

EASTERN EUROPEANS LEARNIN' TO EARN HERE

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Body

When **Eastern** European professionals settle in the United States, they often have a tough time landing even the simplest entry-level jobs.

Consider the experience of Alla Guryevskaya, 49. She moved to Brooklyn from Kaliningrad in western Russia a little over 2 1/2 years ago, armed with a master's degree and more than 25 years experience teaching at a specialized music school.

"When I came to America, my English was zero," said Guryevskaya. "I was a person who needed an entry-level job. But I had the problems of age, language and [being] overqualified."

Then a friend told her about a five-month child-care course at Brooklyn College, a program that teaches **Eastern** European immigrants and others from the former Soviet bloc. The program combines early childhood development training with English lessons.

Guryevskaya recently received her certificate from the program, and promptly got a job as a teacher's assistant at a Brooklyn Montessori school. With a bit more experience, she'll be qualified to open her own day-care center.

The Brooklyn College International Child Care Provider Training Program teaches two groups of about 20 immigrants every semester. The classes are held in downtown Manhattan.

These folks don't come into class unskilled, said Elyse Rudolph, the program's project director. "They're all college-educated," she said. "They're very, very bright."

Indeed, some are amused to find themselves students once again. "I was a teacher at elementary school and high school," said Yevgeniya Radun, 31, who lived in Moscow before she moved to Bensonhurst about a year ago. "Now I'm a student again because I have to elevate my knowledge, to learn the difference between the two cultures."

The most striking difference, the students say, is that early childhood education in **Eastern** Europe is much more rigorous than it is here.

"In Russia, it's hard work," said Guryevskaya. "Beginning at 5 or 6 years old, you should work, work, work like a horse. Here it's more pleasure."

"First-graders [in **Eastern** Europe] have a lot of homework, one or two hours sometimes," added Alexander Choklin, a native of Odessa who counsels immigrant students at Brooklyn College. "In Russia, the teachers are more like dictators you have to learn the world through the teacher's point of view. In this country, it's more about choice."

It's tough for some students to unlearn that tendency. "In our evaluations, we saw that Russian students didn't leave children alone," Rudolph said. "They were very invasive in their [the kids'] play."

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"I live here only five months," said student Polyna Voskoboynik, who hails from Kazakhstan, the former Soviet republic. Like many students, Voskoboynik was referred to the program through New York Association for New Americans, a group that helps recent arrivals from the former Soviet bloc.

Administrators at the Brooklyn College program a year ago decided to weave Channel 13/WNET's day-care outreach called Ready To Learn into their courses. Ready To Learn not only teaches students how to use children's programming as a teaching tool, they say, but also helps fresh arrivals like Voskoboynik adjust to life in the U.S.

Many **Eastern** European immigrants are already familiar with PBS, said Choklin. "They have different shows that are little bit more European than the other channels," he said, referring to PBS' emphasis on documentaries and classical music specials.

The immigrant adults also tend to watch the children's programming on public television to learn English letters, words and pronunciation. "These shows help not just the kids, but the parents and grandparents," he said.

The International Child Care program is funded through the Bureau of Refugee and Immigration Affairs of the Department of Social Services.

Graphic

KEITH TORRIE DAILY NEWS HE'S RUSSIAN TO MAKE A POINT: Alexander Choklin, an Odessa native, teaches child care to students from Russia. The program also enables **Eastern** European immigrants to learn English.

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