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Culture in a Box: Experiencing Kyrgyzstan through an Interactive Learning Center
by

Mary Elizabeth McCune

An Abstract of a Project
in
Creative Studies

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Science

December 2008

Buffalo State College
State University of New York
Department of Creative Studies

ABSTRACT OF PROJECT

Culture in a Box: Creating an Interactive Learning Center to Experience Kyrgyzstan

The goal of this project is to use creativity to produce an interesting and fun learning experience about the foreign country Kyrgyzstan. Using current research on the best ways to structure a learning environment, a display was created in which people of high school age and above can participate and learn new information. Kyrgyzstan was chosen as the topic of the learning center because it is a relatively unknown country to most Americans, yet a look into its culture produces a greater understanding and appreciation for the creativity of the people living there.

Date

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Section One: Background to the Project

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to test my creative skills in making an interactive, interesting, and valuable learning center. As someone with an educational background who hopes to soon enter the field of teaching, I want to use my creative skills to make learning fun and worthwhile. Most education today continues to be taught in the traditional manner of lecture, drill, and test. However, the culture has changed drastically from the days of a one-room schoolhouse. In order to better reach today's learners with valuable information, methods should be used that suit the current style of learning. Research is prevalent on the topic of learning styles and engaging teaching methods. Therefore, it is my desire to explore the idea of planning a learning experience that is geared to meet the needs of a diverse group of learners. My hope is that I can design a creative learning center by using my creative skills. Such a center will be interactive so that the learner or participant of the center can experience the presented information in a manner that leads to useful internalization and understanding of the topic.

Description and Background

The topic I chose to teach through the learning center is the culture and country of Kyrgyzstan. My purpose behind this selection was twofold. First of all, my dear friend (whom I consider a sister) grew up in Kyrgyzstan and has told me many stories of her country while sharing with me the traditions and culture of her family. I hoped to gain a better personal understanding of my friend and her country as I prepared information for the learning center.

Secondly, I have a passion for foreign cultures, and I count some of my most valuable experiences in life as the times I have spent interacting with other cultures. When I considered what type of project I would like to undertake, I contemplated the idea of providing an opportunity for other people to experience the joy and beauty of interacting with other cultures. Since it would be quite costly to secure travel for people to experience another culture firsthand, I decided to create an environment where participants could experience a culture in a meaningful way, gaining the insight and enjoyment that I know is possible, without the travel. Kyrgyzstan is a fairly unknown country to most Americans I speak with; I decided this lack of previous knowledge would make it a good choice for my project because participants would have more information to learn.

With the goal of giving participants in the center a true “experience” of the Kyrgyz culture, I decided to make the actual center in the shape of a tent traditional to the Kyrgyz people. Within the tent there will be pictures and music from the country, artifacts lent to me by my friend, and interactive materials with pertinent information attached. The areas of information will be focused on music, games, traditions, people, general country information, and interesting little-known facts. One aspect of interaction with the center will be completion of a response sheet. This will be designed to help participants reflect upon the information they gathered through experiencing the center and create meaning to take away and apply to their everyday lives.

Rationale

The rationale for choosing this project was originally because I wanted to touch people the way I have been touched in life – I wanted to provide others with the life-changing experiences I have had. I desired to give other people the ability to see God and to know the beauty of diversity around the world. I struggled to choose what venue to use in order to convey a foreign culture in a meaningful and appropriate way. My project classmates helped me to generate many ideas on how I could utilize my passions and talents to attain my goal. It was through incubation and personally going through the steps of the Creative Problem Solving Process that I was able to narrow down my choices and more accurately define my goals. I ended up combining many of the ideas that my classmates provided when finally choosing to pursue an experiential learning center.

The idea of a learning center appealed to me because I have an education background and I could see how the lessons gained from doing this project would translate into future classroom use. The more I thought about it, I realized this project would also give me insight into being a teacher who utilizes creativity to enhance the delivery of information within a classroom. The process involved in this project will be good practice in designing an environment that is accessible to all personality types and learning styles.

I love other cultures so it was almost a given that my project would somehow involve another country, but since I have a vested interest in many different countries, it took more time than expected to choose just one. I thought of pursuing a project on the nation of Honduras because I have traveled there every summer since I was 10 years old to help family missionary friends living in Tegucigalpa, the capital. I have

spent time living in that culture, and my family and I continue to raise awareness and support for an orphanage there. I thought I could make a book about the orphans I know and distribute it here in the United States to raise financial support for their education. However, I felt that in order to make such a book, I would need to take a trip down to the orphanage to gather data and take pictures. Although this would have been rewarding and enjoyable, I decided that a \$1000 trip was excessive for a school project.

Since I have two family friends that are practically siblings from foreign cultures, I thought I could represent each of them with a center. After talking to someone who had just completed the masters program and strongly suggested that I keep the project as simple as possible, I took his advice and narrowed my topic down to just one country – Kyrgyzstan.

Aspect of Creativity

Creatively, this project has caused me to have faith in my own creativity. It has allowed me to dream and to use many different materials in creating a tangible product. When I first envisioned the project, I saw myself compiling materials in a fun and unique way. Once I finally decided on the components of the center, I had to brainstorm how to transform into reality the image I had in my mind of what the center would look like.

As I gathered my research, I realized that I needed to create a structure for what content to add and what information to convey through the learning center. I then put my focus on researching education centers to find out the best structures to use for teaching. This step was helpful because it created a direct connection between

my creativity and my teaching. I see this as a very necessary pathway to have made, especially for my future as a teacher. Hopefully, I will convey the creativity of the Kyrgyz people through the project, and hopefully the participants will be inspired in their own creative learning through participation in the center.

My friend from Kyrgyzstan is a musician here in the United States and she often travels to share her story and her music with a variety of audiences. I hope that the finished product can be something she can use to educate others about her country and give those who come to listen to her music a deeper understanding of her history. There is the potential that interacting with the center could inspire someone to directly help the people of Kyrgyzstan who lack the resources, opportunities, and blessings that most Americans experience. It is my hope that this project not only educates, but also inspires people to action on behalf of those less fortunate around the world.

Section Two: Pertinent Literature

The research for this project fell into two main topics: Education and Central Asia. I thought that the main thrust of my research would be information about Kyrgyzstan be include in the learning center. However, when I began collecting data, I realize d I needed a structure in which to enter the data. This realization caused me to pursue informational resources that discussed the educational philosophy behind the kind of learning center I wanted to create. I found the educational literature I gathered to be inspiring, intriguing, and most helpful in directing me towards deciding exactly how to structure my content information. The topics I searched

within the arena of education were: individualized learning, differentiated instruction, adult learning, experiential and hands-on learning, and learning centers. Below I have listed the most helpful resources I found, along with the key learning I gleaned from each source.

Resources on Education

Dewey, J., & Dewey, E. (1915). *Schools of Tomorrow*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Company.

Back in the early 1900's, Dewey was a proponent of "learning by doing" education. He proposed that students processed information in the most meaningful ways when they were personally involved in the construction of the information. "The teacher and the book are no longer the only instructors; the hands, the eyes, the ears, in fact the whole body, become sources of information...No book or map is a substitute for personal experience; they cannot take the place of the actual journey" (p. 74). He also reported through his studies that students who found personal value in the learning were intrinsically motivated to continue in the learning, often carrying the lessons themselves while the teachers looked on.

Hutchings, P. & Wutzdorff, A. (1988). Experiential learning across the curriculum: Assumptions and principles. In P. Hutchings and A. Wutzdorff (Eds.), *Knowing and doing: Learning through experience. New directions for teaching and learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Experiential learning "involves and engages a range of domains – the cognitive faculties, of course, but also the kinesthetic, affective, ethical, attitudinal, and

behavioral dimensions of learning. Learning acquired through several modalities is more likely to ‘stick’ as psychological research has clearly confirmed” (p. 12).

Meyers, C., & Jones, T. B. (1993). *Promoting active learning: Strategies for the college classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Adult learners are often different from young student learners. Adults have real lives, families, and jobs; they don’t want to waste their time with meaningless instruction. They also have spent much of their time gaining knowledge through hands-on experience such as on-the-job situations and hardships in their personal lives. In order to make learning worthwhile for them, adults need a purpose for the information and a means of applying the knowledge to their daily lives. When considering active learning, one must think that “active” means “not passive”; in other words, create learning where students can take information from the center and utilize it.

Pattillo, J., & Vaughan, E. (1992). *Learning centers for child-centered classrooms*. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association of the United States.

Understanding is produced in learning centers through doing, which likens to the Chinese proverb, “I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand.” The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) requires that all young children are taught in an active manner by giving them activities that will keep them engaged physically, mentally, and socially. It is also beneficial to create learning experiences or centers around topics and materials that are relevant to the lives of the learners. Some of the benefits of learning centers are that they

promote autonomy, provide real experiences through interaction with real objects, and present a variety of activities that have appeal to many skill and interest levels. Active learning through learning centers is not easy to plan for as a teacher, but the use of learning centers shows a “commitment to individualized, self-directed, and individually constructed knowledge”

Reiff, J. C. (1991). *Learning styles*. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association of the United States.

As early as Aristotle, there was mention of the differences that can exist within a group of learners. Unfortunately, teachers often teach in a manner that is similar to the way that they themselves learn. This results in an unconscious favoring of the students who have similar learning styles to the teachers; often the needs of students with different learning styles are not met in the classroom. The more teachers are aware of the diversity of learners, the more effective they will be in catering their lessons to each individual student. There are many different modalities to take into consideration: visual, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, smell, and taste. Studies show that only 30% of students are visual learners, 30% are auditory, 15% are tactile, and the remaining 25% are a mix (p.17).

Rose, D. H., & Meyer, A. (2002). *Teaching every student in the digital age: Universal Design for Learning*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

A look at brain research can aid in the understanding of a learner. Our brains have three main processing networks: the recognition network, the strategic network, and the affective network. The recognition processes involve hearing and seeing words.

The strategic processes involve the many steps that are involved in following a simple instruction. The affective processes involve the differences that each person experiences when put in the same situation. From looking at these three processing networks, teachers can conclude that different people react and process things differently. Consequently, instructional material should be flexible to provide each learner with the opportunity to achieve the set objectives.

Wurdinger, S. D. (2005). *Using experiential learning in the classroom: Practical ideas for all educators*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Education.

There are many organizations that are based on the principles of experiential learning. They seek to supply teachers with knowledge of how to effectively provide valuable learning experiences to students. Two such organizations to look at further are the Association for Experiential Education (<http://www.aee.org/>) and the National Society for Experiential Education (<http://www.nsee.org/>). Experiential learning includes the freedom of students to learn and explore what they like. Therefore, when creating an experiential learning center, take into account that each student will come away with different knowledge based on what appeals or connects most with their individual interests. If there are specific objectives that students should take away, it is helpful to give students those learning objectives before they begin working in a center so that they can know the questions for which they seek answers.

Resources on Kyrgyzstan

Alaolmolki, N. (2001). *Life after the Soviet Union: The newly independent republics of the Transcaucasus and Central Asia*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

The name Kyrgyzstan is supposed to have originated from a term that meant “forty tribes,” which could be due to the many different tribes and ethnic groups that live in the land. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the economy of Kyrgyzstan suffered greatly. It was the first of the republics to adopt its own currency, the Som, but stability of that currency was difficult to achieve. During the 1990’s, Kyrgyzstan received financial assistance from both Russia and China.

Antipina, K., Paiva, R., & Musakeev, T. (2006). *Kyrgyzstan*. Milano, Italy: Skira.

This book is an in-depth look at the traditional costumes of the Kyrgyz people. Through photographs, watercolors, and detailed text the authors explain and describe the traditions behind the dress found in the villages of Kyrgyzstan.

Federal Research Division, Library of Congress (1997). *A country study: Kyrgyzstan*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office. [Electronic Version] Retrieved October 30, 2008, from <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/kgtoc.html>.

Produced by the Federal Division of the Library of Congress, this website provides pertinent facts about every aspect of Kyrgyzstan – from population to transportation and from religion to tradition.

Kyrgyzstan: The Kidnapped Bride

(<http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/kyrgyzstan/index.html>)

This website is produced by Frontline, a division of PBS. In 2004, they produced a special PBS video special about one of the most unique traditions of Kyrgyzstan – bride kidnapping. The website includes the video, an interview with a reporter, a

photo essay of the country, and useful links to other sites containing information on the culture of Kyrgyzstan.

Massey, B. (2006). Where in the world do I belong? Jetlag Press. [Electronic Version] Retrieved on November 17, 2008 from
http://books.google.com/books?id=CBwDwhXk4KoC&pg=PA107&lpg=PA107&dq=yr+kese+song+bowl&source=bl&ots=enqLARYMzS&sig=3GhJ0gQFC_tdX2ntan-cPYpNf1E&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=10&ct=result#PPA106,M1.

This book looked at personality testing as categorized by geographic regions around the world. The author mentioned the personality and creativity of Central Asians, such as Kyrgyzstan, and even gave accounts as to the display of their creativity in the form of games and dress.

Advanced Tours

(<http://www.advantour.com/kyrgyzstan/culture.htm>)

This website gave information about the games and traditions that can be witnessed when traveling to Kyrgyzstan.

Central Intelligence Agency: The World Factbook

(<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kg.html>)

The World Factbook provides vital statistics for each country and allows for comparison to other countries.

N. S. Greenberg, personal communication, September 29, 2008 – Interview

I interviewed my friend Nurmira Salembaeva Greenberg to gain information about Kyrgyz culture because she grew up in the capital city. Notes from the interview are included in the appendix.

Tan, S. (2006). *The arrival*. New York: Arthur A. Levine Books.

This book served as inspiration for my project. It is a children's picture book by an Australian author. Through detailed pictures arranged in frames like a silent movie, this wordless book tells the story of immigration. The illustrations have an old-world quality and the faces of the people are very real; yet the setting is futuristic so the reader can experience the alien culture along with the traveler. When I read it I almost cried because I was so deeply touched by the struggle for survival and happiness the traveler had to fight for. Although fiction, it realistically portrayed what many foreigners still experience. In the way that this book helped me to identify and feel empathy for immigrants, I desire to produce a learning center where participants can identify and feel empathy for a foreign culture.

World Bank, <http://www.who.int/countries/kgz/en/>

This site provides information into the statistics of a countries economy, education, healthcare, and universal standing.

Additional Resources

Bacon, E. E. (1966). *Central Asians under Russian rule: A study in culture change*.

Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Brooks-Harris, J. E., & Stock-Ward, S. R. (1999). *Workshops: Designing and facilitating experiential learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

- Burghart, D. L., & Sabonis-Helf, T. (Eds.). (2004). *In the tracks of Tamerlane: Central Asia's path to the 21st century*. Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Center for Technology and National Security Policy.
- Cantor, J. A. (1997). *Experiential learning in higher education: Linking classroom and community*. Washington, D.C.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education.
- Halpern, D. F., & Hakel, M. D. (Eds.). (2002). *Applying the science of learning to university teaching and beyond*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Jones Luong, P. (Ed.). (2004). *The transformation of Central Asia: States and societies from the Soviet rule to independence*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Roy, O. (2000). *The new Central Asia: The creation of nations*. New York: New York University Press.

Section Three: Process Plan

Originally, I foresaw my time spent on this project being broken into two distinct areas: the research on Kyrgyzstan for the content of the project and the physical creation of the materials for the learning center. However, there were other aspects to the project that I did not expect at the onset that took considerable time.

My original timeline included gathering all the literature research in September and experimenting with materials to be used in the learning center. I planned on having the learning center completed by mid-October so that I could test it with an audience and use information from the testing in the official write-up.

However, this did not happen. Although I selected my topic and committed on paper to creating a learning center on Kyrgyzstan with the submission of my concept paper, in my head and my heart I still had not committed to the project. After speaking with many people who did their best to pacify my fears and motivate me towards action, I took steps forward on the path to creation of my project a month behind schedule.

The timeline below is a revision of the original one found in my concept paper. If I were to repeat the process, I would hope to fully commit to my project earlier in the semester so that I might have a more evenly paced timeline. However, I would not give up the time I spent coming to a decision about my topic, because I recognize it was a valuable part of my process in completing this project. The outcome of my idle time was a fully-committed motivation to see the project through to completion.

Date	Activities	Approx. Time (hours)
August	Explore Topics	5
	Meet with Class	3
September	Choosing Topic	4
	Write Concept Paper	4
	Revise Concept Paper	2
	Research Literature and Gather Data	2
	Meet with Class and SBP	5
October	Research Literature and Gather Data	30
	Begin Constructing Project	1
	Work on Project Paper Sections 1,2,3	10
	Meet with Class and SBP	5
November	Work on Project Paper Sections 4,5,6	10
	Construct Project	25
	Test Project with Audience and Revise	5
	Share Finished Project with Audience	3
	Correct and Enhance Draft	5
	Write Final Draft	5
	Meet with SBP	2

December	Present Project to Class	2
	Self-Evaluation	2
	Total	130

Section Four: Outcomes

Introduction

The main product to result from this project is a stand alone multi-sensory learning center on the culture and creativity of Kyrgyzstan. The purpose of the center is to provide high school students and adults with information about Kyrgyzstan so that they might learn about another culture. Other outcomes include my personal learning experience and the development of my creative skills through the process of creating the project. Below is a description of the physical center with photos to supplement the written explanation. Included on the back cover is a video of some of the participants experiencing the learning center.

I had several goals in mind when creating the learning center. First of all, I wanted the information to be presented in a variety of ways so that all types of learners could connect what they were learning with their preferences for gaining information. To do this, I wanted activities that appealed to all the senses and styles of learning. Secondly, I wanted to provide enough information on a variety of topics that each person experiencing the center could learn something that was personally valuable to them. For this reason, I did not want to set specific learning objectives, but rather pose questions that would lead participants to challenge themselves in a new way. Finally, I wanted the display to look professional and be something that could easily be assembled and reassembled, in case it had to be transported.

Thankfully, by the end of the project I saw each of these goals fulfilled. Through researching effective instruction in classrooms, I designed the center to appeal to all learners. Though it was difficult to narrow down what information should be included, I made my selections by forming groups of information that could easily be related to or compared with American culture and our lives. The display, when set up, does look impressive, inviting, and professional; and although there are many items to transport, it is possible to carry the whole learning center at one time for the sake of transportation.

Physical Learning Center

The physical aspect of the learning center consists of three main parts – the folding table (included in case a venue does not have a correctly sized table), the display board (purchased for the project, but reusable for other educational projects), and the tent covering (consisting of an umbrella and stand that clamps to the table).

The tent was created to meet my goal of transporting people into another culture without actually taking them there. I thought that if I could create an atmosphere that resembled one that might be encountered in Kyrgyzstan, it would help to transmit the information and overall understanding of the culture to the participants. An yurt (pronounced “ert”) is a traditional Kyrgyz tent used by herders in the summer when grazing livestock in the green valleys of the mountains. The yurt is portable and is constructed from a wood frame and wool covering. There is an opening at the top to release smoke from the wood fire stationed inside. Because this traditional housing style has been around since the nomadic days of the Kyrgyz people and is still used today, it has become a symbol of the country. In fact, the

center of the Kyrgyz flag resembles the crosshatched wood intersecting at the smoke hole of the yurt. Because of its national symbolism and its merit as a welcoming place of hospitality, I chose the yurt as the setting of my learning center.



Flag of the Kyrgyz Republic (taken from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kg.html>)

My yurt is created from grey and red felt, wool yarn spun together, and an umbrella to provide the dome shape. Attached to the rounded top is a grey felt siding, which encloses the center on the table.



The display board is used to house pictures of the people and culture of Kyrgyzstan. I found the pictures on Flickr and asked permission from each of the photographers to reproduce the pictures as part of my project. Each picture corresponds to information about the country. For example, the information about national games is linked to the picture of boys on horseback playing a game. When transporting the center, the board folds in thirds and can be stored in a carrying case. The board is covered in a felt material so all of my information is on laminated cards which then attach with Velcro to the board.

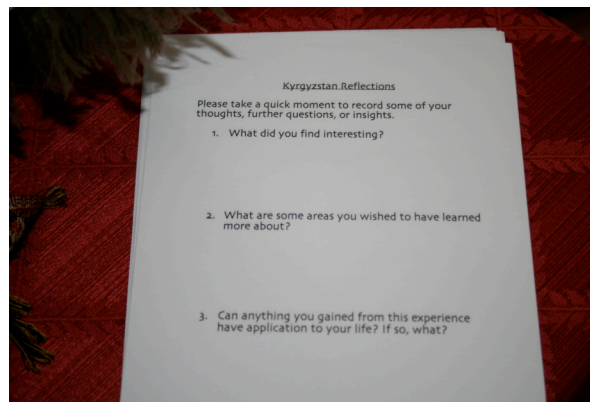


More information about the culture is on the table attached to the many artifacts I have collected from my friend Nurmira. To make the center look presentable and to make the objects stand out, I have a tablecloth to cover the table and a light on the inside of the Yurt to make the information visible. On the table there is a model of an yurt, a pair of felted slippers, a woman's head scarf, a man's cap, a camel made of wool, a pot holder with traditional design, a wall hanging, a book about dress in Kyrgyzstan, a vest to wear, and a stringed instrument called a komuz. My purpose in presenting many different artifacts was to give participants of the center a chance to interact with actual Kyrgyz objects while learning about their significance.

Along with the artifacts I have also compiled a playlist of traditional Kyrgyz music. Depending on the setting, I will either have my computer or an iPod dock set up from which to play the music. I compiled the music from a CD of my Kyrgyz friend Nurmira playing traditional melodies on her cello. The copyright information for the CD is located in my list of resources.

Educational Take-Away

The physical learning center is only part of the product I desired for this project. The other aspect was the learning gained from interacting with the center. Since my educational goal was to present information in such a way that every participant of the center could take something away that was specifically meaningful to him or her, I expected this aspect of the product to be individualized and varied. By suggestion from my professor, I have included in the appendix a DVD that depicts different participants interacting with the center and sharing their responses. In order to extend the learning, I also created a simple worksheet for each participant to fill out after going through the center. The worksheet asks them to record some of the information that they found most meaningful or surprising, while also making some sort of application of the information presented to their lives.



I was pleased to read the responses from some of the people that took the time to experience the center and fill out a response sheet. As expected, each person had aspects of the center that sparked his or her curiosity more than other parts. I found it really interesting to read what people wrote in response to the question "What are some areas you wished to have learned more about?" Some wanted more information on the modern culture, many women wanted to learn more about Kyrgyz food, some

college students wanted deeper comparative analysis to American culture, and others wanted more general information.

Section Five: Key Learnings

Introduction

The process of completing this master's project has brought with it many valuable lessons. I have learned much about my tendencies when problem solving and purposefully applying my creative skill. I found that, in both cases, I desire the input of other people, often realizing that their contributions are essential to my success. In the area of education, I learned all about differentiated instruction and the benefit of individualizing learning to suit the pupil. When it came to researching Kyrgyzstan for the content of my learning center, everything was new. I learned about the history, politics, culture, food, dress, geography, music, and customs of the Kyrgyz people.

Content of Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan is a beautiful country situated in the peaks and valleys of the Tien Shan Mountains of Central Asia. Its neighboring countries include China to the Southeast, Kazakhstan to the North, and Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to the Southwest. The population of 5.3 million is a mixture of Mongolian and Turkish descent, with influences from Uzbek immigration and Russian political domination (Federal Research Division, 1997). Most would say the faces of the people look Asian; but the main religion is Islam and the official languages are Kyrgyz and Russian, attributes not usually matched to Kyrgyzstan's largest Asian neighbor, China.

As part of the former USSR, Kyrgyzstan was one of the first of the five Soviet Republics to gain independence and reestablish its own identity. Kyrgyzstan asserted its independence through reinstating its own currency, the Som, and electing a president for the newly formed Republic (Alaolmolki, 2001). However, the retreat of the communist Soviets devastated the economy, which is still fighting to rise to stability. Although most statistics I found quote the unemployment of the country around 18%, my friend Nurmira tells me that it is much higher. Many educated men, such as her father who was an engineer before the Soviets took over, are still looking to find jobs comparable to their educational level. Many were offered only menial employment under communism, which prompted a large majority of the male population to turn to alcoholism (N. S. Greenberg, personal communication, September 29, 2008).

My interview with Nurmira Salimbaeva Greenberg (personal communication, September 29, 2008) provided a basis for much of my further research into the culture of the Kyrgyz people. She stressed the areas of creativity that she saw in her own culture. For example, a favorite traditional game often played at weddings, called Yr-Kese (Song Bowl), requires the players to be creative. As a bowl is passed around the room, whomever it stops on must sing or play a song. Because of such games, many Kyrgyz learn to play an instrument, even minimally, so they will have something to showcase when the bowl stops with them. The spontaneity of the game causes the players to think on their feet while requiring them to engage their creativity in order to create a musical composition.

Nurmira believes that Kyrgyz people are very creative, and she suggested that much of that creativity might originate in the beautiful landscapes of the country. Often called “the Switzerland of Central Asia,” Kyrgyzstan boasts gorgeous mountains, high altitude lakes, and fertile green valleys (Massey, 2006, p. 106). Much of the traditional music reflects nature and the aspects of the rural, nomadic life of the Kyrgyz people. Along with musical traditions, the Kyrgyz people take national pride in the Manas, a 1,000 year old epic poem about one of their historic heroes, Manas. The Manas is performed orally, completely from memory, and without music. Instead, the performer creates music as he uses voice inflection and half-sung meter to recite the story (N.S. Greenberg).

Content of Learning Centers

There is a current trend in education that calls for differentiated instruction, which means the teacher is asked to cater the information to each child’s needs. Before a teacher can prepare lessons suited for each student, he or she must know how each student differs in his or her educational needs. While academic capability can be determined through interaction with students and tools such as a pre-test, understanding of how a student learns can be gained through an understanding of learning styles.

For my project, I was interested in differentiating the method of delivering the information, rather than modifying the actual information to the intellectual capabilities of each participant. Regardless of student IQ, there are certain methods of teaching that are more effective at providing an environment of deep learning. John Dewey at the turn of the century documented the benefits of “Learning by

Doing” (Dewey & Dewey, 1915, p. 74). His pupils were given the ability to interact with actual objects, solve real-life problems, and connect their lessons to their own lives. By becoming a part of the learning, Dewey reported that his students were driven past the required knowledge because their own personal interest motivated them to pursue the topics further. His students also related to Dewey that they found personal value in their studies. Because I wanted the participants of my learning center to find personal value in interacting with the center, I chose to include real-life objects and to present the information in such a way that it would be easy for participants to make connections to their own lives from the cultural data about Kyrgyzstan.

Through research on college and adult learners, I discovered that older students learn differently than primary students. Most of the lessons adults learn result from personal situations and on-the-job experiences. They gain information based on their needs or the needs of their families and communities. Extra information with seemingly no application value to their lives is less likely to be sought by adults (Meyers & Jones, 1993). Knowledge of this fact paired with a realization that most adults are not seeking information on an obscure Central Asian country caused me to carefully choose the information I put in my learning center. I wanted to convey the essence of a culture while also providing parallel comparisons to our own culture, so that participants will view the information gained from the experience to be valuable in their personal lives.

Another goal of mine, when theoretically considering how to structure the learning within my center, was to make the learning process active and interesting to

all learning styles. Active learning is imperative when teaching the young child (Pattillo & Vaughan, 1992); and, though not imperative for adults, I think active learning is still one of the most effective forms of structuring a lesson. Most information is disseminated in lecture format for older learners. However, research into different learning styles shows that only 30% of learners acquire information through auditory means. Thirty percent of students are considered visual learners, 15% are tactile, and the remaining 25% are a mix of many different styles (Reiff, 1991). In order for my center to effectively reach all learning styles, I chose to include information in many different formats. My center includes written information, visual pictures, auditory music, and physical objects to manipulate.

Process

This project has been more difficult for me than I expected. When presented with the choice of pursuing and creating anything I wanted over the course of one semester, I was struck paralyzed with the immensity of the task. There are so many things I like and so many things I would like to do – it was hard to choose. Once I did choose to pursue the idea of a cultural learning center, I did not start work on it right away because I was afraid I had made the wrong choice, and I secretly wondered if it was too late to switch topics. I finally realized the non-committal behavior was stemming from a fear of failure – this was my big chance to leave my mark on the hallowed shelves of the resource room. What if my project turned out poorly or never aided in the learning of future students?

My project finally began in the problem-finding stage of the Creative Problem Solving Process. I identified many goals and wishes that I had for the opportunity of

creating a Master's Project over the course of a semester, but none of my wishes immediately translated into ideas for a concrete project. I used such tools as the Ladder of Abstraction and Webbing to help me generate ideas. When both of these tools failed to produce an idea I was passionate about, I submitted my struggle to my classmates. As a class, we used Brainstorming to come up with more ideas for my project. None of the ideas we came up with as a class grabbed my attention, so I spent some time incubating on the problem. Finally, after breaking the problem into smaller pieces, I matched my goals with a combination of the ideas from my classmates to yield the decision to make a learning center about Kyrgyzstan.

I was so relieved to have chosen a topic, I naively thought the hard part of idea generation and idea selection was over. However, the idea of building a learning center was only vaguely constructed in my mind. After much talk with others and struggling to express my idea, my professor suggested that I visualize the end result. To do this I pulled out a big sketchbook and my favorite pencils in the hopes that using the same materials I use for artistic endeavors would help to let the creativity flow. Indeed, the large blank sheet before me gave me the freedom to express my abstract thoughts. The end result of this visualization process was a crude sketch of a tent covering a table with objects on it.

Once I had my ideas about what the learning center would look like, I needed to find out how to turn my ideas into reality. As much as I tried to brainstorm ideas of how to translate my ideas into concrete objects, I found myself falling short of a solution. I was reminded of an opportunity I had in elementary school to work on a team of seven in which we creatively solved an obscure problem. Although I hadn't

been placed on a team for this Master's project, I knew I needed to construct a team to help me with my problem.

One of the first people I sought out was my father because I needed to plan the building of my learning center, and he has a background in engineering. We sat and toyed with numbers for an afternoon in trying to come up with a way to create an interactive, multi-sensory, valuable, and interesting learning center. Over the course of the next few weeks, I regularly shared my ideas with my father and asked for his input. One day, while brainstorming ways to build the tent portion of my learning center, my father used the tool of Forced Connections. While eating lunch at Wegman's, he scanned the environment for ideas and saw a patio table with a sun umbrella attached. My father suggested I use an umbrella as the base for the tent instead of building an interior structure from scratch. I was overjoyed with the idea and immediately bought a new umbrella and wool felt to cover it to look like a Kyrgyz tent.

In the meantime, while gathering materials to build the learning center, I also spent a large amount of time researching. My first goal was to gather information on the culture and country of Kyrgyzstan. There was very little printed material at the college and city library about the country of Kyrgyzstan in comparison to many other foreign countries. Most of the resources I found were written to address the fall of the Soviet empire and the construction of the new Soviet republics, Kyrgyzstan being among them. Since most of the textbooks dealt heavily in the governmental aspects of the country, I used personal communications and websites to give me a more person-oriented view of the country. As I gathered data I considered what

information other people would be interested in learning. This led me to do another round of research focusing on educational planning. Through reading books about the benefits of learning centers and other experiential learning models, I began to envision how my center would look and what information it would contain. I also did research concerning learning styles to understand how to provide information in multiple forms with hopes that at least one of the methods I select to transmit information will connect with each learner.

After having all the materials for the basis of the learning center, I assumed it wouldn't be too difficult to plug in the information I had assembled from my research. This task proved to require more creativity and perseverance than I expected. I looked at all the research I had, but I found that the amount of information was too large and diverse. I tried to narrow down the topics of information by selecting the same categories used by many of my reference books. The problem was that I was not interested in most of the categories (such as politics, economics, and military history), and I didn't feel passionate about presenting those topics as part of the center.

I was passionate about conveying the life of the individuals I have met from Kyrgyzstan, but due to the research limitations of my project I could not use their lives as the basis of my project. It was a great challenge for me to find a way to reach my goal of giving participants of the center a personal understanding of the country of Kyrgyzstan without fully including the lives of my Kyrgyz friends. I noticed myself putting up resistance to completing the project because of the difficulty I was having in connecting my goal with a course of action. In the end, I was able to use the

information my friend Nurmira gave me to structure my supplemental information around the theme of creativity. This was not something I saw as a possibility at the onset; but, upon reflection, I see that creativity was the perfect link to connect all the miscellaneous pieces of information I had gathered.

Once the information was organized and printed out, I arranged it within the center. I wanted to use recent photographs to show the color and beauty of the country, but I have never visited Kyrgyzstan so I had none of my own to use. Instead, I searched Flickr.com for pictures listed in the Creative Commons section. The pictures listed in this arena are ones that the photographers have chosen to share with others. By searching for pictures of Kyrgyzstan, I found many photographers who had beautiful pictures I could see myself using for my learning center. I emailed six photographers requesting their permission to use a select number of their Kyrgyzstan photos. Not everyone I emailed gave me permission, but some were very excited about my project and being a part of it. After receiving permission from a few photographers, I downloaded and printed 12 photos for the center.

I searched my house for artifacts that I had from Kyrgyzstan that would be interesting and informational. I was surprised that I found so many objects: slippers, a vest, a hat, a purse, a wall hanging, a chess board, a head scarf, a skirt, a toy camel, a musical instrument, a book, and a pot holder. I thought about how each object represented some aspect of culture and matched it with the information pertaining to that section of Kyrgyzstan culture. I also made a CD from a compilation of CD's Nurmira gave me. I chose songs that best represented traditional Kyrgyz music and that I thought would be easy to listen to while interacting with other information.

The final step of the project was to have participants walk through the center and give me feedback on what they learned. I set the center up at my parent's home, and thanks to a family game night, I had many participants ranging from high school age to mid 50's that were willing to experience the learning center. It was exciting to observe as the participants became engrossed in the process of discovering new information. Some immediately picked up the objects and adorned themselves with the clothing, while others took time to read all the information on the picture cards first. I received a lot of positive feedback, as well as many suggestions of ways to improve the center.

Section Six: Conclusion

Introduction

I chose to make my project a learning center so that I could stretch my own creativity, learn about creativity in other cultures, and learn how to teach creatively. I have come away from this experience with each of these and more.

My creativity

When considering my own creativity, I learned that I need a lot of incubation time to develop an idea. In order to make this time effective, though, I must play around with my ideas and work with them to see if they will fit with my vision of what I want the outcome to be. I prefer to choose one idea (usually my first idea) and follow it through until completion. However, I learned that this does not always work. Creative problem solving does not require just one stroke of genius at the outset, but rather the perseverance of many bouts of creative thought and expression

throughout a project. Each time I began to develop a section of my project, the path I started with led me to another problem. I had to push myself to spend the time to develop an idea in many different ways until I found a solution that fit.

Another insight I gained during the process of creating my learning center is that two heads are better than one. At first, I thought I had to be responsible for the whole project, including all ideas. However, as I pursued some of my ideas, I found myself longing for a team of people to supply me with new ways of looking at things and other ideas of how to tackle the problem. Team problem solving, in my opinion, is more beneficial than trying to solve a problem on my own. Without the suggestions of classmates, my professor, my friends, and my family, I would not have completed the project in the same way, and maybe not at all.

Creativity in Kyrgyzstan

I was very intrigued to learn about many different aspects of Kyrgyz culture; however, the insight Nurmira provided me on the creative climate of Kyrgyzstan was especially fascinating. I learned that Kyrgyz are creative in different and similar ways from Americans. When it comes to thinking, Americans have had the freedom to think creatively since our country's inception. Creative thinking in Kyrgyzstan, on the other hand, was suppressed during the Soviet years, and only since 1991 has had the freedom to be expressed. The generation that grew up under communism was told what to do and how to think. Now under the Republic, Kyrgyzstan is seeing a rise in entrepreneurship as the younger generations begin to step out into their creative abilities in the public sector. It will be interesting to see how the people of

Kyrgyzstan use their creativity in the next few decades as they try to bring their country into the modern era.

Teaching creatively

The research I compiled surrounding the topics of learning centers, individualized instruction, and active learning taught me that teaching in a manner that reaches all students requires great amounts of creativity and effort. I used my understanding of the Creative Problem Solving Process to pick my topic and to identify my teaching objectives for the learning center. I also had to creatively think up what materials to use to create my learning center. When it came to organizing information within the center, I used my creativity to select pertinent data and arrange it in an appealing way. In order to choose a topic, select materials, structure the information, and construct the display, I was required to integrate my creativity with my lesson planning skills, something I was not conscious of doing beforehand. Creating this learning center and having creativity in mind as a learning goal provided me with a model of how teaching can be done in the future.

Next Steps

I will use this experience as a basis for structuring educational lessons in the future. In the past, I have relied on traditional methods for teaching information to students because that is what most teachers around me were using. However, I now have confidence to step away from the norm and to embrace alternative ways of structuring information. Armed with the knowledge of my research, I can be sure that creatively planning individualized instruction is the best way to help students learn.

I plan on taking the basic concept of my Kyrgyz learning center and using the same pattern for other topics that I might teach in the future. I could also pursue making another such center based on the information of other countries and cultures. Other educators could build on this project by extending the idea of learning centers into different genres or teaching arenas. I focused on adult learners because I thought it would be interesting to cater information towards people outside of traditional classrooms. It would be interesting to see if there are any adjustments that should be made when taking this project to a younger audience. Further research could also be made into the creativity of Kyrgyzstan. Most of the information about the creativity in Kyrgyzstan I presented was gathered through personal communication. It would be interesting to see what an in-depth research study into creativity's role in the Kyrgyz culture might result in. One could also look into the creativity of similar countries such as the other former Soviet republics.

Overall, this project has been very rewarding. I have learned a lot about myself, my creativity, and the creativity of others – both here in the US and half way around the world in Kyrgyzstan. I hope to continue to pursue knowledge about foreign cultures and their creativity. Also, I am excited to use what I learned in the education realm to effectively create a creative learning environment for future students. Completing this project has supplied me with confidence that, with help from others, I can tackle a big idea successfully.

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Appendix A

Concept Paper

Culture in a Box: Experiencing Kyrgyzstan through an Interactive Learning Center

Name: Mary Beth McCune
2008

Date Submitted: September 8,

Project Type: Develop a talent or skill I already have

What Is This Project About?

The project is to create a multi-media learning center in which children and adults can experience portable the culture and the country of Kyrgyzstan. Although there is the potential to expand the project and make many different centers that each focus on a unique culture, the first and main product will be a learning center based on Kyrgyzstan. A dear friend of mine grew up in Kyrgyzstan, a mountainous country that borders Kazakhstan and China, and she introduced me to the traditions and customs of her culture. Now a musician in New York, she often shares about her culture and her homeland at concerts and presentations, but finds that very few Americans are knowledgeable about her country. My product will create a venue for disseminating information about Kyrgyzstan to those who might be curious to learn more about its culture and traditions. Creativity will be the key that helps compose the final project – an assortment of information composed of a variety of mediums for the purpose of transmitting knowledge in an interactive, experiential way.

Rationale for Choice:

Most of the world lives in a culture that differs greatly from the Caucasian, middleclass, suburban, democratic upbringing of my childhood. It is through interaction with people of other countries that my eyes have been opened and my understanding of the world, and my place in it, has deepened. Such interactions have caused me to seek out opportunities to experience other cultures.

One of my goals in selecting a project was to incorporate my interest in foreign cultures with the possibility of teaching other Americans about the unique aspects of such cultures. I truly believe that my life has been enhanced through my knowledge of and my friendships with people from other nations, such as my friend from Kyrgyzstan. My hope is that I can enhance other people's lives by presenting them with the opportunity to experience people from other cultures without having to travel outside the United States.

The idea of making a learning center came to me after many days of prayer and incubation. I wanted to use my creative skills to artistically design a product that

would give others the chance to interact with new information in a meaningful way. My background in education has given me insight into the learning styles and processes of different students. I decided that an interactive learning center where the information is accessible, the format is appealing, and the structure is flexible would be an effective method for teaching other people about a foreign culture. I will use many different mediums of expression such as photographs, fabric, posters, music, objects, and written narratives within the center to give people of all learning styles an opportunity to connect with the information.

What Will Be the Tangible Product(s) or Outcomes?

The finished product will be one learning center about life in Kyrgyzstan. The center will be housed in a box so that it can be transported to any venue. Inside the box will be clothing, pictures, music, and written information about life in Kyrgyzstan. There will be no time constraint on experiencing the center. However, when a participant is finished, he or she will be asked to journal a page of reflections about the learning that he or she gained. The tools for journaling will be including in the box as well. The second outcome of the project will be an official write-up of the project.

What Criteria Will You Use To Measure The Effectiveness Of Your Achievement?

My goals are to produce a completed center by November, have at least 10 people participate and reflect upon the center, and to finish the project write-up by the due date in November. I will measure my effectiveness by my ability to meet due dates in a timely fashion, my personal satisfaction with the finished products (both the centers and the write-up), my professionalism in delivery of the product, and the feedback I receive from the center participants.

Who Will Be Involved or Influenced; What Will Your Role Be?

I will be the main creator of the project and will do everything needed to put together the centers and the project write-up. I will gather information and suggestions of topics to cover from my Kyrgyz friend through informal questioning, and I will seek out her family members, my family members, and other individuals that I might meet in the process who could positively contribute to the final outcome. Volunteers willing to participate in the centers will be a vital source of information, as I will gain insight on how to make the centers most effective through the feedback of these volunteers. I will solicit participant feedback at least twice during the process. My classmates and my instructor will also be involved in helping me to be successful and effective in my undertaking.

When Will This Project Take Place?

This project and the corresponding write-up will take place during the Fall 2008 semester, and both will be completed and presented by December. Hopefully the learning center product will be something that can be used over and over again, extending the influence of the product past this semester.

Where Will This Project Occur?

The work for this project will occur at my home in Orchard Park, NY and at the International Center for Studies in Creativity at Buffalo State College, Buffalo, NY. I will gather information from my friend over the phone and through a visit to New York City, where she lives.

Why Is It Important to Do This?

This project will allow me to develop many of my creative skills such as photography, creative writing, project-making, and creative lesson-planning. These are things I do not spend much time developing on my own, but I would like to refine my skills and learn how to use them in a manner that can positively influence others.

I selected the topic of the project because it is important for Americans in the age of globalization to gain understanding into the differences and similarities of those that live in other areas of the world. I hope the center will be an effective venue for participants to experience, however briefly, another culture. The journaling that will occur at the end of the learning experience will give participants the time and space to think about how the insight they gained can be related to their own lives. Looking into another culture can help a person understand his or her own culture and personal role in the world at large; it is important to me that all people are given the opportunity to take such a look into their world. Although this project falls into the “develop current creative skills” type, the purpose of developing my creative skills and creating the project is to positively influence others.

Personal Learning Goals:

- Develop a style of presentation appropriate for showcasing multi-media information that is individual and creative
- Gain a deeper understanding of the culture and people of Kyrgyzstan
- Utilize knowledge in the area of education to create an effective learning center
- Seek out best audiences and appropriate venues with which to share the final product

- Plan, write, and publish a Masters-level project write-up

How Do You Plan to Achieve Your Goals and Outcomes?

I will use CPS and other problem solving strategies to help me select the media to use in my project. I will then experiment and test the ideas generated from that process to develop the style and look of the product. I will ask for input and spend much time incubating and working to make sure that the media of presentation I choose is appropriate and effective.

I will gather information about Kyrgyzstan through informal interviews my friend and her family, reading books and websites, and browsing materials that have been created in the past to inform visitors or travelers about the country.

I will research learning centers and compile information of what makes a learning center effective and what makes it ineffective. I will also ask veteran teachers and friends for advice and insight into creating a meaningful learning environment.

I will gain more insight regarding the best audience as I work on the project and see the path it takes. However, I will constantly ask for feedback and volunteers to test the project throughout the semester. I will record insights and reflections based on my volunteers' experiences and seek to improve the project in areas that they suggest. Some groups I plan to solicit as volunteer participants are my fellow graduate students, the high school students I work with, my family members – including my extended family and cousins of all ages, and my co-workers, who range in age from 30-50.

I will create a detailed work schedule to plan the writing and development of the project write-up. I will share this with my sounding board partner and ask her to keep me accountable to staying on target with my writing.

Evaluation:

I will seek three levels of evaluation. For self-evaluation, I will constantly check to see that I am appropriately making progress in a timely manner by matching my current state to my timeline and written-out work schedule. I will also reflect upon the process in the form of a journal entry every two weeks. After completion, I will write out a reflection of the entire project and an observation of how participants interacted with the project. At the end, I will also look back to my learning goals and determine if I met each one; if I didn't, I will reflect upon what I could do to meet them.

For scholarly evaluation, I will submit all necessary items on time to my instructor. I will also communicate on a regular basis with my sounding board partner to gain insights, suggestions, and on-going evaluation of process and product.

For participants, I will evaluate the success of the project based on my own observation and based on their reflective journaling, which they will do as part of the center. I will also ask them for their insight and comments, and I will converse with them about their experiences with the center.

Prepare Project Timeline:

Date	Activities	Approx. Time (hours)
August	Explore Topics	3
	Meet with Class	3
September	Choosing Topic	4
	Write Concept Paper	3
	Plan Project Work Schedule	2
	Research Literature and Gather Data	10
	Experiment with Materials	4
	Meet with Class and SBP	8
October	Begin Constructing Project	15
	Work on Project Paper Sections 1,2,3	20
	Test the Project with Audience	5
	Finish Project	15
	Meet with Class and SBP	5
November	Work on Project Paper Sections 4,5,6	10
	Share Finished Project with Audience	3
	Correct and Enhance Draft	5
	Write Final Draft	5
	Meet with SBP	2
December	Present Project to Class	2
	Self-Evaluation	1
	Total	120

Identify Pertinent Literature or Resources:

Potential Sources:

- Encyclopedias
- Books specific to Kyrgyz culture
- Websites containing free-user photographs of the countries
- My friend and her family
- Children's books and other sources that effectively convey foreign cultures in a meaningful way

- The Arrival by Shaun Tan
 - Growing Up Behind the Wall by Peter Sis
- Adopted Masters Project
- National Geographic

Appendix B

Product Pages

Down on the Farm

The majority of Kyrgyzstan's population lives in rural areas raising cattle and other livestock. Subsistent farming is common.

Only 35% of people live in cities, the biggest of which is Bishkek, the capital. Osh, the next largest city was developed over 3000 years ago due to traffic along the ancient Silk Road.

Image used with permission by Alan Shipley:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/87039642@Noo/2930490887/in/set-72157602184732159/>

Face to Face

The faces of the people are thought to look Chinese or Eastern Asian because of the Mongolian and Turkish background.

However, the people are culturally Muslim and share many similarities with the Russians, even sharing Russian as a second official language (Kyrgyz being the first).

Dress

If you go to visit Kyrgyzstan you will see modern clothing, especially in the cities. Often in the rural areas, you will see people still dressed in traditional clothing.

Image used with permission by Nurmira Greenberg

Music, Music Everywhere

There is a long tradition of folk music in Kyrgyzstan. And, although there are many professional musicians, it is a culture where everyone is expected to contribute to the arts and music in some way.

Tid Bit: Classical music training was established during the Soviet occupation with the founding of a music conservatory in the capital city, Bishkek. Since independence, people have been learning how to fuse traditional, classical, and modern music together. Pictured here is a group of traveling musicians.

Image used with permission by Alan Shipley:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/87039642@Noo/2312910516/in/set-72157602184732159/>

Let's Play! Games

A game called **Yr-Kese** is often played at weddings. A large bowl is passed around the group, and whomever it stops on must perform, sing, or play an instrument. For this reason many people take up instruments, such as the **Komuz**, so as not to get caught off guard with nothing to do when the bowl comes to them. If a person cannot dance or play an instrument, they will tell a joke and try to make everyone laugh.

Horses are a staple in the everyday workings of most Kyrgyz, especially those who live outside the cities. They even play games on horseback. One game in particular, **Ulack Tartych** (loosely translated as "fighting for the little goat") is played like polo on horseback, but instead of using a ball they use a goat's head.

Image used with permission by Alan Shipley:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/87039642@Noo/2989738056/in/set-72157602184732159/>

Basic Facts

Kyrgyzstan is slightly smaller than South Dakota with 94% of the country covered by the peaks and valleys of the beautiful Tien Shan Mountains. It is at the same latitude as New York State and is completely landlocked by the countries pictured on the map.

Quick Comparison: (from the World Factbook)

	Kyrgyzstan	US
Population	5,356,869	303,824,640
Government Type	Republic	Democratic Republic
Independence Date	Aug 31, 1991	July 4, 1776
Language	Kyrgyz (65%) Russian (13%)	English (82%) Spanish (11%)
Religion	Muslim (75%) Russian Orthodox (20%)	Protestant (51%) Roman Catholic (24%)
Life Expectancy (in yrs.)	Male: 65 Female: 73	Male: 75 Female: 81
School Life Expectancy	12 yrs	16 yrs
Literacy Rate	98.7%	99%
GDP (per capita)	\$2,000	\$45,800
Unemployment	18%	4.6%
Below poverty	40%	12%



Taken from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kg.html>

You Don't Say!

Kyrgyzstan has one of the oldest epic poems in the world called Manas. It is named after an ancient hero of the Kyrgyz people. Manas has been passed down orally for centuries.

Today, Manas festivals are held where performers recite the entire poem from memory, often lasting all day.

Image used with permission by Uncornered Market:
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/uncorneredmarket/1778722620/>

Interesting Fact:

A popular national drink is called **Koumiss** – fermented horse milk! Here a man steadies his horse while his wife milks it.

Strummin'

This instrument, called the **Komuz**, is a traditional instrument developed by the Kyrgyz. Many people learn to play the Komuz because it is easy to learn and everyone in society is expected to contribute to the creative arts in some way.

Home Sweet Home

Traces of Kyrgyzstan's nomadic past can still be seen in the landscape. Families, especially those who herd their livestock to the green valleys in the summer, erect temporary housing. The **Yurt** is made from draping felt around a wooden frame. A hole at the top lets out the smoke from a small oven placed at the center of the Yurt.

Grand Old Flag

The yurt is one of the most important symbols of nationalism in Kyrgyz culture. The view from the opening of the smoke hole in a yurt is even represented in the center of the country's flag.



Flag taken from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kg.html>

Image on reverse used with permission by Zoe Chafe:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/urbangarden/2688544242/in/set-72157606286062376/>

Nurmira Salimbaeva Greenberg studied cello at the music conservatory in Bishkek. She came to America in 2000 to share her music and to continue her studies in music performance.

The music currently playing is from her CD *Hiding Place*. She hopes to use her music and experiences to return and help the women of her country who do not experience the same freedoms as she does in here in America.

Imaged used with permission by Nurmira Greenberg

In the villages, married women always cover their heads with headscarves.

This is a symbol that a woman is married and that she respects her husband.

Image used with permission by Alan Shipley:
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/87039642@N00/2324265069/in/set-72157602184732159/>

Younger men often wear caps, while older men can be seen wearing a Kalpak (as pictured). The Kalpak is designed to represent the white mountain tops of Kyrgyzstan, which are always in view. Wearing a Kalpak shows national pride because it allows a man to identify his country as the crown of his person.

Image used with permission by Uncornered Market:
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/uncorneredmarket/1958127360/in/set-72157603625894842/>

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Appendix C
Reflections Page

Kyrgyzstan Reflections

Please take a quick moment to record some of your thoughts, further questions, or insights.

1. What did you find interesting?

2. What are some areas you wished to have learned more about?

3. Can anything you gained from this experience have application to your life? If so, what?

4. Do you have any suggestions about how to change this center or make it better?

Thank you so much for taking the time to learn about another culture in a new way. My hope is that you gained something from this experience that will be worthwhile to you.

Appendix D
Interview, Personal Communication

Interview with Nurmira Salimbaeva Greenberg
Buffalo, NY
September 29, 2008

Kyrgyzstan

- Tell me about your country
- What are the people like?
 - Mixture of Turkish and Mongolian.
 - Pop 5 million
 - We look Asian but it is a beautiful mixture
 - Very hospitable – biggest good thing
 - Do everything for their guest
 - Take time cooking and preparing food for days ahead of time, would give up bed
 - Like to have tea
 - Sit around table and drink tea
 - Take time to talk and give meaning
 - Life is less stressful – slower
 - Neighbors and friends and relatives always visit your house without notice
 - Must keep house clean at any time
 - Very kind, very simple, love to tell jokes
 - Very creative
 - Because most beautiful central Asian country – grow up in such an atmosphere
 - Breathtaking mountains – green in front, white snow mountains behind
 - High altitude lakes, beautiful rivers
 - Very developed oral traditions
 - Very developed music – central part of
 - Game: yr kese - “song bowl” – pass bowl from person to person and have to do something creative
 - Everyone is expected, not just professional musicians
 - Lots of singing, art, dance, joke
 - Many people learn to play Komuz b/c easy instrument and don’t want to be embarrassed when bowl is passed to them
 - Story telling is big when group together
 - Go for hours and hours
 - “about their lives, about being chased by wolves, about going to the mountains with their animals and sheep...”
 - epic Manas – longest epic in the world – 3 volumes
 - rhyme – passed orally for centuries
 - amazing how people memorize it and pass it along at tea time party times
 - gives great country pride

- have Manas festivals
 - known around world
 - person telling sits Indian style and tells the long poem expressively with hands, acting and raising voice
 - person called Manaschy who tells it – goes for hours, and sometimes improvise
 - not accompanied by any instruments
 - “once I was at a festival and this little boy got so into it he couldn’t stop – these two men came on stage and picked him up and carried him off”
 - 40 tribes – Manas was a person, hero, who united all the tribes
 - also talks about love, sorrow, every day life
 - still 40 tribes, 6 regions, 6 dialects, many different nationalities
 - Kyrgyz, Russians, Ukrainian, Belarussian, Georgian, Korean, Turks, Chinese, Indians, Moldovas, Germans,
 - Modern ways of learning music, being creative
 - Music schools, conservatories – brought by Russians
 - 75 years under Communist Russian rule
 - Islam first, then communist, then Islam
- Communism
 - Iron Curtain fell in 1991
 - That’s when country became independent
 - Economy crashed
 - 75% unemployment
 - most men tried surviving through alcoholism
 - All factories closed, all Russian economic industries
 - People never learned how to think on own
 - Always told how to think and what to do
 - Now independent but don’t know what to do
 - Many trying to start own business
 - Rise of spiritual need after fall of communism
 - People allowed now to ask, is there a God?
 - Christianity came through that time
 - Was folk Islam – worshipped rocks, moon, etc.
 - Nuni became Christian in 1991 because was first chance to make decision about something in life
 - Was healing of God that matched up with reality of Bible working in her life that convinced her
 - Personal relationship option with God was big too because gave freedom to be creative, free to be
 - Faith made her more creative b/c Jesus gave her purpose – wasn’t created just to be famous and make music, but to touch other people

- Put depth to her playing
 - Creative b/c looking for ways to express depth of love for Christ through music
- Hard times
 - Don't become bitter, become better – through Christ – he is sufficient
 - Hard times in America comes from confusion of too many options
 - We didn't have options – only 3 universities
 - Only one choice for music
 - Minds rush all the time – people are restless and need to constantly be doing something in order to have meaning
 - Creates stress and tension not in Kyrgyzstan
 - Know people who have no bread and have no hope in God
 - Humiliating if have children and not enough to eat
 - But people share, I can always go to neighbor and have bread
 - “one day I have it, another day you have it”
 - and you grow together
 - if we had extra food, always brought to neighbors
 - Need of life develops community and good character
 - Never gets attached to physical things and never has trouble giving things away because have to share
 - Different from America where everything is “mine”
 - People there aren't attached to material things, where as hear people can afford and buy their own things so keep it to themselves
 - In K, they never have something that they don't offer – wouldn't eat food in front of other people with out offering
- What makes it most different from America?
 - Nomads – Boz Yi/Urt – house made of wool
 - Tents in Jailoo – big green valley surrounded by mountain – take sheep for summer
- What would surprise/shock Americans if they were to go to your country?
 - Food
 - Lots of lamb
 - In summer eat lots of veggies and fruit
 - Kymyz – fermented horse milk drink – might not like it
- Kidnapping – happens in cities but much more in villages
 - Happens more when economy is down because save on expense of big wedding
 - Also think it is fun and tradition
 - 90% of women accept it, most women just grow up preparing to get kidnapped and try to train themselves to accept it
 - but usually all fight because at that moment it is a shock
 - it is not right – wish I could make better, but such an old tradition is very difficult to change

- some work out very well and women are happy because don't want to be alone
- meshing of old culture and western living
 - western music, dress, American movies with Russian voice overs, American tv, weddings with white dress
 - culture welcoming of change because good for economy
 - many small businesses open up
 - internet/coffee shop
 - villages still try to preserve tradition and wear cultural dress
- Difference for women
 - Women can't go to college
 - Can't choose who they marry
 - Most are abused
 - We have lots to be thankful for and to value, but also a lot to offer
 - If we express freedom, we could change
 - Remember you aren't given gifts for just your pleasure – it is for you to bless others
 - “God said to Abraham I am blessing you so that you can bless others”
- What is important to know about any culture?
- People will want to compare to what they know
- Use American stuff to side-by-side contrast
- Major components
 - Work
 - Education
 - Government
 - Community
 - Neighbors “one day I have, one day you have it”
 - Culture
 - Religion