

Olomouc Summer Institute 2003 Reflections from a U.S. High School Teacher

Background: For the past several years, the Open Society Institute has sponsored a summer institute held at Palackù University in Olomouc, Czech Republic. Directed by Ivana Mrozkova, attendees include high school students from several Eastern European countries who are interested in dialogue about various public issues that transcend the borders of their nations. For the past two summers, Civitas partners in Colorado (Center for Education in Law and Democracy, <http://www.lawanddemocracy.org>) and the Czech Republic (Association for Education to Citizenship and Democracy, <http://www.svod.cz>) have participated in these institutes.

In 2003, Colorado teacher, Susan deLemos, Department Chair and teacher at Northglenn High School and Czech teacher, Dana Fivlova, collaborated to present a series of lessons to students at this institute. Susan's journal describes how these two teachers are learning from each other and building lessons that blend their individual expertise and cultural experiences in civic education. Websites for lessons she refers to are listed at the end of Suzanne's reflections.

Monday, July 14, 2003

Dana and I have just finished leading *BaFa BaFa*. It went well and the students are extremely enthusiastic. I know I will really enjoy working with them. Dana is an excellent teacher and is very committed to using active learning lessons with her students. We spent many hours talking yesterday about her experiences teaching civic education.

There is a clear need for lots of cultural tolerance here. Several of the students complained about the food here during our discussion, which was difficult for the students from the Czech Republic. We are planning a lesson for later on using some of the activities Dana brought with her and some from Streetlaw's *Democracy for All* materials.

Tuesday, July 15, 2003

Dana and I did the lesson on refugees from last year with a few changes. The most interesting moments for me involved the students discussing whether someone living in a democracy should be arrested for distributing pamphlets calling for the overthrow of the government by force. Several students said that since you did not need force to change the government in a democracy that people should be jailed for proposing the use of forceful change of government. A student from Kosovo said that one of the ways you know a government is democratic is that the people have the right to distribute pamphlets calling for the overthrow of the government... he must have had some good teachers.

The students are wonderful and Ivana is a great person to work with. The institute is incredible.

Friday, July 18, 2003

It is Friday afternoon and I thought I would send a short update. This is a wonderful experience, the students are top rate and the teachers are wonderful. We have been incorporating some of my materials and some of Dana's in each lesson so there are presented as a team.

Yesterday, we did a values clarification activity from the *Choices Curriculum*. It went well and led to some lively student discussion about whether equal opportunity meant that everyone had to begin at the same place financially. The students disagreed, just as they do in my own class. Some said that people who have money have an unfair advantage and others said that everyone has the same chance to succeed if they work hard and are smart.

July 24, 2003

The final presentations look like they will be very good. The topics this year are religion, the role of women in religion, terrorism, global environment, genetic engineering, and discrimination. Dana and I did sessions on the global environment and discrimination in our seminar. We didn't get the presentation topics until yesterday. A thought for future participants might be to get the topics when they arrive so that more of the seminars could perhaps be related to the presentations.

The ambassador is in the United States (as I am sure you have heard), so there will be an attaché at the presentations tomorrow.

I have a collection of materials from Donna including a comic book on discrimination published by the EU I thought you might find interesting

Websites for lessons

BaFa BaFa: <http://www.stsintl.com/>

Democracy for All: <http://www.streetlaw.org/democlesson.html>

Choices for the 21st Century: <http://www.choices.edu/index.cfm>