



MID-YEAR CONFERENCE FOR CHINESE TEACHERS

January 16-19, 2009

New York City

The 2009 mid-year conference began with a familiar face: Dr. Wu Wei-ling, a Chinese teacher from West Windsor-Plainsboro High School in New Jersey, worked with the exchange teachers at the July pre-departure orientation in Shanghai. Dr. Wu asked the teachers to reflect upon their experiences in the United States: “Share one thing really exciting,” she began. The teachers raved about cookies, host families, learning from homeroom teachers and even pet dogs. As the Chinese New Year was only a few weeks away, Dr. Wu brainstormed with the teachers on ideas for sharing the Chinese New Year with American students, colleagues and friends. She gave the teachers Chinese New Year decorations for their classrooms and patterns for student arts and crafts projects. The teachers were thrilled!



After breaking the ice with ideas for the Chinese New Year, Dr. Wu jumped into a discussion of how to address some of the challenges the teachers face in the classroom. Dr. Wu focused on themes the teachers had raised: managing the classroom, motivating students, setting up expectations for learning Chinese, and coping with a different cultural environment. For each theme Dr. Wu asked teachers to come up with possible solutions and she also recommended some ideas of her own.

Exchange teachers share their experiences teaching in the United States with Dr. Wu Wei-ling.

and Beijing, 2001-2002) and Maura Gouck (Beijing 1998-99) taught demonstration classes presenting different teaching methods the teachers could use in their classes. Janet Schoor taught the poem, “The Creation” by James Weldon Johnson. In reviewing how she had taught effectively, she noted speaking in a well modulated voice, constantly moving around the classroom, making eye contact, and regularly asking the students questions. The teachers were very inspired by Ms. Schoor’s animated reading of “The Creation” and at the end of the lesson they asked if she would read the poem to them one more time; many of the teachers excitedly joined her in reading the poem aloud.

After lunch veteran American teachers and TEP alumni Janet Schoor (Chengdu, 1997-98

Maura Gouck presented the teachers with a very different lesson and teaching style. While Janet Schoor piqued interest with her dynamic reading of the poem and strong presence in the

classroom, Maura Gouck stepped back as a teacher and gave more control to her students, introducing the techniques of collaborative learning and “enabling constraints.” After reading an “I Poem” she had written, Ms. Gouck provided the teachers with the framework to write their own poems. The teachers were surprised to discover they could write poems in English and learned the effectiveness of “enabling constraints” – providing a guideline while not further stipulating students’ work. The teachers then separated into smaller groups and taught each other Greek myths they had been assigned to read before the conference, demonstrating collaborative learning.



Maura Gouck uses collaborative learning techniques in a demonstration class.

For most of the teachers, the Mid-Year Conference was their first visit to New York City. On Sunday the group ventured outside the conference room for a lesson in American history and a bit of New York culture. In the morning the group visited the Ellis Island Museum and the World Trade Center site. After lunch the teachers headed north to the theater district to see the Broadway show “Billy Elliot.”



Guo Xiaoling (La Crosse, WI) and Wang Yu (Royal Oak, MI) work together during the evaluation session.

The conference concluded with an evaluation session led by Beverly Parsons and Pat Jessup from Insites. The evaluation addressed issues such as living arrangements, the use of digital technology in classrooms, and how the teachers’ experience differed from what they had anticipated. The teachers also spoke about the impact their experience teaching in the United States has had on them as individuals and will ultimately have on their students, colleagues, friends and families in both countries. One teacher said the following, “I benefit a lot; I feel better about myself, more useful, more nice, more confident, more comfortable with myself.” The teachers returned to their American schools and host families motivated by sharing experiences with their fellow teachers, and equipped with new ideas, new teaching techniques and a renewed enthusiasm for the second half of the school year.