

**Smart Library for Peace: The Contact Hypothesis in Practice.**  
**Tajikistan**  
**Luther College**  
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*“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world!” Nelson Mandela*

**Background**

Depriving minority groups from a good quality education, communication and job opportunities will deteriorate the living standard and work qualifications of minority groups, and could cause prejudice, conflicts and even civil-war. Under the Soviet Union, cities had very mixed ethnic groups and they lived peacefully under the centralized government without borders and with a higher mobility. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Central Asian states declared their borders, traditions and identity. This created minority groups in different cities. In 2010, inequality and discrimination caused the South Kyrgyzstan riot which was a clash between ethnic Kyrgyz(majority) and Uzbek(minority) people. The clash killed nearly 420 people, mostly Uzbeks, and displaced around 80,000 people. I grow up in a city in Tajikistan that is not far from the conflict area and we have similar ethnic groups. My city has been experiencing a similar challenges and I strongly believe that creating an access to a good education and appropriate conditions for interpersonal contact could be one of the most effective ways to reduce issues of prejudice and discrimination, which was initially suggested by Gordon W. Allport and became known as the contact hypothesis.

Tajikistan is a landlocked country in Central Asia, and is very mountainous. According to the World Bank, in recent years the country has done a poor job in improving quality and accessibility of public goods and services, especially in remote areas. Living in remote areas traps people in poverty and it is hard to escape this poverty without external help. My city, Gulakandoz, is located in the northern part of Tajikistan with a population of 90 thousand people. Uzbeks and Kyrgyz people consist of 95% of the city's population, which are minority groups in the country, and the city receives less external support from the government. The city is facing several problems in unemployment, gambling, crime, corruption, and education. I strongly believe that these problems exist because of a poor education system.

The city has four large schools which operate with the old Soviet education system and they teach in the Uzbek language. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan declared Tajik to be the national language and Uzbek schools started facing a challenge with finding resources to print Uzbek books. Moreover, schools face challenges with updating curriculums, and making them relevant to the current demand of universities and businesses. Schools also have problems with financial support to maintain classrooms and providing computer classes with the internet access. Internet is very expensive in the area, and schools and average households can't afford to buy a subscription. Due to a low salary, schools have difficulty with retaining qualified teachers. It became normal for teachers to leave their position for several months to do menial work in Russia and earn some money to support their families. Because of poor teaching quality and missing many classes, a majority of students lose their interest to study in grade 8, and continue this behavior in later grades. When they graduate, they compete with students from major cities getting into the universities. In fact, 65% percent of high school graduates fail their test and go to Russia for menial work to support their family. Sometimes being desperate to earn money makes them get involved with crimes, or extremist groups such as ISIS. Many families hope that their children will help them to break the poverty line; However, given very poor quality of education and no access to career development/improvement, going above the poverty line is impossible for most of those families.

Therefore, the goal of my project is to renovate two classrooms in a local public school (the school #6 agreed to give two classrooms for this project) and create a public library space that offers e-learning with computers, a school counseling program, free career development workshops, and an open space for organizing education related workshop/training sessions. To that end, the library will include three key services/opportunities:

**Project Details/Outcome**

- 1) **E-learning:** The project will organize a room with 10 PCs, internet access and study tables that are open for students from Monday to Saturday (normal school days). Students will be able to read electronic books in different languages and learn different subjects in Uzbek, Russian and English from websites like Khan Academy. Moreover, students will be able to read/watch news and become more informed global citizens. Internet access will allow students to socialize with their peers from around the world, and build ties that will contribute to peace. The computers will be equipped with open source software in programming languages and editing/designing documents, which will allow interested students to learn on-demand skills

like building websites and software. Bunyod Tusmatov will remotely conduct a class (twice per week) in Python for 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students.

- 2) **School Counseling Program and career development workshops:** The project will train a teacher who will be responsible for good usage of the library. More importantly, a trained teacher will play a role of school counselor for the city who will be responsible for giving career guidance to young students and their parents. Schools in Tajikistan don't offer any counseling programs, and therefore the project will be the first program that offer such a service. He/she will share information about ongoing programs/projects university scholarships, summer camps, etc. I already provide a similar service through an Instagram account ([\*j.rasulov\\_education\\_news\*](#)) but limited students can see my posts because of lack internet access. Therefore, providing such guidance through the public library will open the door to larger audiences. In addition to that, the school counselor will invite successful local people who will share their stories and give career advice to the younger generation. This will also serve as a network building event for young people.
- 3) **Small library and study space:** The library will include a study space that will have movable desks and chairs, speakers for the room, shelves for books, white boards, a projector, etc. The space could be used to organize workshops, training sessions, and tutoring for students and adults. Teachers and students could also reserve the space to organize group discussions, presentations and debates. When there is no scheduled event, students could use the space as a study room. Bunyod Tusmatov agreed to buy books in Uzbek, Tajik, English, and Russian to learn different subjects and English. Also, he agreed to buy board games in English that help students to learn English and improve their logic.

The project will be organized by myself and my mentor Bunyod Tusmatov who is UWC alumni, UWC Tajikistan National Committee member, and a graduate student at Miami University.

### ***Expected Outcome***

Through offering above mentioned opportunities, students will be able to learn subjects that are missing in their schools and get guidance to applying to universities. Using e-learning, students can study classes in English and improve both their subject understanding and English language. With the help of school counselor, many students will be able to prepare for admission exams on time and find better opportunities at different universities. While sharing the library and studying together, students will inspire and motivate each other and build bonds, which will contribute to build a brighter future and a peaceful society. Students with similar interests could organize large scale projects to help their community. In the long run, we hope that many successful students will return to the center and share their success stories and motivate the younger generation.

### ***Sustaining the project***

In order to sustain the project, the project must require two things: 1) The study space and computers are always in working condition with minimum expenses. 2) The project always has money to buy internet access for computers. The school counselor will be responsible for keeping the study space and computers operational and being used for above mentioned purposes. The library will have a committee who will ensure that the school counselor is performing her/his responsibilities and engaging with youth.

The project will buy the internet subscription for two and a half years. During these two and a half years, the project will demonstrate its benefits & impact through attracting youth and adults and helping them. With proven benefits, the project will attract local businessmen to help with buying internet subscriptions. The library committee and school counselor will actively search for local donations and support to organize workshops and extend the free internet access for students. If there is not enough money for the internet subscription (in rare case), the library will start charging a reasonable price for adults who will use the internet in the library after 2.5 years.

### ***Project Plan***

<b><i>Time</i></b>	<b><i>Action</i></b>	<b><i>Note</i></b>
06/01/19 – 06/30/19	<i>Refurbish the library</i>	<i>Two rooms will be renovated for the library</i>
06/15/19 – 07/15/19	<i>Buy and install furniture &amp; tech</i>	<i>This phase will buy/install furniture and technology</i>
07/15/19 – 08/15/19	<i>Open the library</i>	<i>This phase will open the library, test everything and train a teacher</i>
08/01/19 – 08/30/19	<i>Promote the public library</i>	<i>This phase will advertise the space and explain its services, and how students can take advantage of it.</i>