

Title: Reading Chekhov in Russia
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This paper will examine language- and culture-learning strategies in an immersion study abroad program in Russia, designed as an innovative collaborative project between educators from the University of South Carolina and their Russian partners from South Federal University (Taganrog, Russia). The program took place in summer 2007 and 2008 with goals of developing language proficiency, cultural knowledge, and intercultural understanding for USC students. Existing long-running programs served as models but there was a need to establish a more well-sequenced program to help students satisfy their individual needs as learners of Russian, foster positive cross-cultural attitudes toward the target culture, and facilitate cross-cultural transition.

The pre-departure course included challenging areas of study abroad experience in general, emphasized important aspects of the Taganrog program, and had a positive effect on creating a necessary level of “preparedness” for students, though it could not completely eliminate some significant obstacles at different stages of adjustment in Russia. The paper will include samples of case studies focusing on the most difficult areas of cultural adjustment for American students, observations of students’ performance in the class on Chekhov, and evidence of a significant connection between the degree of “openness” toward the target culture (or a level of “acceptance” of target culture) and the level of students’ performance in language courses.

Taganrog, as the hometown of Chekhov, provided American students with a unique environment: they had a chance to explore the genius loci of Taganrog that affected Chekhov’s life and work (Chudakov, Rayfield). Extending the classroom to an entire city became an effective teaching strategy. The students’ reflections and daily journals show a significant increase of motivation and an appreciation of Chekhov as an individual and a writer.