



Mid-Year Conference for Chinese Teachers

January 14-17, 2011
New York City

Over the Martin Luther King, Jr., holiday weekend the Chinese teachers traveled to New York for a mid-year conference. The conference is an opportunity for the teachers to reconvene after half a year in the United States, share experiences, learn about new teaching methods and spend some time together in the Big Apple.



Liu Jianying (Norman, OK) and Wang Qiong (Ponca City, OK) admire the Chinese New Year classroom decorations provided by Dr. Wu Wei-ling.

The first session of the conference was led by Dr. Wu Wei-ling, a Chinese teacher at West Windsor-Plainsboro High School in New Jersey, who worked with the teachers at the pre-departure orientation in Suzhou. Dr. Wu started by asking the teachers to share exciting experiences they had had in the United States. The teachers raved about pow-wows, apple picking and rodeos; one of the teachers told the group, glowingly, how his host family refers to him as their “third son.”

Before the conference the teachers were asked to submit a challenging situation they had encountered in their American classrooms; during Dr. Wu’s session the teachers discussed ways to handle each challenge. The session resulted in a lot of creative ideas on how to engage students, make lessons more interesting and better manage the classroom. Dr. Wu also discussed ideas for celebrating the upcoming Chinese New Year. Her enthusiasm for teaching is contagious; she got the conference off to an excellent start.

In the afternoon returned American teacher Maura Gouck (a former high school English teacher who is now a master teacher in the Department of Teaching and Learning, NYU Steinhardt School of Culture; Beijing, 1998-99) taught a demonstration class entitled “Buttons and Poems.” Through a series of exercises Maura demonstrated a teaching method called “liberating constraints.” By breaking the tasks of developing a story and writing a poem into small steps, she made the assignment manageable and unthreatening. The teachers finished the session with beautiful poems and several new approaches to writing under their belts to try in their own classrooms.



Zhou Qin (Milwaukee, WI) and Hou Fengyan (Westport, CT) work on their poem under the guidance of Maura Gouck.

Richard Sanford (retired, Grover Cleveland High School, New York; Dalian, 1997-98), whom the teachers had also met at the pre-departure orientation in Suzhou, led the final session on Saturday. He asked each teacher to write about an unexpected experience that happened to them in the United States. The teachers then shared their experiences in groups and asked each other questions about where the experiences took place, how many people were involved and how they felt. Richard explained how they could adapt this exercise to a Chinese language classroom in the United States and discussed teaching techniques that can be used to maintain student interest and encourage student creativity.

After a full day at the National Committee office, the group was excited to venture outside on Sunday and see some of New York City. In the morning they visited the museum at Ellis Island; in the afternoon they saw the Broadway production of “Billy Elliot” and enjoyed themselves in Times Square.

The conference concluded on Monday with an evaluation session led by Dr. Beverly Parsons and Dr. Patricia Jessup from InSites. Patricia and Beverly asked the teachers to comment on a range of issues from technology in the classroom to the impact of the program back in China. The feedback that the teachers provided will be compiled and used to improve the program in the future.

After a busy weekend the teachers returned to their host cities around the country for the second half of the school year.



The 2010-11 Chinese exchange teachers with Maura Gouck (standing), and Richard Sanford, Wu Wei-ling and Margot Landman (seated).