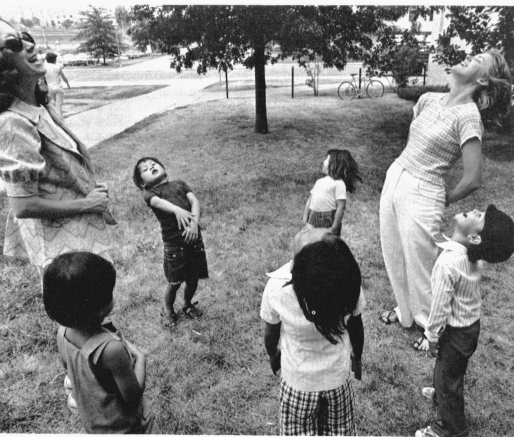


# TEACHING AMERICAN

By Anne Baber



Debbie Goss, left, and Rise Gilliom, teachers for the pre-school class, lead the favorite singing game, "Doing the Hokey Pokey."

Mrs. Georgette Kongolo, left, from the Central African Republic, and Mrs. Sary Chhith, from Cambodia, share a book and ponder an idiom.





When Indochinese refugee children started school this fall, most were poorly prepared to cope with the strange American ways and the English language.

But in Columbia, thanks to a Mizzou summer school class, refugee children had learned games, songs, idioms, and had made great progress with English.

In addition, the Mizzou students who taught the refugees had acquired a salable skill—teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL).

Dr. Donald Lance, associate professor of English and chairman of the Linguistics Area Program, has taught a TEFL class for four years, but there had been no chance for his students to practice teach. The students requested a summer practicum class.

In what is an outstanding example of the University's responding to the needs of the community and to the needs of its own students, a summer practicum course was quickly set up. The International Programs Office arranged for a grant from the Asia Foundation to pay for a teacher to assist Lance and for teaching materials. The assistant was Rachel Moag, who has 11 years' experience as a language teacher.

Most of the 35 pupils, ranging in age from 3 to 58, were either children or wives of Cambodian graduate students at Mizzou or Vietnamese refugees who have settled in Columbia. Also included, however, were Greek children, the sister of a grad student from Hong Kong and wives and children of Mizzou students from various African countries and Indonesia.

Five classes were set up for the non-English-

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### Refugees learned English from Mizzou students in a unique summer program.

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speaking people: one for pre-schoolers, one for school children and three for teenagers and adults of various levels of proficiency. The eager pupils came to class two hours a day, five days a week, for a total of 75 hours of instruction.

None of the Mizzou student teachers spoke Vietnamese or Cambodian. A few spoke French, but, for the most part, the classes were in English. At the beginning, to make the Mizzou students aware of the difficulty of learning another language with all the instruction in that language, Moag spent two hours

teaching them Hindi, a language of India, *in Hindi*.

"After two hours, my mind ached," remembers Debbie Goss. "We understood how our pupils would feel. And not knowing their language taxes your ingenuity and creativity. We couldn't use their language as a crutch."



As students recited,  
classes resembled  
the one-room school.

So the teachers and pupils made do with pantomime, blackboard drawings, props and improvised skits.

Robert Johnson was trying to get across the idea "I am feeling pain." To dramatize, he closed the classroom door on his fingers and held the door closed while he winced and grimaced and led his group in saying, "I am feeling pain."

The classes often sounded like one-room schoolhouses as the pupils chanted, each rendition improving their pronunciation and impressing idioms on their minds. "In 1975, . . . in May 1975, . . . *on* May nineteenth, 1975." Except for the most advanced class, most of the instruction was repetition rather than rules, rote rather than reasons.

The pre-schoolers looked at picture books and talked about the pictures. "Where is the cat?" asked the teacher, Rise Gilliom. "The cat is in the tree," the children chanted. When they tired of the books, they went outside the General Classroom Building on the mall to "Do the Hokey Pokey" and learn games like Ring Around the Rosy, Cat and Mouse and Red Rover—some of American children's favorites.

But the Mizzou students learned about the cultures of their pupils, too. "We saw so much of their cultures without having to read a history book," said Cindy Baer. "But I wish we could have had a cram course on their countries. My students explained their name system to me, and one man drew his family tree on the blackboard. We learned as much as they did."

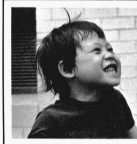
Cindy took her class to a Columbia supermarket

for an on-location lesson in weights and measures and money—and hot dogs. The schoolchildren's class visited the petting zoo at a Columbia park.

The beginning adults probably learned a minimum of 500 English words and a maximum of 2,000, Lance estimated. "We're not claiming to train them for life," he said. "This is not English for survival, as some people would like to dramatically call it. These people have survived without English. We're just helping them get started in America."

The more the Mizzou students worked and played with their pupils, the more concerned they became for them. "I don't want to 'dump' these people," Cindy said. They were particularly worried about the children entering school at grade four or above. At that stage, there is less classroom conversation and more need for advanced reading and writing skills. "Many public school teachers just put them in the hopeless category," Moag said, "because they have no idea how to help them."

So, as summer school ended, Lance began negotiations with the Columbia School Board that have resulted in four of the trained Mizzou students teaching in four local schools: one in high school, one in junior high and two in grade school. The students teach three hours a week. They don't get paid, but they do get college credit. They also are acquiring experience that will help them get jobs. The summer students were both undergraduates and grad students, working on degrees in linguistics, Spanish, speech and drama and English—all fields with high



Mizzou students  
are now teaching  
in Columbia schools.

levels of unemployment. For many, becoming employable was their original motivation for participating in this special program. But, after becoming involved with their pupils, they say that the greatest reward is to see a mother shopping at a supermarket or a little girl arm in arm with her new school friends at recess, chattering in English. □