

CETI 2004 REPORT
Xi'an Gaoxing Middle School
Zhaoguan Middle School

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Xi'an Gaoxin No 1. High School
July 12 – 30, 2004 //

TEACHING IN XI'AN

We arrived at the school expecting few facilities and many students. We were right about the students, but wrong on the faculties. All four of us had rooms in a dimly lit corridor. Inside, however, each room was en-suite with kitchen, and equipped with TV, desk, AC and fridge. Things looked great and a lot less rural than we had imagined. The city of Xi'an is apparently the second biggest in China, and this fact should not be taken lightly. Xi'an is huge and very well developed. As a city, the old section is beautiful but gradually being absorbed as the number of box-like shops mushrooms and the new parts of the city are divided into areas designated for different business areas such as 'high technology'.

The School

During our first meeting with the school party secretary, we were asked to take on another 50 students in our class. So we said sure, no problem (having just been given our new apartment keys). So there we were, with not 50, but 100 students, split into 2 separate classes. A few days later, we were asked to teach on Sunday. So of course we said it would be fine. A few more days passed and we were asked to teach on Saturday as well. A small amount of confusion ensued until we realized that we would now have Sunday off instead, so everyone was happy and we were invited by the principal to dinner at a 'fancy restaurant'. The moral of the story: make sure you are flexible enough to adapt to any situation, because it will arise!

Teaching

As to the teaching, the MIT half of the team had a little difficulty with the idea of separating work and play, but it happened eventually! But seriously, we had fun and 3rd angle projection drawing was never more exciting. We still ran our rocket course, but unfortunately without the rockets...the final project was the slightly less high-octane, but nevertheless well received, candle-powered balloon race.

The practical nature of the course proved to be a great success with the kids. Admittedly many of the projects did not go completely according to plan but that was half the fun, and provided the biggest laughs of the course in the process. The balloon race for example ended up being a race to see whose hit the ground last as one after another plummeted to earth only to collapse and have the plastic bag canopy burst into flames in the schools central courtyard. Bob One, Bob Two and Popeye (yes, we named them) just about had a working model, but as it rose about the level of the sheltered courtyard, the candles were blown out and the crowd cheered once again as the contraption spiraled to earth. So the students and indeed all the bystanders seemed to enjoy the event. A picture of our particular favorite balloon is shown below; the group who made this was unaware of the blown up shape until the final run.



We had also planned to make model gliders, however we couldn't find balsawood...so our airplanes didn't really glide, and it became a lesson in communication through 3rd angle drawing and why they did not fly...leading to a paper airplane practical with all sorts of interesting shapes.



The only piece of the course that really went to plan was the cardboard boomerangs, they did come back and some people even caught one. With the oohs and aahs from the crowd on our demo it was exactly like fireworks night...It was only when one of the kids started throwing a real one made of wood that we had to stop! The boomerangs consisted of two pieces of high density card that were sanded to a fine airfoil shape and then stuck together at the centre. An example can be seen in the picture on the right below.



Even towards the end of the course we still got the:

"do you understand?"
silence

"who understands?"
silence

"raise your hand if you do not understand,"
no movement

"it is OK to not understand, so who does NOT understand? no one? good then, whoever DOES understand please raise their hand"
no response.

But usually the students very much enjoyed to participate in the hands on activities, and so long as we staged a warm up act we got on fine. Warm-ups have ranged from singing that Beatles favorite: 'Yellow Submarine', to playing Simon says, to skits on how Newton discovered gravity with a steamed bun (baozi) tree!

There were a few classic quotes following our first week, and John's explanation of angular momentum, coupled with Yiwen's general relativity lesson produced these complaints:

"I thought the class would be about computers and English speaking, but you give us Physics and now I feel cheated"

"We are doing many Physics in school, but this is in Chinese. I did not understand then and now I am completely lost"

We conducted some group feedback sessions with the aim of finding out why students

were here and what their aims were for the course. We had some interesting quotes from this too. The funniest reason that one of the girls gave for coming on the course was to meet some 'handsome foreign friends'; we never asked if her aim had been met however.

International Teachers

Being International teachers, we do seem to get some strange benefits and experiences within the school. During our stay we were invited to the International campus to meet the summer school students. The way it was billed to us, we all presumed it would be an informal chat with a small group over lunch. But oh no, no meeting, instead we stood on the gym steps as a throng of students swarmed in to have their photo taken with us. We were eventually involved in photos of all 400 summer camp students in groups of around 30. Then to finish up the visit, the school party secretary took us to the school restaurant for special guests and served us up a delicious Chinese meal with a side order of KFC posing as the *piece de resistance*. In our final week 48 cans of coke and 3 jars of Nescafe and 14 prune things arrived in our office.

The *photographs with us* was not only confined to the school either, we were both amazed and amused to find that as foreigners we were celebrities wherever there were Chinese tourists. We found it especially interesting in Beijing as the paparazzi were out in force.



The interesting events and our wonderful hosts made our stay in Xi'an very memorable for so many reasons. We are all very happy to have had the opportunity to teach in Gao'xin Number 1 High School. We would like to thank the principal for her generous support and all the other staff members who made us so welcome. A special mention is reserved for Jane, our serene interpreter and fix-it guru, without whose time and effort we would not have managed! Thank you Gaoxin Number 1!

Zhaoguan Middle School

Aug. 1- 21 //

Living arrangements

Our second school after Xi'an was Zhaoguan Middle School. Zhaoguan is a small town in Jiangsu Province. Like most small farming-based towns in this area, the houses, stores, schools, etc. were all surrounded by rice paddies. Indeed, there was a rice paddy right next to the school, which was very convenient for losing frisbees in when we took the students out for a game of ultimate... The center of the town consists of about four main streets, and a 10 minute walk from the school in any direction will take you out to the houses of farmers and their fields full of rice and mosquitoes.

Unlike Xi'an, which was somewhat dry most of the time, Zhaoguan had the typical humidity and wetness of a southern Chinese town. For most of the days that we were here, the temperature was around 36 degrees Celsius, but the humidity made it much harder to be around outside. A shower seemed to be in order after every walk of more than five minutes. However, there were frequent thunderstorms that cooled things down for an evening.



Although the living conditions here were not as convenient or modern as in Xi'an, they definitely offered a much more character-building experience. John, Warren, and Simon lived together in one room, while Yiwen shared a room in another building with a local English teacher. Both rooms were inside and close to the school and classrooms. While they were both installed with air conditioning especially for us, neither had private bathrooms. This was alright since the public bathrooms in the school were close by, except for the occasional mass attacks by mosquitoes when visited at night. Food here can be summed up as very very good. Meals were all provided by the school and the emphasis was on seafood, vegetables and seafood. Prawns every day, lobster on occasion and simply the best *baozi* (steamed buns) we had the opportunity to taste.



Teaching

As to the teaching, there were not many terribly big surprises. We started with a class of forty students, which is what we asked for. They were all junior three students, and their English was not as good as the students in Xi'an, but there were a few exceptionally bright ones. With a good deal of writing and drawing on the board, along with games such as hangman to recap on concepts and vocabulary, we conveyed most of what we were trying to teach to a good number of the students. They were also more shy than the Xi'an students, so we spent much more time talking in small groups. The only somewhat unsettling thing about teaching in Zhaoguan was that our students would gradually disappear. This was mostly because some had classes in the afternoon or had to study for the next school year. Every day, there would be students going to class in the school, and we could hear the bell ringing for class every morning at around 6am, even on Sundays! It seems that the students don't really have a break in the summer, and the fifteen or so students that remained in our class until the end were just squeezing out their precious time for us. In the last week, we ended up not teaching on some days and going to talk in various English lessons on others. Still, we got to know some of the students quite well and spent more time with the emphasis on quality by playing Frisbee, eating popsicles and talking about aerodynamics or David Beckham (it was obvious which was preferred) with them.

The school's teachers and administrators were very helpful and nice. Unlike in Xi'an, we lived next to some of the teachers and saw them every day, so it was a much closer relationship. We became good friends with Mr. Wang, the English teacher who took care of us, along with Mr. Hua, the headmaster, Mr. Jin, the vice headmaster, and Mr. Mao, who took us on trips around places like Yangzhou with Mr. Wang. There were many dinners and lunches with various teachers and administrators involving toasts and extensive amounts of good food, which added to the overall excellent experience we had in Zhaoguan.

Thank you to Zhaoguan Middle School, our teaching placement was more than we could have hoped for.

Finally, some helpful advice for future CETI teams:

Bring 5 or 6 decent gifts with an MIT connection. Both schools treated us with such hospitality that our gifts seemed to fall a little short of our appreciation.

Bring lots and lots of practical examples and think up lots of demonstrations. Like

students everywhere, most don't like physics during a summer program especially, so you'll need to grab their attention.

Bring print photos, not just digital ones. They are easier to show around the class and the kids love them.

China has almost everything you can buy at home but it can be difficult to find what you want at the spur of the moment. If your needs are specific bring it with you.

Many young students are not confident enough to speak in front of the class. Divide the class up early to get them more involved.

You'll be teaching in the summer which means the weather is hot and the students might be on holiday. This means that you'll have to work hard but you'll get out everything you put in.

The most important thing is to have fun; As our students said to us: 'It is your holiday too!'



We would all like to express our gratitude to the CETI program for giving us this tremendous opportunity to teach and to experience the Chinese people and their culture.