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EXPERIENCE: Participating in TEA Program

The program I participated in is called Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program (TEA). It has been developed by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the US Department of State and implemented by IREX (International Research and Exchanges Board). This program brings proficient secondary school teachers from around the world (from countries in Europe, Central and South Asia, South East Asia, Near East, and the Western Hemisphere) to the United States to enhance teachers' expertise in their teaching disciplines and equip them with a deeper understanding of best practices in teaching methodologies, lesson planning, the use of technology in education, and increase their knowledge about the United States. TEA consists of a six-week academic program at a U.S. university, including intensive training in teaching methodologies, lesson planning, teaching strategies for their home environment, teacher leadership, as well as the use of modern technologies as tools for teaching. The program also includes an internship at a secondary school to engage participants actively with the American teachers and students.

My experience with TEA began from the time I was informed of my selection for the program. American efficiency and assiduity came to my home town of Michurinsk long before the program started and was going on all the way through the preparation for the program. It was done by American Center in Moscow where I had a chance to have an interview and to pass TOEFL, to have a pre-orientation meeting in an American Embassy in Moscow.

My staying in the USA started in Washington D.C. for an orientation conference which allowed me to enjoy cross cultural experiences as there were many international teachers from a variety of countries. We had the opportunity to exchange ideas and discuss the most important issues facing the world today. There were such workshops and seminars as "Surviving and Thriving in the USA" (Cross-Cultural Communication Skills), "US Education Structure and Principles" (The US Educational System), "Global Prospective", and "TEA Program Overview

and Expectations”. International poster fair and sightseeing tour around Washington let us get acquainted with all the participants of the program closer.

But the most tremendous experience I got when I came to the host university, Claremont Graduate University (CGU), California which designed The Teacher Education Internship Program (TEIP) to help teachers develop expertise in their subject areas and enhance their classroom skills. It was in fact designed by co-director of the TEIP DeLacy Ganley and the project’s faculty director Anita Quintanar served as director of operations. The goal of TEIP is to prepare a kind of teacher who is committed to fostering academic success in all students while “fast-tracking” the achievements of students who struggle, a kind of teacher who cultivate success and breed optimism.

Our program at CGU consisted of a clinical experience where we spent time either in a local high school (9th-12th grades) or in a local middle school (7th-8th grades), professional development classes at CGU including a Teaching/Learning Process Course(TLP), Methods Course, and Technology Course. Besides we had cultural activities on Sundays and on Saturdays we met our friendship families who volunteered to introduce the family life in America. Team meetings helped us to get closer to each other and to overcome cultural differences.

Methods Course was designed by Helen Rockett for English teachers. This class was focused on what it meant to be an effective English teacher. The most practical part of the class included making lesson plans, describing California Content Standards, ELD Standards and Learning objectives. Learning objectives are specific, measurable and purposely linked to contents and standards. The plan should also include formative and summative assessments. Summative Assessments are given periodically to determine at a particular point in time what students know and do not know. Formative Assessment is part of the instructional process. When incorporated into classroom practice, it provides the information needed to adjust teaching and learning while they are happening. In this sense, formative assessment informs both teachers and students about student understanding at a point when timely adjustments can be made. Here are some examples of formative assessment: self and peer assessment; student record keeping; checking for understanding (CFU); questioning strategies; observations, etc.

Next item of the plan is essential question. It requires students to evaluate (make a thoughtful choice between options, with the choice based upon clearly stated criteria), to synthesize (invent a new or different version) or to analyze (develop a thorough and complex understanding through skillful questioning).

Essential questions spark students' curiosity and sense of wonder. In a template not only teachers and students activities are described, but also differentiation is indicated, it poses a number of questions to help ensure the lesson will reach every learner whatever his abilities are, using SDAIE strategies. SDAIE stands for Specially Designed Academic Instructions in English. Some of the most applicable features are error correction done in context through teacher modeling; new information introduced and presented by the teacher in a way that engages students; limited use of idiomatic speech; use of cognates; gestures and facial expressions; graphic organizers; realia; hand on activities and demonstrations; use of examples and analogues; audio-visual materials; projection technologies, etc.

The plan itself consists of three parts: sharing objectives and engaging/motivating students; instruction and practice; closure.

A lot of strategies can be used to make the process of education more effective:

Graphic organizers are a means of introducing and assessing concepts in a manner that encourages meaningful learning. Graphic organizers are diagrams or maps that show the relationship between new and existing concepts, thereby facilitating integration of new and familiar ideas. They require minimal language and are therefore helpful tools when teaching science to English language learners.

Group projects and cooperative learning provide opportunities for students to exchange, write, and present ideas. Projects use a variety of skills that work together to increase understanding and retention.

Think/Pair/Share gives all students the opportunity to practice, providing students with time to write a response to a thought provoking question, then additional time to discuss it with their neighbor before sharing their conclusion with the class.

Encourage participation with a positive and supportive environment has a significant influence on student comfort level, participation, and success. Requiring English language learners to speak in front of class may be counter-productive and cause great anxiety. Encourage them to express themselves, but don't force them onto the stage.

Outlines provide students with a copy of your lecture/discussion outline. This will help students know where you are, and where you are going with your lesson.

Relate to prior knowledge make use of student background knowledge of science concepts. Discover what your students already know about a given topic and build upon this knowledge.

Hand-on activities for kinesthetic learning events provide an excellent learning environment for English language learners.

KWL Chart (the K stands for what do you know about the topic, the W stands for what do you want to learn about the topic, and the L stands for what did you learn about the topic).

SSR (Silent Sustained Reading), a general assumption about reading is that students improve their reading ability by reading a lot.

Rubrics allow teachers to be more objective in grading complex student performances. Moreover, they help students understand more clearly just what is expected of them in an assignment or activity. Students and teachers can compose rubrics together, and revise them according to actual performance. They give a reference point and language for raising expectations and achievement.

There are also lots of other strategies applied in American schools which I learnt while having clinical experience at High Claremont School. They are equity cards which allow students to be equal, whipping around, when students one by one tell some ideas, popcorn reading (for concentration), brainstorm, summary frame, jigsaw reading, anticipatory guides, matrix grid, and many others. But all of them involve students into active participation during the lesson. The methods used and showed how important and efficient the student centered approach is and what good results can be achieved. Staying there for 7 weeks and having school at least 4 weeks gave me a chance to understand the needs of students and to make a plan for my further steps for changing some ideas about teaching. We have a profession which has a lot of responsibilities to students and society. The TEA program has enriched me professionally. Now I am more skilled and confident to help my students in their needs.