

Personal Benefits

Initially, I was drawn to the Baltics study tour because I had only a basic, at best, understanding of their overall history, culture, and economy. I knew of Soviet occupation and that they had been under a command economy, but details were scarce. One of the goals I had for this program was to immerse myself in Latvia and Estonia's rich cultures, geographies, histories, politics, economies, and education systems to challenge, change, and/or confirm my own world-views to cultivate enduring personal and professional growth. As I begin to write this, several weeks after the end of the Global Economic Education Alliance (GEEA) study tour in Estonia and Latvia, I continue to be struck by those enduring understandings; they are still exceeding my highest expectations. The depth of learning and resulting growth, revisions, and adaptations to my economics, government, and sociology classes will undoubtedly continue to impact me, my students, and my colleagues for many years.

As an avid traveler, I can honestly say this was a unique experience that would not have been possible without the planning and structure of GEEA, and Junior Achievement's Estonia and Latvia affiliates. I appreciated having the articles from Dr. Brock prior to our departure as they provided essential background knowledge of the economic, political, and cultural relationships between the Baltic States, United States, European Union, Russia, and NATO. Additionally, the thorough overview of the history of the Baltics and Soviet Occupation provided over the course of the study tour were essential and enhanced my experience considerably. Walking tours of Riga and Tallinn, visits to the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia, the KGB museum, the Memorial to Victims of Communism, the Song Field, both national banks, Money World, and e-

Estonia helped to anchor my learning and increase my cultural, political, and economic understandings during our school tours, bank presentations, home visits, and the targeted learning provided via workshops. Knowledge of the immense changes of the last several decades was vital for me to truly grasp the decisions, intentions, and attitudes of teachers and students we would encounter throughout the rest of the program.

I especially loved the school visits when we were able to tour buildings and hear from students about their overall education, economic education, and the programming through Junior Achievement designed to build entrepreneurial skills. At Riga State Gymnasium No. 3, Tallinn School No. 21, and Tallinn School of Science (Reaalkool), we were able to learn about the impressive Mini Companies created by students such as Wheelift, Glaze, and Borto Bags. These entirely student created products were outstanding and are clearly aiding in creating a generation of students who are innovative, capable, collaborative, strong, confident, efficient, solution-oriented, and creative. I especially enjoyed learning *how* the schools are focusing on providing diverse opportunities like the Mini Companies while also developing and emphasizing math, science, technology, and economics courses. It made me think about how well this program would work in my own schools' business classes and how wonderfully it builds so many valuable real-world applicable skills. While I don't know how similar the programming is in the U.S. compared to Europe, I plan to meet with our business teachers to share what I have learned about Junior Achievement's programs.

I also loved getting to participate in workshops led by Dr. Brock and Dr. Harter alongside teachers from both countries and my fellow colleagues from the United

States. Dr. Harter's yardstick activity used to teach the impacts of globalization and trade barriers, was a wonderful way to demonstrate natural barriers, tariffs, quotas, embargos, and standards with movement. It was a fun way to interact with other participants and helped alleviate the language barrier. I will absolutely use this activity this year and know the emerging bilingual students I teach will enjoy this method for comprehending these concepts. Dr. Brock's activity on Factors Determining Success also created a lively discussion between teachers, and I will implement this either in beginning our financial literacy unit, or in teaching about income inequality. Both activities have direct real-world application and I am excited to use them in my economics class this year.

I also enjoyed the more informal opportunities for discussion and building friendships. I appreciated that time was given for formal discussion and sharing about teaching in the United States and Estonia. It was really interesting to hear different perspectives and be able to ask questions about similarities and differences. When we all later went to dinner we continued this discussion more informally, which helped to break the ice, develop rich discussion, and form new international friendships. I am so thankful for the teachers, students, and especially Junior Achievement who were always willing to answer our questions and share their experiences with us. One of the stated goals in my program application was to learn and acquire economic concepts, skills, and activity-based methodologies by engaging in a shared experience with my colleagues—both those from the U.S. and those from our two host countries. Attending the workshops and having these opportunities for informal discussions absolutely helped me meet this goal.

As wonderful as all of this was, it was absolutely outdone by dining with an Estonian family in their home. Being invited into Elbe's daughter's home was absolutely wonderful. I so enjoyed getting to know her amazing family, listening to stories about their lives, Estonia, cultural anecdotes, and sharing so much laughter. It added so much to the richness of my overall experience that special can't even begin to describe it.

Benefits for My Students and Ideas for Future Activities (school district and/or your state Council or local Center for Economic Education)

Another goal I had when applying to attend this study tour was to continue my goal of being a life-long and adventurous learner who transfers these passions to my students, colleagues, and loved ones by sharing my experiences in educational, professional, and social settings. Since I do not have a background in economics, and have only taught the subject for two years, I also wanted to increase my overall economic understandings to design lessons to push students toward greater depth of knowledge. These goals are a work in progress that I will continue to address as I revise and redesign lessons over the course of my teaching career. Specifically, for this coming year I am designing a case study project to help students discover the differences between command and market economies and examine the economic decisions that took place after the fall of the iron curtain in Estonia, Latvia, and Moldova. I am excited for students to recognize how world economies change over time as a result of economic choices made by leaders and individual citizens. I am thrilled to move beyond just the big picture ideas and provide students with concrete, current, real-world examples.

It is my hope that I can develop multiple iterations and refine this project to eventually share it and the many other ideas that have come out of the experience through my local economic organization, Economic Literacy Colorado. I am so very thankful to have had this experience as I know it will result in me being better able to guide my students in their changing conceptualizations of the interconnected nature of the world, especially as it relates to the world's economies.