

**A group of Stepping Stones
volunteers went to Henan in
July 2010 to teach at
various village schools.**

This is what we did...

We went to:

- speak **English**
- make class **fun**
- spread love and acceptance
- have great fun and joyful experiences ourselves

We did NOT go to:

- speak Chinese and translate into English
- have a formal, rigorous, pedagogically and methodologically correct class (although what we do is always communicative)
- make them draw pictures to pass the time
- stand in class and control every action
- have a out-of-control class with no learning
- teach our materials – we changed on the spot so we could teach the student, not the material

Preparation:

Warning: Do not walk into a classroom without material and being prepared.

Do not leave Shanghai without the following:

1. Materials – set the tone and use as much recycled material as possible

- Enough **recycled paper A4** to be used = 100 students = five activities each = 500 pieces of paper (at least!)
- **Five boxes of colored wax crayons/pastels/glitter pens**
- **Six markers** in different colors
- **Recycled cardboard** to paste papers on to make them sturdier
- **All flashcards** you need to teach vocabulary and ensure there are enough so they can be used in at least three different classrooms at the same time
- **Two pairs of scissors**
- **Glue**
- **Prestick** (blue tack) to stick things up on the blackboard or in class (be careful when you take this down – you may damage the blackboards in class)
- **Five packets of balloons** (can be used for anything from teaching colors to how to count to gifts)
- **Small rubber balls** (throw them at the student when you want them to answer a question – very effective with older students/teenagers)
- **Realia** – if you want to teach them clothing vocabulary, for instance, ensure that you have relevant clothing materials to show them and hand around. Keep it simple. Students really don't have to know the difference between hiking boots and sandals at that level.

- **Anything you need to teach that class** – take every single thing and make up your materials before you board the train
- Different **colors board chalk** If you insist on teaching them a song, take a **recording** with you. Play it on a tape recorder you take with you or your boom box or iPod etc.
- **Long life battery** if you want to use your laptop for music or anything else or want to take a projector – don't trust the electricity supplies at the school.

2. For yourself

- **Patience and love**
- **Your sense of humor – you're gonna need it**
- **Leave expectations behind – just jump in and immerse yourself - you will never experience this class in this way again**
- **Comfort food** like chocolate or an energy bar to keep you going in class (have it during break)
- **Sport drinks** – water is often not enough
- **Comfortable shoes** to teach in – you're gonna run!
- A **piece of cloth** to wipe the sweat away (trust me on this one!)
- **Wet wipes** and lots of them – board chalk is messy and pastels even more so
- **Tissues** for the squat
- An **extra T-shirt or shirt** in case dirty hands and pastels make you a work of art that needs to be changed into a sober teacher for the next class
- **Camera**
- **Sun block**
- **Sunhat**
- **Mosquito stick**
- **Your loudest voice** – kids are noisy and there are many of them – speaking in gentle tones is going to get you nowhere – learn to project that voice!
- Be **prepared** to pose for a **LOT** of **pictures!**

Tips when making materials:

There will be nothing for you to use the classrooms, and I mean NOTHING! Take EVERYTHING with you!

- **Make an example** of every activity you want the students to reproduce e.g. cards with the words "My name is _____" / "How are you?" / numbers / vocabulary flash cards
- **Write with colored pens** and in **HUGE / BOLD** letters – students copy what they see – set the tone you want them to copy
- **Make the material sturdy** (paste on cardboard, laminate, cover in plastic) – you need to use them again for the next class and might even want to leave them for the teacher if they should ask for it
- Be prepared to **turn up / turn down** your teaching – often students are much more advanced / much lower level than you anticipated – take extra material if you need it e.g. you figure you need to teach them 1 – 10 and then find out that they can count to 100. Make extra numbers if you think that might be the case or have different colored board chalk handy!
- Make **copies of the materials** if you think it necessary – classes can have up to 30 students in them
- If you are going to use balloons etc, sort through them beforehand so you have all the colors together so you don't have to waste time and lose momentum in the classroom
- Ensure that all handouts, prizes, little gifts are prepared beforehand so you can simply hand them out and not have to make them up in class itself

How to ensure that they ask you back

- Be **prepared**
- Be **friendly**
- **Enjoy** yourself
- **Respect the rules** of the school and the **teachers in class**
- Don't teach from a book, don't make them write things, don't make them do anything they always do with their English teachers in the everyday classroom
- Keep the students on the go all the time – keep that energy level **up, up up!**
- **Make them move and physically do something**
- Make them work in pairs, come to the front, go to the back, walk in line, sing in line, chant while they are marching like robots, anything to show fun in the classroom (get great ideas here: http://www.learningabledkids.com/multi_sensory_training/Page24-kinesthetic2.htm)
- Ensure that every student has your **undivided attention** at least **twice** during the two hours you will be with them
- **Move around** in the class and **engage** every student
- **Praise** every student at least **four** times during class
- Keep an eye out for students who are **bored** – give them **something to keep them busy** (that's why you need to be prepared – have something on hand to keep them occupied like a gap fill of what you are teaching or ask them to do what you are doing e.g. helping the other students say a word etc)
- Keep an eye out for students who are **slow/shy/unhappy and simply touch them** on the shoulder or smile and take attention to let them know you don't care if they are clever or not, you like them anyway
- **Don't focus attention on students who cannot answer you** – leave them and then later ask your co-teacher to go and help them, but don't all storm and make a big fuss of helping – you are just making the student totally incoherent and they lose face
- **Allow clever students to help** weaker students and encourage them to listen to each other

This is an example of what we did in a class where the students were way more clever than we anticipated and the English teacher deserves a medal for the work she does with the kids!

Tips for teaching with others:

- 1. Choose a leader.** It is better to have one leader and two followers in this situation, otherwise the students do not know who to listen to and that totally confuses them and that means no cooperation in class and no learning.
- 2. Don't turn your back to the class during any stage of your teaching.** That means they cannot hear or see what you are doing.
- 3. Don't block their view of your cards or flashcards or realia.** Move to the side of classroom completely while the leader is teaching in front.
- 4. Only the leader speaks when giving instructions.** Keep your eyes on the leader and stop what you are doing when the leader moves to the front and starts another activity.

Activity and actions

1. Three of us walked like robots into class in single file, chanting: “Good morning! How are you?” to the great confusion and then great delight of the students. When they start giggling, you have them...
2. We then moved around class using words like “Hi”, “Hello”, “Morning” and tried to make eye contact with every child between the three of us.
3. We moved back to the front and then started greeting each other by shaking hands and using vocabulary like: “Good morning, how are you?” “I’m well, thank you, and you?” “I’m great, thank you!” Try to use as many alternative to “Fine” as possible. You want to teach students to answer and then repeat greetings. Most teachers never teach the “and you?” part of the greeting. Ensure that the students can see what you are doing and speak loudly so they can hear you.
4. Now get students to greet each other and you by hand. Make them stand up to do this. Move around and ensure that they do it correctly, using the “and you?” and answer parts of the greeting ritual. We found some students really good with this, and simply made the language more difficult: We taught them variations like “good afternoon, good evening,” “I’m having a good day,” “I’m happy today, I’m sad today, not so good today,” etc Make a mental note of which students get the basics right. Praise and encourage throughout. If the students are too shy to do it with you, ask them to do it with a friend and move on. Don’t hover and make them even more nervous.
5. Move back to the front of the class and ask students who got the basics right to come and greet you by hand in front of everyone. Encourage everyone to clap hands and cheer them when they get it right. Work through all of them if that is what it takes to encourage and praise them.
6. Now give one student who got the more advanced greeting ritual right and ask them to come and greet you. Clap hands and cheer.
7. We then pointed to ourselves and said: “My name is _____” We had name cards prepared with our names on it. Keep these up so everyone can see them. Then I would say: “My name is Tom.” See if students pick up on the fact that I’m a girl and my name is Lize and that Tom is the name of my male colleague who is standing next to me and just introduced himself as Tom a few seconds ago and is holding the name Tom. Continue until they all have the names right. Keep on using the “My name is _____” construction and not just the name. You don’t want them to remember your name after class, but the language! And yes, they can read the names.
8. Now write the construction “My name is _____” on the board. Hand out paper and something to write with while spreading out into the classroom. Encourage them to write “My name is _____”. Yes, they can write their names and the grammar construction in Western script. Praise and clap when they get it right and show everyone around you what they did. They will get it very quickly.

Activity and actions

9. Now them to say their names. Walk up to individual students and ask: “What is your name?” They will repeat: “What is your name?” Ask a friend to help them and correct. There are enough students who will get it right. If they are totally confused, ask the teacher to translate, but only as a last measure. They very soon pick up on this and will start saying; “My name is _____”. Praise, encourage and cheer as they get it right.

10. Now review. Go through the whole process: “Good morning, how are you?” And “my name is _____” Do it fast and furious while you move along the students. This is to check that they get the individual words and not just the sounds of English, can distinguish between them and understand when you ask them the questions. You will be surprised at how well they are doing by now!

11. Make the class leave the classroom and line them up outside. Now make them walk like the robots you were when you came into the class. One volunteer leads in front, and the other covers the rear. The leader stands outside the circle and calls: “Good morning!” Students repeat while walking. Leader calls: “How are you?” Students repeat. Then move to: “I am great/OK/whatever you taught them.” Repeat for as long as they seem to enjoy it. By this time, all the other teachers and grownups around will have come to have a look at the kids speaking and having fun. Cheer, break up the line and go back to class. They need this break. If it is raining outside, try doing it in the classroom.

12. Now test their counting abilities. Ask them to count from 1 – 10. Test if they really know what they are saying or just repeating a rhyme. Divide class into three groups. Each volunteer takes one group and hands out paper again. Now ask your group to write the numbers 1,2,3 etc on a piece of paper. Big numbers and bold. Show them the example you made. Tell student 1 to write 1, student 2 to write 2 and so on. Now you have three sets of flashcards to use!

13. Move back to the front of the class and ask them to call out the numbers you flash. Do it in random order and use their own numbers they wrote. Check. If they get it, move on to 11 – 20 and repeat the exercise. Test them. If they get it, move on!!! Now repeat the exercise on tens: 10, 20, 30 etc. When they start saying, uhu or no – usually at 100, now you start teaching ☺

12. Teach them 100 and then 200 and so on. Now write 569 on the board and break it into: $500 + 60 + 9$ (This was Ned Dana’s brilliant idea – mathematician and scientist he is! Thanks, Ned!) Teach them to say: five hundred and 50 nine. Carry on until you can see they can work it out. Call individuals to the front and as they get the numbers right (keep on changing them all the time), give them a jelly and send them out to play. Be quick about this, as you need your 10 minutes rest by now! **NB: The last class we taught, we ended up in the high thousands because the teenagers just got it! Keep on moving up and up if they get it! Thank goodness for Ned and Guy (another Trinity college mathematician!) I was getting panicky for the millions there for a few minutes!**

13. Now take your well-deserved break and gobble down a sports drink or chocolate or energy bar. You are nearly done!

Activity and actions

14. Wait for the students in class while each of you are blowing up a balloon. Let them get exciting and wondering what you are doing. Spread into class and hand out the colors you have selected willy-nilly to the students. Keep it to four colors if they have not learned the names of colors before or more if they know the basics like blue, red, green etc. Yellow and purple start getting difficult, so save those for your fast students.

15. Stay between the students and encourage them to blow up their balloons. Make a big deal of using words like blow and great and beautiful balloon and wow, look at your balloon. Praise and laugh and have fun. Using English like this gives the students the understanding that English is actually a language you can use and speak in, not just something you learn in school!

16. Now get all mysterious and give significant looks at other volunteers while you way one balloon in your hand. Point to it and say: Blue. Get all the kids to repeat. Go through the colors of the balloons they have, getting them to repeat the words after you. When they get it, point to a blue balloon and say RED! If they repeat RED, look disappointed. All volunteers make negative noises and shake their heads. When they realise their mistake and shout BLUE, tease them a bit and say NOOOOOOOOO. They will shout YEEEEES – you go NOOOOOO... Tease a bit more, and then ask one volunteer: Ned, is this balloon blue? Ned says: Yes, it is blue... You look disappointed and say: Oh, OK, it's blue.... Get another volunteer to do the same with all the colors, keeping on teasing them and asking if they are sure they have the colors right...

17. Now divide class into boys and girls. Hold up various balloons (or grab them from behind your back etc). The first team to get the color right when you produce the balloon, get a mark. Get the teacher involved to decide who gets the mark. We made them excited up by my saying: My girls are gonna win! and then standing with them. Ned and Guy went over the boy's side and say "Nooooo, the boys are gonna to win." I replied: "My girls are more clever AND prettier!" That stumped the boys! Keep on with the friendly banter – the students and teacher loved this! Our teachers got into the act and cheated outrageously on the score keeping and the kids just loved yelling that they saw her when she did it that! And all in English! This is learning!

18. Then we calmed everyone down and they happily answered when we reviewed the greetings, my name is_____, numbers and colors with them. We simply spread into the class and asked questions like: How are you, what's your name, what number is this and what color is this in random fashion, each one of us working with individual students and praising them to high heaven every time they got it right. We allowed friends to help friends (yes, this IS learning) and corrected pronunciation with the faster students who got it all right.

19. Then I went to the front, made a little speech telling how good they were and how much we enjoyed them and the teacher made her little speech and class was over!

The real heroes of this class were Ned and Guy who put up with me yelling instructions to both them and the students and for running around, keep students and teachers happy! Thanks, guys! Now go back and do it again 😊

Thanks to Corinne, as always for organizing this, and our fabulous host, Mr Zhang, and his team. I enjoyed myself tremendously!

And thanks so much, Betty, for carrying the supplies and organizing the gifts and putting up with me as a roommate.

And to the other teachers: Stephen and Margaret, Maria and Sylvia – you are the best!