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Remedial English-Learning Project at Guo-Tai Elementary School

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Introduction to TEFL
Remedial Project Report
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Remedial Project in Guo-Tai Elementary School

On October 12th, 2015, we participated in the remedial project in Guo-Tai elementary school. This is not our first time teaching students there, but we obtain a whole new experience within the six weeks and learned a lot from the students and advisors, including our classmates and Teacher Jane. Now, are you ready to enjoy a pleasant teaching journey with us?

Students' Background

The students we teach are all five graders, two of them are boys and one of them is a girl. As for their personalities, the girl is very shy and talks quietly, while the other two are sometimes naughty and noisy, but will still listen to our orders.

Lesson Plans

Of course, the class will be in chaos without writing lesson plans beforehand. Therefore, we would prepare a 40-minute class every week before we went there. Each time it took us around two hours finishing the complete plan, including discussing the content, finding useful teaching materials online, and practicing teaching some of the activities in our dormitory. We will attach our lesson plans in the end of the paper (ordered in dates).

For the lesson plan, we mainly focus on phonics and alphabet in the first three sessions, because we found that the students we teach are not very familiar with them. For example, some of the students will get confused with the pronunciation of “u” and “w”, “b” and “d”, “p” and “q”, etc. The reason might be that the two letters look so similar that the students made such mistakes and have difficulty distinguishing them. As for the last three sessions, we went further to simple vocabulary that relate to “feelings” and create special activities for the upcoming Christmas. Lastly, we reviewed all the lessons we taught and designed worksheets to see whether they really learn and absorb. If we classify our lesson plans into four parts—listening, speaking, reading, and writing, it will be like this:

Listening: phonics and alphabet dictation, “messenger” game (傳話遊戲)

Speaking: jazz chant, phonics and alphabet pronunciation, conversation practices, draw and guess game

Reading: English lyrics comprehension

Writing: cross-word worksheet, reviewing worksheet, Christmas letter

Teaching Methods

The teaching methods we mainly used during our teaching process were the grammar translation method, the audio-lingual method, and total physical response. We will briefly give examples based on each method in the following paragraphs.

For the grammar translation method, we asked the students to translate the sentence pattern “I feel” and “He/She feels” into Chinese since the English sentence pattern is exactly the same with the Chinese one. Additionally, we mainly used Chinese when explaining the sentence pattern and the particular vocabulary.

We also used audio-lingual method to teach. We use a lot of repetition during the session especially, and the students need to follow and repeat what teachers said. When teaching vocabulary of feelings and Christmas, application of the method could be easily seen. For example, we teachers would read out loud a word, then the students need to follow the teachers.

The last method we use is total physical response. When teaching the song “If you are happy,” we asked the students to clap their hands, stomp their feet, and take a nap along with the lyrics. Connecting the body movement and the phrases could help the students memorize the meaning.

Teaching Difficulties

To begin with, I must admit that we are very lucky. Compared to others (according to our classmates), our students are comparatively hardworking and well-behaved. Although some students would fool around now and then, they are actually not too hard to control and manage. Still, we would like to list some problems that we encountered during teaching.

First, we discovered that students get bored easily. In order not to let our students feel boring, we would try our best to design not only normal courses but also add in interesting games for them to play with. However, since this is a remedial project that takes place after school, students are often tired and become less energetic. Therefore, while we were teaching, some of the students would show exhausting faces in the middle of the class or even said “I’m tired. Can I take a nap?”

Furthermore, one of the students would suddenly stand up and walk to other places without our permission (not doing something bad but things like closing the window, turning off the lights in the back side of the classroom, etc.) What really bothered us was that he did not do these things quietly but would also chat with the other classmate loudly while walking around the classroom, which somehow affected our lecture because the other students got distracted. When we told him that he should tell us before leaving his seat, he would try to defend himself by saying several explanations.

Moreover, we found that some of the students are not willing to speak out in class. For instance, the girl that I mentioned in the beginning is afraid of making mistakes. If we tell her to answer the questions alone, she would feel nervous and often speaks in a small voice. Similar condition happens in group activities, too. When we told all of the students to read the alphabet, phonics, or sing English songs, her voice is hardly being heard on the spot.

Last but not least, students forget what we taught easily. Since we realized that our students are not familiar with basic phonics, we spent approximately six sessions (that is three classes) talking about short vowels and consonants. Nevertheless, students would remember how to pronounce them right after we taught, but failed to say the right pronunciation after only a week.

How we solve the problem

Since students took the course after ordinary school time and they got bored easily, it is important for the teachers to find some topics to interest the students. For example, we designed specific topic such as Christmas and feelings, and we had some games during class time. In addition, using an energetic tone in class could also prevent the students from being so sleepy.

The particular student who liked to distract other students really bother us in the beginning. However, we found out that it is because he wanted some attention from the teachers. We thought that fifth graders are older enough to have some serious talk with, so we would spend some time talking about class management. For example, when we mentioned “you are not little children that you can have good behavior,” all the students could really be quiet and started to thought about it. Furthermore, we would encourage the noisy boy to work well on his worksheet-- once the boy is praised, he would focus more on the class and stop acting distracting.

For the shy girl who is not that willing to speak up in class, we two tried our best to encourage her. In the beginning, when she was asked to read a word, we would say “okay, teacher would read it with you.” Additionally, when the students made mistakes, we would say “let’s try it again.” The students would gradually realize that it is not a problem to make mistakes. Also, we create a cozy environment, hoping to have a relax atmosphere. Owing to the above reasons, the shy girl spoke louder when it came to the third class.

“Forgetting what teacher taught easily” is an universal phenomenon for all students (so do we :-p). To help the students memorize those basic English knowledge about the alphabets and phonics, “review” and “repetition” are extremely important. For instance, we would not have different topics for each lesson; on the other hand, we would have the same thing being taught in each class. In short, review what had taught by using different games or worksheets could really help the students.

What we learned from this activity

Ivy:

I am really happy and grateful that I could have so many opportunities to gain my teaching experiences, including participating in this project. Since I have a huge passion in teaching, I cherish every possible chances to become a teacher. Unlike most of the other classmates, Claire and I are relatively familiar with standing in front of the stage to teach students due to several English camp experiences. However, we will still feel uneasy and troublesome when the students forgot what we

taught immediately, showed sleepy faces in the middle of the course, or ignored our instructions. Looking back to these six weeks, there are so many memories to be remembered, but there are also things that need to be improved.

To begin with, while facing students' attitude problems, I often choose to correct them with soft voices because I am afraid that the students will dislike this class if I am mean to them. Nevertheless, the more teaching experiences I have, the more I think I should sometimes be as grave as a judge. It does not mean that I should always scold them if they make any mistakes. Other than compliments, children sometimes need to be disciplined by strict and clear instructions. For instance, when we told the student not to leave his seat without our permission for the first time, the student barely listened to us because we did not show enough authority. Therefore, I tried to adjust my tone and facial expression when he did it again next time. I not only spoke louder and slower but also smile less, which somehow made the student feel the solemn atmosphere and stop his behavior.

Moreover, I learned a lot from my partner, Claire. Both of us like children, and both of us will be very enthusiastic when it comes to teaching. During the process of designing lesson plans and teaching, she will offer ideas that she thinks the students will like or be interested in. Furthermore, in order not to let the students get distracted when we were switching roles or discussing about our next activity, she recommended that we could communicate in English, which can also train our speaking ability. Though I often forget to do so, I still regard this as a great idea and I think it can be used if I become a teacher one day!

All in all, I enjoy this remedial project a lot, no matter preparing the lesson plans and finding teaching materials online, or teaching on stage with Claire. Also thanks to Teacher Jane and those who provided us suggestions when we present our plans in class. Were it not for you, this project will not be so successful. Maybe Jim, Roger, and Vivian (our students) we taught will forget us, but I will never forget this precious moment in my life!

Claire:

I was really happy to have the opportunity to participate in the project. After coming back from Chang-Fu Elementary school, I felt a sense of loneliness since children's laughter and sound were not around me anymore. Although having joined Remote Teaching Project to teach two lovely girls, I was still long for the real interaction between the teacher and the students in real classroom. Fortunately, I had the chance to go to Guo-Tai and met three cute students.

I was extremely excited when first meeting the students (since I went to the doctor in the first class, I met them in the second class). According to Ivy, all of them are quite obedient, so I was not worried a lot beforehand. In one hand, I was happy about meeting those cute kids. On the other hand, I was also worried about having bored the students. During the class, I sometimes could not help but laughing out owing to some cute facial expression of the students. Sometimes, however, I felt so tired that I could not use a very energetic tone to continue the class. What I learned most from the project

are to build up students' confidence about English, and to adjust my speed and tone of speaking depending on students' reaction. I hope the students know the beauty of a foreign language, and that they can use English to approach a very different world. In addition, I strongly believe that in teaching process, the teacher is not always the authority. The most key point of teaching lies in the interaction between both student and teacher.

Special thank to my co-teaching partner, Ivy, for working so hard with me. I understand that both of us have some passion about teaching, and we are willing to design good lesson for students. Every time we discuss our lesson plans, worksheets, and games, Ivy could come up with creative ways to enrich the whole lesson. We also hold same value about being a good teacher, so it is really comfortable to work with Ivy that we do not have much arguments. If having the chance again, let's teach together again in the future!

Although I would not become a teacher in the future, having the chance to get along with children always makes me happy. I would never ever forget Roger, Vivian, and Jim, for you enrich my senior life with your big smiles in each class!

