

from the

# FIELD

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in Democracy

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# Practicing Speaking Skills

The auditorium atmosphere was tense as students nervously studied their talking points one last time. The twenty-five students were about to showcase their newfound skills in debating and their work from the last five days.

With the stage set and judges in place, the first round of debates began in early June 2010 at the Poltava Regional Lyceum in the Kremenchuk Teachers' Training School, named after A.C. Makarenko.

Last year's success was the result of dedicated students, teachers and PCVs, and has been the driving force behind preparation for the upcoming speaking practice, said Valentina Vereshchaka, the head of the English department. "Students truly enjoyed debating with each other," Vereshchaka said. PCV Andrea Zimmerman, who teaches English at the school, said this year's planning has focused on structuring the practice so that it can be continued by her Ukrainian teachers once her Peace Corps service ends, as well as adding new elements to make the program more dynamic for the students.

One of those elements includes a debate with students from the gymnasium #3 in Shostka. Ukrainian teacher Lyudmyla Hryhorivna Sachko and PCV Yeri Chang started a debate club this year as a way to encourage students' English speaking and critical thinking skills.

Zimmerman said the speaking practice was a perfect opportunity to create an

environment for students to use authentic communication, which will help them better develop one of the toughest foreign language skills – speaking.

"Debates also naturally encouraged competition between students," Zimmerman said. "Soon enough, they were more focused on persuading others and

forgot they are using English to do this."

Although last year's camp featured PCVs exclusively teaching students, Zimmerman and her teachers have agreed this year to change the speaking practice model to make it more sustainable. That's why new plans include teaching debate basics as part of students' regular classes in May. During the speaking practice, PCVs and Ukrainian teachers will work together to help students develop their arguments for the debate showdown at the week's end.

Last year's student participant Marina Bondarenko summed up her feelings easily about the week. "My mark for them: 12+!" she said.



Students practicing speaking skills in a debate club

Last year's success was the result of dedicated students, teachers and PCVs

# International Day of Peace



Site mates, Patrick Smith and Jessica Strickland, with members of the Stakhanov Community English Club, discuss world peace

While Jessica Strickland, Peace Corps volunteer, and her colleague Patrick were pondering what topic to discuss at the monthly community English Club, she vaguely noticed as her computer continued to pop up messages from her Skype with advertisements. One of the ads asked “Are you a teacher?” Out of curiosity, Jessica finally clicked on the ad and was instantly surprised. An organization known as Peace One Day ([www.peaceoneday.org](http://www.peaceoneday.org)) was hosting a concert and other various events in Paris, France to celebrate the International Day of Peace in September. She had never heard of this holiday. As she continued her research, Jessica learned that in 1981 the United Nations decided to make one day in September a national holiday dedicated to world peace. It was their hope that on this day, everyone across the globe would put aside their differences and come together to celebrate and live in peace. The UN wanted the world to observe a 24 hour ceasefire and a day of nonviolence to mark this day. In 2001, the UN officially made the 21st of September International Peace Day.

Jessica learned that Doctors Without Borders have found success on Peace Day; they are allowed to travel through hostile territory to reach the disadvantaged and bring medicine and vaccines. Terrorists allow the doctors to pass without harm on Peace Day; typically, doctors are usually stopped by gunmen. This is just one advantage of the holiday. Sadly, people are still in the dark about Peace Day — only people in Western Europe and parts of Africa seem to be aware of this holiday.

While Patrick and Jessica led a discussion about International Peace Day, she was inspired with an idea. Their students continued to discuss a world where peace existed. They all said it was hard to imagine, but a beautiful idea. In September 2011, Peace Corps will celebrate its 50th Anniversary. President John F. Kennedy and the founders of Peace Corps shared the dream of instilling volunteerism within Americans and celebrating the rich diversity of the world through peaceful relations with other countries. Hopefully, on September 21st, 2011, all Peace Corps Volunteers will make a difference by educating others about Peace Day, by finding ways to celebrate with their communities, and by showing through example what their community can do to promote peace. Perhaps the world has lost some hope that peace can exist, after so much violence that has fallen upon America and across the world. No one said world peace would be easy and it certainly doesn't mean one cannot try to make the world a better place. But why not try?

*“Let us call a truce to terror. Let us invoke the blessings of peace. And as we build an international capacity to keep peace, let us join in dismantling the national capacity to wage war.”*

—John F. Kennedy September 25, 1961

# Sovetsky Journalism Center: Role of a Free Press in Democracy

**D**emocracy is an important concept in Ukraine as its citizens grapple with intense economic and political issues. As Americans, we understand the crucial role a free press plays in our democracy. How could Ukrainian school children learn more about democracy, the free press, and civil society? The answer from Matt Sommerfeld and counterpart Natasha Neschetnaya was: “Journalism”! Matt Sommerfeld was a Group 35 TEFL PCV in Sovetsky, Crimea, where he taught with Natasha at Sovetsky School Gymnasia #1.

“We wanted to spark an appreciation for a free press, which is greatly valued in America and seen as fundamental to democracy. We planned to explore the role of a free press as a check and balance in a democratic society along with associated ethical issues. We hoped to build self esteem and open the kids' eyes to the possibility of journalism as a profession,” Matt summarized.

## *Fledgling First Steps*

Matt and Natasha recruited several students for a preliminary journalism workshop to assess interest and motivation. It was well received – the students were eager to learn more. The next step involved the fundamentals: they sponsored a seminar with former newspaper owner Elnur Aliev in February, 2009. Participants learned many how-tos.

- How to write, edit, and lay out articles
- How to conduct interviews
- How to take appealing photos
- How to manage a work flow

The students pooled their skills and, with key assistance from Matt and Natasha, launched their first newspaper in March 2009. School World (ШКОЛЬНЫЙ Мир in Russian) is a 12-page monthly newspaper that includes sports reports, school events, Q&A sessions, interviews, poems, and opinion pieces. About 20-25 students in the 8th to 11th forms devote 70-80 hours to produce each issue. AND each issue sells out! In fact the crew does two print runs, first in color (sold for 2 UAH each) then in black and white (1 UAH each).

Is the paper making a difference? “Yes,” confirms Natasha, “We have few clubs at school that give kids healthy activities. The poems and sharing of ideas in the paper are very important. AND a lot of parents read this paper and know much more about the kids' life and the school.” “Yes,” echoes Ann Neschetnaya, a student photographer who was inspired to attend the 2010 National Geographic Photo Camp in Bakhchysaray, Crimea.



Students Emine Musledinova and Masha Movchun present their stories for a television camera



Students put into practice the interviewing skills

### *Onward to Greater Ambitions*

In Sovetsky, the enthusiasm for journalism didn't stop with School World. Because the newspaper was so well-received, Matt and Natasha offered a summer camp for journalism in 2009. Camp FUN (Future Ukrainian Newsmakers) has since become an annual event each June and attracts many students and Peace Corps volunteer assistants, creating a vibrant and creative environment for learning.

Knowing that a free press involves more than simply print media, Matt, Natasha, and students pushed to incorporate more sophisticated technology and pursue more ambitious endeavors. Matt applied for and won a Peace Corps SPA grant in 2010. Funds from the grant allowed the school to substantially improve hardware and software not only to provide ongoing support to the newspaper, but also to become, with the introduction of and radio and video, a well-rounded journalism center.

### *Recipe for Success*

Success in our Peace Corps world:

*Motivated students +  
enthusiastic counterpart +  
knowledgeable PCV =*

### *SUSTAINABLE PROJECT*

As PCVs, we recognize the importance of capacity building and sustainability. We strive to make our projects have a life beyond our two-year stay and have a long-term, positive impact in our communities. The Sovetsky Journalism Center has succeeded in just this manner and provides a good model for other schools to follow. Will the Center rest on its laurels now? No, this energetic group is eager to stretch and grow and are considering entering the newspaper in competitions in Crimea, establishing an ad committee to better understand the business side of media, and posting radio podcasts to the school's website.

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enthusiastic counter-  
part + knowledgeable  
PCV = SUSTAINABLE  
PROJECT**



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by the last week of each month.

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