

Cindy Liliana Gonzalez

Study Abroad – China

Field Practicum

My experience teaching rural children in Sichuan, China



I am currently part of the CSB/SJU group studying abroad in China. I am studying at Southwest University (西南大学) located in a small city named Beibei, which is part of the municipality, Chongqing. I am currently enrolled in Chinese, Chinese Literature, Chinese Ethnology/Culture, and a Study Abroad Seminar. Besides my core courses I decided to enroll in a two credit course that was titled *Field Practicum*. I didn't know much of what the class entailed or what exactly I was going to do to receive credit but what I did know was that it was the opportunity to travel to a school located in a village and teach rural children English for a weekend. Being of Hispanic decent I was sold on the idea to get to experience rural areas in China for all I was aware of and experienced in the past were rural areas in parts of Mexico. Both of my parents went to rural schools in Mexico when they were young. Thus having the opportunity to teach children in a rural setting definitely caught my eye for I related to it in a very personal level.

On the weekend of October 21st -23rd it was finally time for some of my fellow Bennies and Johnnies and I to travel to the village. The ride took approximately two and a half hours, and throughout the entire ride I saw how we slowly left the noisy city, large apartments, and a lot of cars for farm land,

actual houses, some cattle, and empty highways. The stares of people working on the fields, or some of the very few people driving our same direction were those of complete shock of seeing foreigners in that specific part of China. I began to think of how different the lives of people are in rural areas like the one we were driving by and going too compared to people living in big cities such as Chongqing. I began to get antsy about arriving and being able to see the town, school and most importantly the children.

When we finally arrived we were in front of a huge gate that would lead us to the inside of the school. A guard soon came up to that gate, opened it for us and allowed us to approach the main building of the school. During the time that we arrived the children were having recesses and some students were playing basketball, some Ping-Pong and others were walking around chit chatting. Soon after a few students caught a glimpse of our bus they began to run and surround the bus. They stared through the windows of the bus and began to shout "Hello, hello!", "what is your name!", "where are you from!" Their faces had expressions that I will never forget and my heart will forever cherish. Their expressions seemed those of excitement, surprise, and most importantly those of a person that has been waiting for someone to come teach, talk and play with them for a long time.

Unfortunately, the first day we arrived we didn't get to teach for we had to go and register at the hotel we were staying in and eat dinner. Nevertheless the next day we came back to the school and we were all given a class to teach for the day. I was really nervous because of the language barrier and trying to achieve pedagogy for ESL students without much training. Right then and there I remember looking into the small window the door had and staring at the children. I remember listening to their laughter of the sixth grade class I was supposed to teach that day and out of nowhere all of my nerves were at ease. I then opened the door and walked in with my head held up high stopped at the middle of the classroom. I turned around to face them and all of a sudden all of the students stood up and began to cheer very loudly and clap for me. The feeling I got from that was absolutely indescribably, their faces were priceless and I began to think of how proud my parents would be if they were there at that moment. I introduced myself and they introduced themselves one by one. My lesson for the day included how to say certain foods, colors, seasons, and clothes in English. I used my best Chinese, body language, and entertainer skills to create a fun learning environment that these ESL students both comprehended and enjoyed. When it was time to leave on break they begged me not to go on break and to continue teaching them. I agreed and we then began to play games that made me laugh in a way I had not laughed in what seemed like a long time.

The next day the women on the teaching weekend Sarita Tabor (CSB Junior), Kia Lor (CSB Junior), Rachel Mullin (CSB Sophomore) and I were placed in the Kindergarten classrooms to teach for half a day. Trying to accomplish pedagogy in the Kindergarten setting was very difficult especially because some of the children spoke in a different dialect I did not understand. So I did what I know best and that is to make them laugh by playing games with them. I had access to about six flash cards that had six different colors and I taught them how to say the colors in English. After they seemed to repeat the colors after me very well and even recognize some of the colors I gave them each a small treat. I also had access to a small tambourine that the kids seemed to love. I began to play the tambourine and dance along with the rhythm and it made the children laugh hysterically. After a while of dancing by myself I asked them to dance with me and when I stopped playing the tambourine they had to sit down. They absolutely loved

that game. When it was time for recess I played on the slides with the children and had them chase me around the playground as I continued playing the tambourine. Saying goodbye was the hardest part for I felt so attached to each and every child. I felt that I had made such a personal connection with all of the children especially after they all kept hugging me and holding my hand.

Although the school lacked a lot of resources including teachers, teaching material, and a sanitary bathroom for the children to use it did not lack eager and loving students. I will never forget my experience of teaching students English in rural China. I not only got the chance to experience what the word rural means in China, meet wonderful students but I got the opportunity to cherish and be grateful for what I have back in the United States. I also got the opportunity to share a piece of my heart with children that eagerly wanted to learn English in the sixth grade setting, and play as well as give all of my affection to Chinese kindergarteners that were very happy to have a teacher that enjoyed playing and hugging them.



Cindy Gonzalez (CSB Sophomore), Christopher Tunbaw (SJU Junior) with sixth grade Chinese students. (Sichuan, China)