strive for. It was Todorov wanted his readers to understand when he wrote, "Can we really love someone if we know little or nothing of his identity; if we see in place of that identity, a projection of ourselves or of our ideals?" It is also what I had come to understand more clearly when I wrote:

> *It would be unrealistic to say the distance is gone. In this life, I know for a fact that I will never be able to shed my identity as an American, as a foreigner in the midst of people foreign to me. Try as the best of us might, Peace Corps volunteers will always struggle with the same issues. We'll never be fully accepted, fully understood, or fully able to understand. But the irony has faded. My life is not a play life, a temporary adventure life, a short-term learning experience life. It is simply a life. How can I express this? I no longer do my clothes by hand because it's interesting, or because it makes me stronger, or because it gives me a good reputation, or praise, or experience. I do my clothes by hand because they need to be washed. I no longer go to work or guestings in the hope that I will come out of them with some good story to write home. I go to work because it my job, because there is work to be done, and guestings because there is something to be celebrated, or someone I care about to see. And letters home? I don't write mass emails anymore because what once seemed unusual has now become the commonplace. I can't stand back and be bewildered together with folks from home because I myself am what they would find bewildering.*
> *--Journal, October 12, 2007*

At the very end of my DOS, I included these two simple sentences that left an official record of the profound changes that had occurred in myself and in my outlook towards others:

> *She lived with the same host family for her entire service, fostering genuinely family-like ties, and developed close relationships with colleagues, students, and other locals. These relationships will continue to grow and fulfill the goals of Peace Corps long after her service.*

Though this is perhaps such a small part of such an official document, my experience of cross-cultural adaptation and integration was perhaps the most important to me personally, and in many ways professionally. Doubtlessly these words have rung true, as I find myself today much better able to relate to my students and facilitate their learning more effectively because of it.

5. Conclusion

> *And even though we talked about all these accomplishments I feel like one of the most useful things was finding a shared sense of failure amongst the many individual moments of our service, and knowing that that was totally normal, and that none of us had truly failed, but rather succeeded in an enormous number of ways. Simply the fact that we finished our commitments at all, the fact that we will soon be RPCVs, the minority who have not only ever done it, but done it completely, is enough to know that we were all successes in one very important way.*
>
> *--Journal Entry, September 28, 2007, after our Close of Service (COS) Conference*

I have written this chronicle not as a freshly returned volunteer, but at the end of a master's program in TESOL, the finishing touch on my degree, the conclusion of a separate journey of understanding the mistakes I made as a teacher, as a language learner, and as a person. If I could go back to Kyrgyzstan now, I would not be the same person that I was when I began, nor the same person that I was when I left. I would have liked to have incorporated the things I learned in my graduate classes.

For example, Curriculum and Materials Design taught me the importance of doing a needs assessment, of organizing plans according to goals and objectives, and not simply according to the activities I found to be the most "fun." I would have talked with my students and my community to find concrete ways that using English would have benefited my students—communicating with tourists, entering university, understanding English media—and I would have built my goals and objectives around that.

In English Language Teaching I and II I learned that PPP is not the only way of organizing lessons, and found solutions to my problems with long explanations of rules and menial exercises through task-based teaching. I would have incorporated more tasks and not simply games. I would have substituted explanations for listening and reading activities that lead students to rules inductively, and would have moved students from more to less controlled, more simple to more difficult by asking them to complete increasing more difficult tasks.

In Language Assessment, I learned ways of creating more effective tests, ways of assessing my students more authentically, and the critical importance of having objective and clearly explained standards. I would have outlined my criteria more specifically and I would have assessed their oral and written production more frequently than I had.

Teaching Pronunciation and Principles of Linguistics to a lesser degree opened my eyes to a whole realm of language that I had up till then almost entirely neglected. I used a lot of songs, but I would have capitalized more on the power of rhythm. I think my students would really have enjoyed learning about stress, rhythm and intonation, playing with rubber bands and clapping their hands, memorizing jazz chants and performing them at assemblies and village concerts. I wish I could go back and teach them now.

Structure of English made me more knowledgeable about the language I was teaching, where it had been, why it was the way it was, and where it was going. I wish I could have brought that same knowledge to my classes and to our teachers' seminars especially.

Second Language Acquisition helped me to see that mistakes are not always mistakes, that they are sometimes part of a developmental process. It gave me more theoretical basis for the way I organize my lessons, something that would have helped me enormously in my instructional planning. It also taught me strategies I could have both used for myself as a language learner and could have passed on to my students.

Lastly, Cross-Cultural Communication moved me beyond the simple heuristic devices we'd been given by Peace Corps in our cross-cultural "boot camp." I do feel that I made leaps and bounds of progress towards identifying with my students and negotiating the intricate power struggles that had been invisible to me, but I still remember so many ways that I could have been more respectful and understanding of the incredible people I encountered.

I know that I can not go back to that time, but that I can look back. I can reflect upon my experience and know that the measure of how much I would change in doing it all again is in fact the exact measure of my growth. As I embark on my teaching career now, master's degree in hand, I can only hope that in the years to come I will just as soon be able to look back on my early years as a fully-fledged TESOL professional and find new points that I would change, new and exciting ways in which I will have grown and progressed.

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APPENDIX

A. List of Topics for Lessons Taught, 2005-2007

- Modals of Ability: Can and Could
- Should and Could: Problems and Advice
- Teenagers and Romantic Relationships
- Superstitions
- Family
- Fairy Tales
- Past
- Future
- Animal Words
- Food Words—menus
- Introductions
- Body parts

- Describing People—physical and personal attributes
- Superlatives
- Holidays—Halloween, Thanksgiving, Valentine's Day, New Year's Day, Easter, Mardi Gras
- American Slang
- English Around the World
- Time Words
- Numbers
- Basic Conversation
- Classroom English
- Hypothetical Conditional
- 30 Basic Verbs
- Likes and Dislikes
- Feelings
- Present Perfect—What you have and haven't done in life
- The Giving Tree
- The Very Hungry Caterpillar
- Prepositions and Place
- To Be
- Comparatives
- Agreeing and Disagreeing
- Moral Dilemmas
- Wants and Needs

B. List of Songs Taught, 2005—2007

- Cheap Trick: I want you to want me
- Beatles—Money, Can't Buy me Love, Yesterday, All Together Now, And I Love Her
- Pussycat Dolls, Stickwitu
- Simon and Garfunkel, El Condor Pasa, Bye Bye Love
- Magnetic Fields, Book of Love
- White Stripes, We are Going to Be Friends
- Woody Guthrie (Sung by Billy Bragg and Wilco) Someday Some morning Sometime
- Black Eyed Peas, Where is the Love? (excerpts)
- Mustafa Sandal, All My Life
- Ne Yo, So Sick
- Jem: Finally Woken
- Children's Songs and Chants: Miss Suzie, The Littlest Worm, The Itsy Bitsy Spider, Rain, Rain Go Away; The Farmer in the Field, The Alphabet Song, Head Shoulders Knees and Toes, Hokey Pokey, If You're Happy and You Know It, I Know an Old Lady, My Ship Came From China
- Holiday Songs: A Partridge in a Pear Tree, Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer, Jingle Bells

C. Topics for Student Letters

Each week, I had my more advanced students write me letters instead of doing exercises for homework. I generally gave them a topic to write the letter on. Here are some of the topics I used:

1. Tell me about your favorite TV show or book. What is it about? Who are the characters? Why do you like it?

2. Tell me about someone you admire–a brother, sister, parent, teacher, actor, sportsman, politician, singer, etc.

3. Describe your ideal boyfriend or girlfriend. Use adjectives for appearance and personality.

4. Tell me about yourself.

5. What are your hopes and goals for this year?

6. Describe your favorite place.

7. Write about a problem you have, real or imaginary.

8. What did you do on New Year's Eve?

9. Tell about a time you were surprised, embarrassed, happy, angry, or sad.

10. Interview someone you know. Write three questions and have them answer. Try to find someone who speaks English, or you can translate the questions and answers.

11. What will you do this summer?

12. Tell me about your best friend, real or imaginary.

13. Describe your life 10 years from now. Where will you live? Will you be married? What work will you be doing?

14. Write a fairy tale. It can be a famous fairy tale, or you can make up your own.

15. If you had a million dollars what 5 things would you do with it?

D. Examples of Student Letters

I typed up copies of these student letters to e-mail to friends and family at home. The comments in brackets are what I included in the e-mail.

Hello! How are you? I am all righ.
I am very glad to write to you again. This my second letter about my best freand. My best freand name's Curtis Jackson--50 cent. He is 27 years old. My freand singer-rapper. 50 cent beautiful, nice and sociable. His favourute sports are American footbol and boxing. I with 50 cent go to disco and beach on Saturday and Sunday. I went in many consert 50 cent's. His hobbies are write song and go for a walk. Sometimes I walk along beach with best freand. He confide in secret. My freand the very best.

See you soon, Kasyet.

Dear Ms. Megan.

I spent my winter holidays very interesting because with you. Do you remember? We was in Cholpon Ata, to a restaurant. In New Year's we went to swim in the lake together and we met dicks [I'm hoping that "I" should really be a "u"] and we told with them. They are very good animals, isn't they? I think it's very interesting days. It is my dream to meet with you New Year's. I hope.

Umut [Umut is also a girl, in case you're wondering--my boys haven't got past copying their homework out of the soviet era text books]

[from a letter that was supposed to be to me about this girl's best friend:]

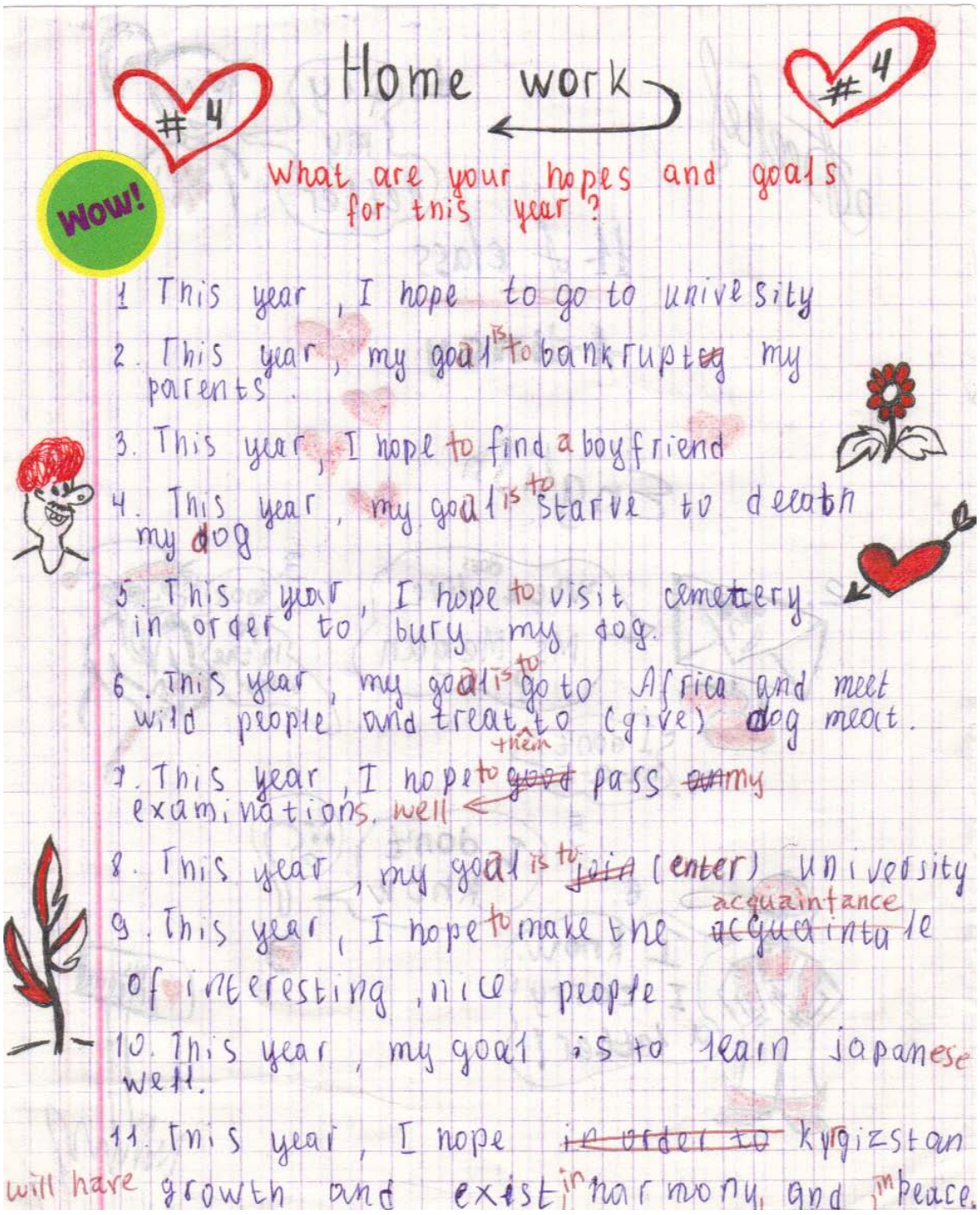
Dear Elvira,

Elvira, this week me very rich boyfriend discover. He is good boy. That very humour relate. He is always holidays gift flower give. Next week that you introduce. That you without words flatter. All the best. Good by.

P.S. Give everyone my kind regards!

Ayzada

[Then inexplicably, the single word, floating in the empty space at the bottom of the page:] Frection



E. Repertoire of Classroom Games and Activities

The games described here were in no way entirely invented on my own (my apologies for not being able to credit the sources), yet many of them are games that I altered to use in an English classroom, or modified in some way to suit my instructional contexts and preferences. Many of these games I use to prepare my lessons today; others I could prepare easily if the situation called for it. This list is not meant to be exhaustive.

Mrs. McGillicudee (Good for: Practicing present simple question formation, practicing the verb "like" with nouns and verbs, raising metalinguistic awareness, speaking for basic conversation classes) The teacher explains that Mrs. McGillicudee is a woman who likes some things, but not others. Having silently chosen one way to differentiate words into categories (words that have four letters but not words that don't; verbs but not nouns; things you can do outdoors, but not things you must do indoors), the teacher then writes 3 examples on the board of things she likes and 3 examples of things she doesn't. The students then ask questions ("Does she like apples?") and the teacher writes each new word on the board until someone is able to guess what it is that makes her like certain words.

Paper Fortunetellers (Good for: Practicing future with the modal "will" and possibly "be+going to+verb), listening to and following instructions; speaking practice for basic conversation): Teacher talks with students about what they think will happen in the future, eliciting examples on the board. From the examples, the class extrapolates rules for constructing the future tense appropriately. The teacher then explains what paper fortunetellers are, and demonstrates by telling the fortunes of 2-3 students. Paper is distributed to students and instructions are then given orally step by step on how to fold the paper to create a fortuneteller. They then write 8 words on the "outside" layer (colors, numbers, other vocabulary) and 8 fortunes on the "inside" layer. Once they are complete, they can move around the room and tell each others' fortunes.

MASH (Good for: Reviewing basic vocabulary for jobs, housing types, vehicles, geography, and numbers; practicing future constructions; a light conversation activity): MASH is a fortunetelling game that stands for "Mansion Apartment Shack House." One person gives 4-5 possibilities for the future in different categories (for example, "Where I will live," "Who I will marry" "How many children I will have" etc.). Once each category has several possibilities, the person closes his or her eyes, has a partner mark tallies at any speed on a piece of paper, and chooses when to say stop. Using the number of tallies marked to count through each of the listed items, the partner crosses off the last item in each counting cycle, until only one answer remains in each category. That is then the person's "future." To use in teaching, the teacher explains and models the activity on the board, then places students in pairs to create their own games so they can tell their partners' fortunes. They can either interview their partners for category choices, or choose for them.

Labeling Race (Good for: Vocabulary of items that can be found in the immediate vicinity such as school items, furniture, etc.) After having reviewed a set of vocabulary, or just prior to teaching vocabulary if the teacher wishes to use this as a means of assessing students' current knowledge, the teacher can place students in teams and provide them each with a set of uniquely marked labels for things in the immediate vicinity and tape. It works best if the labels are different colors. The teacher models and has all students label one item together, then students

race to label the items as many items as they can within a given time limit. Points are given based on whether or not the

Acting out a play or story: (Good for: motivating students; checking and reinforcing comprehension): An entertaining and informative addition to readings that describe a series of actions is having students act out the reading as the teacher or students narrate. This works best after students have had a chance to read the passage silently and ask questions.

Charades (Best for practicing verbs, either in base or conjugated forms, but can be used for other vocabulary as well if students are creative enough): Students act out words or phrases silently while other students guess what they're trying to convey. Teacher can supply cards with vocabulary for students to select from, or students can choose on their own. If done as a whole class, it tends to work best without teams since it is difficult to ascertain sometimes who shouted out the correct word first. This can also be done as a partner activity. Another variation has students select the words or phrases by writing them on slips of paper and placing them in a hat to draw from.

Taboo: (Vocabulary review game): A variation on charades in which students are allowed to speak, and can say anything but the word or words they are trying to get the students to guess.

Pictionary (Good for: Vocabulary review): Students are either given cards with words to draw or allowed to choose their own. Students then guess the word as they draw silently.

Grammar Auction (Good for: Grammar review): Teacher writes about 12 sentences on the board, some with grammatical errors and some without. Students can be placed in small groups or pairs if it is a large class. Each group is given a certain amount of "money" with which to bid and told that the goal is to have both the largest number of correct sentences AND the largest amount of money at the end (to prevent them from bidding on incorrect sentences as well). The teacher then organizes the bidding for each sentence—the more dramatic the better!

Dialogues and "Mini-plays" (Good for: Speaking practice, reinforcing a set of vocabulary, eliciting a specific grammar structure or a specific type of speech act): Always a good standby. I found it is more effective to give students just enough time to prepare a dialogue by planning the "plot" and practicing the words they'll say but not enough time to have them write it and try to memorize it. I also found it is more effective if the students serving as the audience during performances are given a role to play in these dialogues. For example, they can judge the best one (better for a less sensitive group of learners), give feedback orally or on paper, answer questions afterwards, suggest a solution or "final scene" or even jump in in the middle of the play and take the place of a character. A number of possibilities exist for the content of the dialogues and plays as well. They can be based on a story read in class, based on a joke or a fairy tale, based around a particular speech act or set of speech acts (e.g. meeting a new person and introducing oneself), or each group can have a unique topic provided to them by the teacher or other students (students are given time to write scenarios which are then placed in a hat for other students to draw from).

Partner Find: (Good for: Matching questions and answers, matching vocabulary words and

their definitions, pictures, or translations, matching words or phrases broken into two halves and cut into "puzzle cards," a variety of other matching activities; also good as a means of pairing students up and as a precursor to further partner activities): Teacher distributes cards to students and has them stand up and try to find their partner. The students can stand with their partners and show and announce to class their results, so the class can collectively decide if they are right or not.

Memory (Good for: Matching activities as described above; the same cards can be used): Students sit in small groups around a table where all the cards are placed face down on the table. Each card has a match, and the students take turn selecting two of the cards and turning them face up to try to find a match. Matches are kept and the student with the most at the end wins.

Snap (Good for: Matching activities as described above; a full set of matching cards is needed for every 2 students so this may be best for very small groups of students or as a review game after several units in which matching cards were used): Students sit at tables in pairs across from each other, each with half of the "deck," or set of cards in one of their hands, face down. It is best to have all the cards divided by category, for example if it is questions and responses then one student will have all the questions and the other will have all the responses. The students then simultaneously turn up one card at a time and each place them side by side on the table in front of them. If the two face up cards are a match, the first student to slap their hand down on the match will win it. The student with the most matches wins the game.

Spin-the-bottle (Good for: Speaking practice, reinforcing a set of vocabulary, eliciting a specific grammar structure or a specific type of speech act): This is a way of making dialogues more spontaneous and more entertaining. If there is a large group of students, they should be broken into two groups. A theme for the dialogues is selected (meeting someone for the first time, calling for information, placing an order in a restaurant, etc) The students sit or stand in a circle, with a bottle or marker in the middle. The bottle or marker is spun once by the teacher to select the first student, who then spins again to select a partner. The two step into the center and have a spontaneous dialogue while others listen. Dialogues should be kept relatively short. They then spin again to choose the next person, avoiding repeats by choosing the closest person who hasn't spoken yet, until all students have dialogued. If students know the kissing game that this is based on, it can increase the entertainment value.

The "Hot Seat" (Best for: Intermediate to Advanced learners who are getting to know each other): This can be a great introduction game, although it can be somewhat face-threatening for certain groups of learners, such as more conservative adults. Students are given a few minutes to generate questions they might want to ask their new classmates. They are told that any question is okay—funny, simple, stupid, crazy, normal—as long as it's not mean. They then take turns sitting in the "hot seat" for 3 minutes while the other students shout out questions for them to answer. The student in the hot seat must answer honestly, but is allowed to pass on any question for any reason, without explanation. At the end of 3 minutes, the teacher "buzzes" the student out and a new student sits down.

The Big Wind Blows (Good for: Practicing colors, clothing words, descriptive vocabulary, or past tense constructions): Students sit on chairs (or pieces of paper that mark their seats if chairs

are not possible) in a circle while the teacher stands in the middle. The teacher explains the game and writes the phrase, “The big wind blows for everyone who...” on the board or a piece of paper, and has students practice saying it with a few possible ways of finishing the statement so it applies to certain people in the group (but not others). The teacher then begins by saying something like, “The big wind blows for everyone who is wearing jeans.” All the students wearing jeans must stand up and quickly find another seat while the person in the middle rushes to grab one of their seat. The one person who was not able to find a seat (there will always be one) then continues the game.

“Picture” Your Life (Good for: Beginner to low-intermediate students; teaching professions, geography, numbers, English names, and other basic vocabulary): The teacher provides a large set of pictures of people; these can be cut out of magazines and should be as varied as possible. The teacher prepares students by writing up several categories on the board, such as name, age, job, where I am from, where I live, etc., and taking different examples for each category. The teacher then models the activity by taking one large format picture of a person and soliciting 1 imagined answer for each category for the person in the picture. Students then choose a picture of their own from the array of smaller pictures and do the same for the person in their picture. As a follow-up, the students can pretend to be that person and have basic introductory conversations with each other. See for example, “Spin-the-bottle” above.

Flyswatter Game (Good for: Reviewing vocabulary; reading recognition and listening skills): A single set of words is written twice, once on each side of the chalkboard. The students are divided into two teams and one student from each team comes to the board (see Team Relay Competitions below) and is given a “flyswatter” (this can be as simple as a rolled up piece of paper if flyswatters are not available). The teacher calls out a word, either in the L1 or the target language, and students must swat it with the flyswatter. In a variation on this game, the students can also erase the word called out. This variation ensures students only get one chance to “swat” and must do it quickly, but it does require a lot of erasing!

What's the Question? (Good for: A “get to know you” game; practicing question formation) The teacher starts by writing up her name in the center of the board, and then writing several answers to basic questions about herself sprouting from her name, such as Baltimore, 2003, 0, etc. The students then must guess the questions. In small groups or as a class, the students then take turns doing the same, providing answers for 3-4 questions.

Team Relay Competitions: (Good for: Reviewing vocabulary; listening; basic writing skills; spelling) Students are divided into teams and one student from each team comes to the board to compete. The teacher can dictate a word, sentence, or number either in the L1 or the target language, can whisper a word for pictionary or charades, or can give an instruction that students must follow. The first student to complete the task correctly wins a point for his or her team. Students competing can and should be matched by level, either formally with number assignments or informally through teacher guidance.

F. Sample Calendar Plan for Class 10b, Sept. 2006 to May 2007

Date	Topic	Activities and Objectives	Homework
9-5	Information Cards and Rules	-fill out information cards -begin working on rules in groups	Work on rules
9-8	Rules	-finish writing rules -have students present rules -vote on class rules and write them down -The "Miss Megan Quiz"—a competitive game to reinforce my expectations	Memorize rules
9-12	Teacher/Student phrases	-learn teacher/student phrases -begin working on classroom dialogues using phrases	Continue working on dialogues
9-15	The OC, episode 1	-go over show's background and useful vocabulary -watch show and answer questions	Answer questions
9-27	The OC; dialogues	-discuss the OC and play "The OC Quiz" -finish dialogues	Describe the plot of the OC or any other TV show.
10-4	Wants and Needs	-copy chart showing grammar rules for "want" and "need" -give examples	Describe the plot of the OC or any other TV show.
10-5	Wants and Needs	-listen to song: "I Want You to Want Me" by Cheap Trick -fill in missing words	Write 5 things you want in life and 5 things you need in life.
10-11	Wants and Needs	-translate words to song -pronounce words and sing -learn "Somebody wants somebody to do something" construction and practice making sentences.	Write 5 things you want in life and 5 things you need in life.
10-12	Wants and Needs	-You are going to the Sahara desert. What do you need to bring? Why?	Finish homework #1 and #2.
10-18	Wants and needs—questions and neg's	-explain rules for negatives and questions -switch around dictation	Finish homework #1 and #2.
10-18	Test review	go over the vocabulary that we learned this quarter, practice writing sentences using the vocabulary points we learned.	Prepare for test
10-19		Modified go fish game	Prepare for test
10-25	Test	-take test	
10-26	Halloween	-the story of Halloween and related vocabulary -Halloween games	
11-15	Ability	*Can, to be able to, could*	

11-16	Ability	Can, positive and negative Can you roll your tongue? Can you snap your fingers? How old were you when you could read for the first time? Can you swim?	Choose any person or animal (for example: 50 cent, the president, a fish, superman) and tell me 5 things they can do, and five things they can't do. (remember that can doesn't change)
11-17	Ability	Common expressions with "can" Give scenarios and ask for appropriate phrases. I can't go tonight. Can/could you give me a hand? I can't tell.	
11-22	Ability	Disabilities A blind person. She could see when she was young, but then she lost her eyesight. She can't see now. She will be able to see if she gets and operation.	
11-23	Food	Review food words (or thanksgiving lesson?)	
		In spec. course review food words	
11-24	Cooking words	Learn some cooking/food words and write cookie recipe	
11-29	Would	It would be nice if…	
11-30	Would like	Teach "would like". divide up food words, give shopping lists and have students collect those things by conducting transactions with each of the shop keepers.	
12-7	Preference	Would rather. Explain, practice. Answer questions in discussion groups. Would you rather be tall and ugly or very short and beautiful? Would you rather be blind or deaf? Why? Would you rather lose an arm or a leg?	
12-1	Would rather	Simon and Garfunkel song	Would you rather be a child or an adult? Why? (ex: I would rather be a child because adults have to work. Children don't have to worry about money. Children

			can play all day.)
12-6	Would rather	Discuss song, answer questions	
12-8	Obligation and Advice	-learn and practice *must, have to, have got to* -learn and practice *should, ought to, had better, be supposed to* People must pay taxes. People should give money to the poor.	
12-13	Obligation and Advice	Learn and practice some common expressions with must, have to, have got to, should, ought to, had better, be supposed to	
12-14	Obligation and Advice	Read people's problems and write advice letters. Do one together then have students write their problems, then switch with someone and write an answer.	Write an advice letter to someone who wants to find a boyfriend or girlfriend.
12-15	Obligation and Advice	Debate over some issue of current interest.	
12-20	Test review	go over vocabulary learned, grammar points, practice, and play games	
12-21	Test		Review
12-22	Holidays	Discuss winter holidays in America	review
12-27	Christmas songs		Review
12-28	Christmas songs		review
12-29	Christmas songs		review
	Obligation and Advice	What were you supposed to do during winter break? What were you supposed to do that you didn't do? What did you do that you weren't supposed to do? Translate that to should have.	Finish writing in class assignment.
	Some common verbs and their third form	-times you need the third form -go over some common words with word ball -competitive games	
	Regret: Should have	Should have, shouldn't have—give scenarios and choose appropriate responses.	
	Regret: Would have, if	If I had seen the accident, I would have called the police. Would not have...	
	Regret: Would have	What would you have done differently? Give or act out scenarios	What would your life have been like

		and ask what you would have done.	if you had lived 200 years ago. Ex: I would have cooked all my food over a fire. I wouldn't have had a refrigerator.
	Health/sickness	Learn words and practice expressions	
	Health/sickness	Play "doctor"—read symptoms, diagnose, and give advice. What should this person have done? What should this person do?	
	Health/sickness	Nutrition and food pyramid What foods should you eat? What foods shouldn't you eat?	Write about a time you were very sick. What did you do? What should you have done?
	Too much, not enough,	Explain and practice using nutrition and healthy habits. She does not eat enough vegetables. He does not get enough exercise.	
	Health and sickness	Read an article on health and sickness in America. Answer questions.	
	Body words outside	Learn, write and practice with competitive games	Draw a picture of the body and label 20 different parts.
	body words outside	Monster building	
	Body words inside	Learn, write and practice with competitive games	
	Body words inside	"Operation"	Draw a picture of the inside of the body and label parts with words we learned.
	Body words	-learn hurt vs. sick -practice using "My___ hurts." -"first aid" game"—a doctor will examine a patient and tell where the patient hurts. Then the paramedics will come and put a band aid where the patient hurts	
	Test review	Review vocabulary and grammar. Practice grammar.	
	Test		
	Time words	Review time words	What is your favorite time of the

			year? Why? What is your least favorite time of the year and why?
	Future tense	Review basic future tense, positive, negative and question form, and some of the words associated with it	
	Future tense	Billy Bragg and Wilco: Someday some morning	
	Song	Sing and discuss the song, Woody Guthrie	Write a letter to your future husband or wife. "Someday I…" "I would like to…."
	Future tense	Going to (gonna) -show pictures and say what is going to happen	
	"The Future"	What do you think the future will be like? Learn some useful words and then write in groups	
	"The Future"	Read a short story about the future.	
	"The Future"	Discuss the short story about the future, and answer questions in groups.	Write your reaction to the story.
	The future	"Hope" -page 51 from Wow! Book 3.	
	Times when we don't need to use the future tense	-when (we'll leave when my friend gets here) -if (if my friend comes late, we'll miss the movie)	
	Horoscopes	-Pass out horoscopes and read them -write a horoscope for someone else	-finish writing horoscopes
	Test review		
	Test		
	Nature words	Learn, write and play games	Which do you prefer and why: the city or the country?
	Nature words	Nature scavenger hunt Discussion of scavenger hunt	
	Geography words	Learn, write and play games, Also discuss American geography	
	Geography words	Make your own imaginary country	Write about life in your imaginary country.
	Geography	"This Land Is Your Land"	
	Geography	Look at the map of the world.	

		Quiz: How well do you know the world?	
	Environmentalism	Read about taking care of the environment, facts.	
	Environmentalism	What is your ecological footprint? What should people do to take care of the environment? What can you do?	Write: 5 things I should do to protect the environment.

Appendix G: Journal Entry from March 15, 2007 on my Views on Classroom Management

I don't know why I hadn't tried harder to keep my classroom under control before. I think had all kinds of complex feelings that came into play (as is always true with teaching—when you are the linchpin of organization, the one that steers, your tiniest mental movements are scrutinized and exaggerated, and ultimately set the course for all). I am not a cop. I am not a punisher. I am the one who dictates right and wrong behavior. I am not sure of myself or my own opinions. I wasn't sure how a Kyrgyz classroom should be run. My needs come second to the needs of my students. I wanted to be loved by my students, because their love is approval, a sign of success. All these things I need to turn around:

1. *I am not a cop, but I am a teacher. And in addition to creating and conducting lessons, being an expert on his or her subject, a teacher's role is to make sure the classroom is an acceptable learning environment. Students can't learn when there is noise, when they are being bothered by other students, when they are not paying attention, or when they realize they can do whatever they feel like without consequences.*
2. *Punishment is not cruelty; it is a means to order and a maximized learning environment.*
3. *Order benefits not only me, but my students as well. Students learn better in a more orderly environment.*
4. *It doesn't matter what Kyrgyz customs are—if American students are capable of behaving in a certain way, then Kyrgyz students are too. I just have to make my expectations clear.*
5. *It's true that the lesson is not about me, but I need to make sure my teaching environment is appropriate and optimal for myself, so that I can be an effective teacher. I need to be an effective teacher in order for the students to learn, and the students' learning is priority.*
6. *I do not need to be their friends, but I can not be their enemy. I don't need to be loved at all times, but I do need to create a pleasant, fair, and effective learning environment for them. My sign of success is not their love, but their acquisition of knowledge.*
7. *I can not be their enemy because we do not learn effectively from someone we hate, fear, or distrust. I need to be firm but fair. I need to make sure they understand my expectations, and apply punishment equally to all misbehavior without insult or anger. I need to retain hope for all students that they can redeem themselves, so that they have the opportunity to improve behavior. Positive behavior expectations need to be clear and realistic.*

I get too angry when I punish. I need to stay calm, and never take personal offense, even if a

student makes something personal. An insult from a student could mean nothing more than the fact that that student is irrational and disrespectful.
My behavior and my punishments are too erratic. One day I will tolerate something that the next day I will not. If my lines were clear, this wouldn't be a problem.
I need to have a clear idea in my mind of where my lines are drawn, and what consequences I will impose for crossing those lines.
I need to make those lines clear not just in my own mind, but in my students' minds as well. When there is consensus, the students will understand why I did something, and hold themselves accountable.
My lines need to have the greater benefit of all and students' optimized learning as their basis.

I will not tolerate disrespect to me, because if students do not listen to and respect me then there will be no class.
I will not tolerate students talking loudly or persistently in class. An occasional whisper is no great matter, but anything that draws attention from the lesson is a problem for other students.
I will not tolerate any behavior that prevents other students from learning. This includes bothering other students, fighting with other students, making loud noises, leaving your cell phone on in class, walking around the room, standing up, handing in papers in the middle of class, or asking to leave when it is not an emergency.

Students' Rights
Students have the right not to be distracted by other students.
Students have the right to ask the teacher questions about the lessons during class, before class, and after class.
Students have the right to a safe, comfortable classroom.
Students have the right to fair treatment.
Students have the right to a fair and accurate evaluation of their learning.
Students have the right to make requests for better seating, repetition of words etc. in special circumstances.

Student's Responsibilities
Students must pay attention in class.
Students must follow instructions and complete assignments.
Students must do their own work, and must not do work for others.
Students must not pressure other students to give them answers or do work for them.

Why is it important that students do their own work on a test?

It is a student's right to a fair and accurate evaluation of their learning.
It is a student's right to a quiet environment during tests.
It is a student's right to take credit for their learning and not to be pressured into cheating for others.
It is important for me as a teacher to measure the effectiveness of my lessons. If my lessons are too difficult it is important that I know that, because it benefits you too.

For these reasons, during tests, I expect: No talking, no whispering, no passing notes, no looking

in your notebooks or textbooks, no looking at answers or copying answers from other sources, no leaving the room unless there is an emergency. If there are questions about the test, raise your hands and ask me quietly. I will not give answers, or tell you if an answer is right or wrong. I will only explain questions as needed.