

000925 Computer Classes

Class Struggle

No, not another revolution, but what has been going on at the school this week. I approached the Party Secretary to argue that teaching every student in the school, rather than just to concentrate on a single grade would expose all of the students to a foreign teacher, but they would not learn. Since I only see the students twice a month, they do not retain what I teach them. I argued that it would be much better to teach either just the Junior 2 class or to only teach in the boarding school. My arguments were well received and they promised to get back to me. The next day I received a visit at my apartment by the Party Secretary after she had discussed it with the headmaster. She explained through one of the English teachers who had accompanied her that although they thought my ideas were good, the parents would be very upset if their students did not have a foreign teacher. Therefore, I was stuck with my schedule with the promise that if I reviewed my lessons with the other English teachers that they would review it with the students.

However, I did make some headway with the English Corners. The English Corners are a time that I am to have conversations with the students in English about various subjects. I argued that over fifty students were far too many to have any sort of conversation in English. I tried to eliminate them all together from my schedule, but they would not agree. However, now four other teachers will accompany me, rather than then just sending their students. We will each take ten students in small groups which works to my advantage for two reasons. Firstly, I can actually have an English Corner. Secondly, the other teachers hate the English Corner as much as I do, and they have it in their power to cancel them. In fact, the English Corners that were scheduled for last week were canceled. The first time, I received a call that the room for the English Corner was in use. Jason and I used to be called with this message last semester as well, so I did not mind. The next day, I went to look for the English Corner, but could not find the students. I wound up hanging out and talking with the teachers in their office. I explained that I could not find my English Corner, but that I did not mind. They admitted that they all hated them as well. I believe that I will have very few English Corners this year.

Classes

Last week I started my computer lesson. My J1 students last year had listed computers as a subject that they would be interested in learning, so I was excited to teach it to them. I reviewed the lesson with the teachers at our weekly teacher's class. I showed the large flash cards that I had made with pictures of various hardware items on them. I had drawn pictures of a floppy disk, disk drive, CD-ROM, CPU, laptop, modem, software and other computer related objects. We also reviewed computer uses such as word processing, surfing the web and playing video games. The teachers all predicted that the lesson would be over the student's heads, but I did not believe they were giving the students enough credit. After all, the students had asked for this lesson.

That afternoon I had my first J3 computer class. I start the lesson by first telling them that we will be playing a game and that we need to form teams if we had not the previous class. Almost every class now has a team named UFO, Winner or Tiger. It has been interesting to watch the

students go through the process of choosing captains. Sometimes the team or the whole class will bully one student into being the captain. Other times, one student really wants to be captain and will get the whole team to support her or him. In my J3 classes, I have even seen voting going on and the occasional game of rock/paper/scissors. But, some of the J1 classes really have to be pressured to choose a captain as no one wants to do it.

Next I show the class one of the computer flash cards without saying anything. Most of them know what it is in Chinese and usually at least one student knows the English name. So, I then say the name and tape the picture to the board. I then write the name and have them say it again. This continues until all of the pictures are on the board. I expected modem to be a problem, but the students grasp what the pictures is all about. However, software can be a little rough. I have a card with Microsoft written on it and Windows and Word below. They all know the words and someone always yells out Bill Gates's name. But, for software, I usually have to fall back on Chinese.

Next, I review the words again to make sure they have heard the words a few times. Then I call a student to the front to try this great new technique that I read about in one of my ESL books. The method is called the "silent method" where the teacher only monitors the learning. The student at the front of the class points to different pictures and asks, "What's this?" The student teacher then picks one of the students with their hands up to answer. After a few questions, I call up a student who has answered one of the questions. The process of calling up a student continues for a few rounds until I am sure that they have grasped most of the names. For my J2 classes, I reward the student teachers with stickers. Once the students picked up on this, the enthusiasm to answer the questions increased dramatically in hopes that they would in turn be asked to be the student teacher and earn a sticker. Without fail, in every class, the students keep asking the student teacher to point at the picture of a CPU since they all know that one.

Next I ask who knows how to play Tic-Tac-Toe. No one ever does, but as soon as I draw an example grid on the board, they all know the game. I arrange nine pictures over a grid and call two teams to the front to compete. In order to get an X or an O in a spot, they must tell me the name of the item shown in the picture. This works pretty well and they get into the game. I just have to police the teams to watch for word lists that they bring up with them or that they are not being told the answers by the audience. After a few rounds of the game, I have one more review and then the class is over. It is amazing how quickly this class goes, since the students are really interested in learning the material. Now I just need to come up with five more lessons that are as well received as this one.

Classes at the church

I have also resumed teaching a class each week at the Catholic church. I am currently making lessons from one of my ESL books that require colored, wooden rods. Since I do not have rods, I use magic markers. The markers are used to explain lessons such as have/has or prepositions of place. For example, the class is asked questions like, "who has a green marker?" "I have a green marker. He has a brown marker." And so on. The preposition of place lesson involves arranging the markers in various ways such as around a book, on a table, under the book or between the

books. The ESL book has about fifteen lessons using the rods to teach basic English building blocks. However, I think that next week I will switch to keep them from getting too bored of the rod lessons.

Black Lung

Last semester a new smokestack appeared that was about 100 ft from our apartment and at the same level. Since I got back this semester, this smokestack has been slowly emitting coal fumes all day long. Coal smoke is thick and heavy and just kind of hangs in the air. I was so annoyed last semester that a company would be allowed to build a smokestack so close to the school. Then, I realized that it was the school's smokestack. It is awful in that I wake up in the morning to the smell of burning coal if the wind is blowing towards the building. The kids hate it as well and close the windows to their classrooms. They also close the windows to try to block all of the noise from the building being built 20 feet from their classrooms. Every day from the break of dawn until late into the night, there are workmen diligently sawing and banging as the kids try to learn. So, the poor kids are stuck in a classroom from 7AM till 9PM that is hot, noisy and assaulted with coal dust. Sorry to gripe, but I can't help but to think that this is not in their best interest.

Everyone is sure to tell me that the US is currently in first place in the medal count, although China is holding its own at number two.

Have a great week.

Jeff



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