

# Intercultural understanding with Ukraine

Multicultural Education Unit senior project officer **Gary Shaw** paid a recent visit to schools in Ukraine that are keen to connect with schools in Victoria.

I RECENTLY visited three schools in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (ARC) in Ukraine and met students studying English. Impromptu discussions revealed that the students knew a lot about Australia. Apart from the obvious geography, flora and fauna, they named Canberra as the capital, picked our flag and knew we had a female prime minister.

I wondered if similar questions were asked of students in Victorian schools about Ukraine what sort of answers would they give. What would they know about the Ukraine, Crimea or Eastern Europe generally?

What springs to mind is the 1986 nuclear accident at Chernobyl, and the 1850s Crimean War where Florence Nightingale pioneered modern nursing practices.

Ukraine is in Eastern Europe and is the second largest country after Russia. Its capital is Kiev and it was a member state of the Soviet Union until 1991. The country is home to 46 million people.

In 1991 Ukraine gained independence, and over the next five years the Ukraine-born population in Victoria increased for the first time since the post World War 2 migration, from 2937 in 1991 to 5370 in 1996. In 2006 Victoria had the largest Ukraine-born population in Australia, with a total of 5682 people.

Crimea has a history of autonomy within the region, and in 1992 it was determined that it would remain under Ukrainian jurisdiction while retaining significant cultural and economic autonomy including authority over such things as agriculture, land, mining, public works, housing, tourism, public transport, roads, hospitals and education.

The ARC sits out into the Black Sea like an island connected to the rest of Ukraine by a narrow neck of land. The language of instruction in all but seven of the 600 Years 1–11 schools in the ARC is Russian, although Ukrainian and other languages such as English are also taught.

Of the three schools I visited, two were Ukrainian language schools; Ukrainian Gymnasium in Simferopol, and Civardeiskaya School – interestingly enough located in a Russian army base, just to the east of Simferopol. In these schools all subjects are taught in Ukrainian.

The Ukrainian Gymnasium, established in 1997, is based on a European high school model and has more than 800 students. It is currently seeking to offer new classes to meet high demand for Ukrainian. The school is already a member of a Ukrainian Partner Club, which has schools in other parts of the Ukraine, Russia, and other European countries, but is looking to connect with schools further abroad, including Australia.

At Civardeiskaya School a social skills class for senior students was demonstrated in Ukrainian using a variety of media and approaches including song and dance. English is taught and the students thought it good practice to quiz me about Australia.

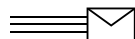
The third school I visited was the 770-student Gymnasium No 9 in suburban Simferopol. This is a general educational institution with an academic focus, particularly on humanities and linguistics and teaches a range of subjects in English.



Students dressed in traditional costume for a class at Civardeiskaya School in the Ukraine.

At all three schools there was strong interest from the teachers and students in developing online or sister-school connections with Australia.

Developing intercultural understanding and global citizenship is a feature of current Victorian and Australian curricula. There are many sound educational reasons for developing relationships with a part of the world that may be largely unknown to Victorian students.



For more information, contact senior project officer Gary Shaw, at [shaw.gary.r@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:shaw.gary.r@edumail.vic.gov.au) or call 9637 2031.

Austrade China has also recently identified several opportunities appropriate for Australian schools. The Government of Taizhou in Zhejiang Province is interested in developing collaborations, student exchange and professional development programs with primary, middle and senior secondary levels. For more information, contact Sarita Yen at [yen.sarita.m@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:yen.sarita.m@edumail.vic.gov.au) or call 9637 2324.