

EAA INTERVIEW WITH THE 2007 FRANKLIN R. BUCHANAN PRIZE WINNERS

GREG FRANCIS AND STEFANIE LAMB

INTERVIEWED BY LUCIEN ELLINGTON



This is our eleventh interview with Franklin R. Buchanan Prize winners. The Association for Asian Studies awards the prize annually for the development of outstanding curriculum materials on Asia. The 2007 prize was awarded for the Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE) curriculum unit China's Cultural Revolution co-written by SPICE curriculum specialists Greg Francis and Stefanie Lamb.

Lucien: *Greg and Stefanie, congratulations for winning the Franklin Buchanan Prize for China's Cultural Revolution. Please tell our readers about your backgrounds and how you became interested in Asia.*

Greg: My family was never into foreign travel. Despite—or perhaps because of this—I remember scouring atlases in my youth and reading about places that seemed “exotic.” I was lucky to have a diverse group of friends, and many whose families hailed from East Asia. When I finally had the time and money to travel abroad, I thought briefly about following my peers to Europe, or perhaps Latin America, but to me that didn't seem exciting enough. I wanted to go somewhere where I was completely out of my element, and I was accepted to a program to teach English in China for the summer. It was the best summer of my life. I was hooked. When I returned to school in the fall, I declared International Relations as a major and began to study Chinese. The rest is history.

Stefanie: Like Greg, I never had the experience of traveling overseas until I was in college. After graduation, I wanted to try something completely different and immerse myself in a new culture. When I was offered a teaching position at an international school in Hong Kong, I jumped at the opportunity. I had never been to Asia and knew very little about Hong Kong before I arrived. I was surprised by my own ignorance and the realization that my world thus far had been so small. Living and working in Hong Kong and traveling throughout Asia opened my eyes and my mind. It was a life-changing and valuable experience that ignited my love of Asia and inspired me to share my interest with others.

Lucien: *What factors motivated both of you to develop a guide on the Cultural Revolution? Why do you personally think it is important for secondary school students to learn about this particular event in Chinese history?*

Greg and Stefanie: The Cultural Revolution is fascinating in that it is an experiment in intentional chaos: Mao effectively tests the belief that a “perpetual revolution” can produce progress with the world's largest population, one that had been very traditional and valued order. Studying what resulted is very relevant to high school students, who are in a stage of life in which the urge to rebel against authority is strong. That's why we incorporate techniques to put them in the shoes of students during the Cultural Revolution: would you want to have all the power that these students had? What are the consequences when the power hierarchies of society are totally flipped? What's the role of education? These are questions that students will grapple with as they study the Cultural Revolution. Finally, the Cultural Revolution is, to us, a great lesson in the perils of ceding too much power and trust to one leader, and a reinforcement of the importance of maintaining a real balance of power in society.

Lucien: *In my opinion, one of the strengths of the guide is the great variety of approaches you developed for teachers to use with students in teaching the Cultural Revolution. Share with our readers a couple of examples of student activities that you consider most effective in facilitating understanding of the topic.*

Greg and Stefanie: This gets back to our desire to draw parallels between student reality and the experience of Chinese students during the Cultural Revolution. Early in the unit, we post an announcement that all AP tests have been canceled, all students will automatically graduate, and school time will no longer be used for academic study, but rather for development of political propaganda. Initially, we ask students to record how they feel about this announcement. Then, at the end of the unit, we ask them to journal on this topic again, with an emphasis on what these changes will mean for their future. This reflective exercise allows students to gauge how much their perspective has changed and hopefully will initiate deeper causal analysis.

We also relied heavily on primary sources, including political propaganda posters, an audio recording of Mao's morning exercises, and memoirs of youth who were “sent down” to the countryside during the latter years of the Cultural Revolution. These sources bring alive its chronology and academic analysis of the Cultural Revolution to students; they give students a richer understanding of the pervasive reach of the Revolution and its effect on the life paths of individual Chinese people.

Lucien: *I found it interesting that you have students examine treatment of the Cultural Revolution in Taiwanese, American, and Chinese texts—and then ask them to create their own text entries. What do you hope students learn from this exercise?*

Greg and Stefanie: We occasionally use this technique in our SPICE units as an effective means of assessing student ability to identify facts and objectivity when given a variety of sources. This is one of the most valuable metacognitive skills students can have—particularly now, with our amazing access to information from so many perspectives. This exercise also illustrates that what they read in their textbooks is not neutral; the point of view they encounter has its own biases. ■

GREG FRANCIS is the Associate Director of Curriculum with the Broad Center and was a Curriculum Specialist with SPICE for four years. Before that, he taught middle school English in China and Japan. Greg has a bachelor's degree in International Relations from Stanford and a master's degree in Latin American Studies from the Universidad Andina in Ecuador.

STEFANIE LAMB is a Curriculum Specialist and East Asia Seminar Coordinator at SPICE. Before joining SPICE in 2001, she taught middle school Language Arts and Social Studies in Oregon and Hong Kong. Ms. Lamb holds a Bachelor of Arts in Education from Western Oregon University and a Master of Arts in Curriculum Studies and Teacher Education from Stanford University.