

Teacher of Kazakhstan – September 2005

Jennifer, what kind of programs does IFES offer to schools?

JW: “IFES offers school programs oriented toward dynamic interaction between students and teachers. Special course offerings are interesting to them, such as *Introduction to Civic Education* since it is a new subject to everyone here. Civic education is an important and effective tool for democratization, because it offers the means to create empowered citizens who participate actively in a democratic society.

Today’s students are the future citizens and leaders of Kazakhstan and, if they better understand their system of government, they can more effectively contribute to the successful development of the country. Civic education is much broader than simply studying history or political theory. The depth of understanding that comes with practicing concepts is significantly greater? Civil education is also an important component of economic development because of the social and practical experience a person gets during active participation in real life circumstances.”

Is there a need to initiate new programs within the schools that are interesting and which will enable teachers to develop a closer and more meaningful relationship to the new generation of students and their modern needs? How can this be accomplished?

JW: “Yes, it can be done by giving teachers the opportunity to use the best curriculums and techniques to enable them to fully realize their creative potential. The course on civic education is just such an integrated offering, combining both proven curricula and the latest instruction methods. It starts by giving students and teachers a modern, well written textbook to work from; then it teaches the students how to create *Students Action Committees (SAC)* in which they may empower ideas; and finally it culminates in *Student Local Government Days* where actual, working local governmental processes are put into use. This is a stair-step type of program which lets students go through a process from conception to actualization.”

What are the requirements to create such a program?

JW: “Non-traditional approaches are the most effective in these circumstances. This is the kind of program in which the vast majority of student must acquire a profound understanding of the subject. They need to know lots of very specific information. The “read and regurgitate” system of education cannot cope with the scale of the numbers of students that must achieve these results. To overcome ignorance, learn that one possesses the ability, get past the feeling that one’s knowledge has no practical value, find and develop one’s ability to play a part, and to learn the kind of lessons that can only be gotten by actual participation, it is necessary that the entire group of students must take very direct part in this training. We have been quite pleased to discover that young students like this kind of approach.

There is sufficient psychological background for students’ interest in such processes since this is the age when children strive to know the world, to find outlets for their enormous amounts of energy, and when they have their greatest desire to strive for self realization.

This project is supported by USAID, as are many similar projects, which assist in development of democracy. Kazakhstan is going through a deep period of social changes which has caused the need for this kind of support. People have been used to a certain system in which everything was done by the government. Now, however, people are finding it necessary to

change their old mind sets. There has to be an understanding that democracy does not work without people's participation and, in fact, initiation.

IFES has been involved in implementing programs that help to develop civil society in Central Asia for about 7 years. We have played a lead role in making information about democracy available to secondary school students in all regions of Kazakhstan through projects in curriculum and course development. We have formed a successful partnership with the existing educational system in the sphere of creating a civic education curriculum, providing teachers with methodological help, and the implementation of extracurricular activity projects that reinforce the lessons of a civic education curriculum for students. All this has been done in accordance with the Protocol of Understanding signed in 2001 and 2004 by IFES and the Ministry of Education and Sciences.

We have been very gratified by the results we have gotten since we have been working here. We have been working directly with coordinators. They are very mobile, intellectual people, with lots of initiative, easy going, creative and willing to try experimental things. Experience has showed us that teachers can get the same results whether they work in urban schools or rural schools. The only problem seems to be one of distance because rural schools are so far away from everything.

Of course, we keep improving the efficiency of the courses based on the results received about the organization of communication we impart and the exchange of experience had by students.

Every year, civic tournaments for students and seminars for teachers are coordinated by IFES. Objective evaluations of teachers and students and the efficiency of the course materials are equally important for us. From the beginning, all teachers are taught to participate in seminars and training using interactive teaching methods and only after this can they use the interactive method of education effectively with students.

The civic course is the heart of IFES' civic education program. In 1999, IFES developed this course – which uses the IFES-designed book *Introduction to Civic Education* for students in the upper forms of secondary schools. The course lasts one hour a week in 650 schools throughout the country. It is optional and has strong extracurricular components to it. Teachers are happy with the new information and show significant interest in participating in trainings. The satisfaction generated by this course is useful for linking up with other subjects where we can employ similar techniques.”

Are students involved in civic education different?

JW: “Definitely, there are about 40000 young people involved in this program. Some of them come from those who were introduced to many aspects and principals of civic society through past trainings. Some of them are a part of the group who have learned how to take citizens responsibilities and are now stating to play a valuable role in the improvement of life in their communities. This course gives an initiative for the development of civic consciousness (an important new mentality) which is the agency by which democracy becomes aware of and makes responses to the needs of the people. Those who have been thus educated understand that a lot depends on them. That gives this group of youth a sense of confidence and self respect; they are learning to have leadership skills and abilities plus a sense of responsibility which a program like this must necessarily encourage.

No one is surprised to acknowledge that young people have been part of the process to solve some of society's most difficult problems. We see history is full of examples when young

people have helped solve problems not only in their school but also in villages, district and cities. By participating in such kind of activities, they grow in skills and abilities. After they finish school they not only have knowledge but also valuable experience will be useful in their adult lives.

Still there are many schools where students do not know what to do with their free time. Youth clubs, sport activities and summer camps have not yet become a part of these schools activities in many cities and villages, in spite of the great need for them. We still have areas which we haven't reached."

Why has IFES sponsored the establishment of SACs?

JW: "Importantly, *Student Action Committees* have answered the need of young people for something meaningful to do with their free time. We at IFES created a network of *Student Action Committees* in 2001. These, in turn, provide school based student organizations that cooperate with teachers and local organizations to identify and solve problems within their local community."

What other kinds of things could SACs do?

JW: "We find the SAC project offers a simple model for developing extracurricular activities and integrating those activities in a school based perspective. There are more than 1,500 students from 64 schools currently working within the SAC framework – they have implemented 152 projects involving their schools and surrounding communities. Perhaps some examples would be useful, showing how SAC can develop a healthy and active civil society. Let's look at an example from school ? 17, Panfilov village, Talgar district, Almaty oblast. After taking this course the students began to develop principals of self government at the school. They held an election which set up a student government and elected a school president by the name of Oxana Golydkina from the 10th class, and who had been a participant in the Regional summer camps for school leaders. We can see the program successfully working here. This is where an understanding of the importance of civil education can be actually seen in action. Nataliya Tifancidi, the Director of school ? 17, is outspoken about these results and supports our program in every way possible.

In Chimkent city, at school ? 8, the course Introduction to Civic Education was visited by the United States Ambassador to Kazakhstan, John Ordway, who was pleased with the way teacher Elena Pak taught this course. Circumstances like these make it obvious why the school's director, B.A. Komekbayeva, is a supporter of the course, Introduction to Civic Education.

Roman Polykarpov, who was the student of school ? 17, and who is now student of the University says: "This course helped me to be active, self confident and erudite."

Jennifer, tell us more about the program called Student Local Government Days.

JW: "This program very effective method for socializing the school based student. It is not a secret, that even many adults do not understand the work, functions and responsibilities of local authorities. One day that the students spent under the direction of government officials gained a lot. We saw 18 projects initiated in 15 cities of Kazakhstan with the participation of 515 students and 326 officials from various departments of local governments."

Another form of civic education is summer camps. How do they work?

JW: “We have conducted camps that are based on long-standing local traditions of summer activity for children since 2001. Camp participants gain solid experience in civics and life skills through interactive teaching methods. In addition they spend time participating in sporting, cultural, and entertainment activities. Such kind of an environment provides a venue for intensive education focused on the basic principles of democracy and civil society for approximately 500 participants. From there they take this information back to their schools, where they use it to initiate various IFES projects in their home communities. This last summer a group of 20 camp participants visited regional summer camps in conjunction with all the Central Asian countries. They went through a competition where they were honored while, at the same time, introducing Kazakhstan to diverse other ethnicities.

Different national cultures were not a barrier because the language of democracy was understandable to all the youth. Additionally, we are aware that young people find it much easier to adjust to new situations and are able to more freely exchange their views and principals. They are well able to demonstrate their depth of knowledge, spirit of cohesion and normal feelings of patriotism in these circumstances.

This summer a Kazakhstan SAC forum was held in Almaty where all oblasts participated. During this program they initiated activity to clean up the city. Civil beliefs must be expressed by some form of action – without that they are meaningless.”

Can you comment on the result of the previous education year?

JW: “Many schools have joined our program. We should praise the courageousness of the Akims that they are willing to experiment through the promotion of *Student Local Government Days*. Akimats of cities such as Kostanai, Pavlodar, Karaganda, Akmola and the Auezov district of Almaty are leading the country with their support of these programs.

As a result of our experiences last year we will continue with all our efforts to put on programs, make textbooks better (in accordance with the laws of RK) and to provide new types of valuable information in the new education year. Our goal is to broaden our projects and to offer the opportunity for a large number of participants in them. Included with the Regional camps for school leaders there will be an International forum of the *Student Action Committee* which will be put on with the help USAID, MES RK, KAO of I. Altinsarina.

Our plans are to work on new trainings, run programs jointly with RIAQ AE (??????), and also to continue with trainings for teachers to use interactive instructional methods. In perspective, I think *Introduction to Civic Education* could be taught as a separate subject or through integration with different courses of similar types. What is certain is that civic education should be multi-channeled in format.

Before we close, I want to take this opportunity to thank to those who have not been mentioned yet but have also been significant in sponsoring our program. They are companies such as Motorola, Petro Kazakhstan, Siemens, and Kazmunai. Thanks on behalf of the young people of Kazakhstan.”