



MID-YEAR CONFERENCE FOR AMERICAN TEACHERS

February 22-24, 2008

Shanghai

The mid-year conference for the American teachers took place in Shanghai, February 22-24. We reviewed experiences that the teachers had had upon arrival, how effectively the orientation had prepared them, what changes to the preparatory process they would recommend for the future, and how they planned to incorporate what they had learned during their sojourn in China into their teaching in the United States. One teacher summarized her reflections as follows:

We can intellectualize, but things feel different in reality. I will teach differently about Asia when I go back because I have seen so much. I have both appreciation and knowledge. It is different to live in a place on a day-to-day basis [rather than visiting on a study tour]. The experience is valuable to me as a human being and as a world citizen.

Not surprisingly, teachers had very different experiences depending on where they lived. We had two new sites in 2007-2008, Anqing (Anhui) and Jiangdu (Jiangsu), where, unlike places such as Beijing or Suzhou, Americans are unfamiliar and even exotic. One of the teachers in Anqing noted that he was the first foreigner many of his students had talked to; the impact of his presence went far beyond the classroom. He believed that his being there brought home to many in the city that there were people outside of China, and that they weren't as bad as perhaps thought.

One of the Jiangdu teachers said that in addition to her fairly structured and straightforward teaching role, the school expected her to be a liaison between the two cultures; that role extended far beyond the classroom and could sometimes be quite a challenge: one of her students told her, "I want to learn to think."

A participant asked his colleagues to talk about the "blessings" of their experience. The teachers responded in many thoughtful and different ways, but there were several themes:

- Learning about China and about themselves
- Wonderful experiences and dreams come true
- Personal and professional enrichment
- Discovering commonalities with the Chinese

After the conference, the teachers returned to their host schools excited about the adventures awaiting them during the rest of the year.



American teachers and family members, CEAIE staff members and Margot Landman at the Mid-Year Conference