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Final Internship Report – Jinqiao Schools – Wuxi, China

For this internship, I really wanted to get an insight on what it was like to not only teach children, but I also wanted to know what it might be like to be a foreign English teacher. I can say this experience has truly enlightened me. It was more than what I could have hoped for.

Preparing for my internship:

Before beginning my internship, I did my best to learn as much information as possible concerning this internship and China's culture in general. Any questions I had I asked my IE3 advisor, international advisor, students who had been abroad doing similar work, and the past participants of this internship. I also rented books from the library to learn more about China. Financially, to fund my internship, I applied to many internships and received funding for my entire abroad experience. Before the start of my internship, I had not learned any Chinese, I had planned to, but it didn't work out that way. Which is totally fine, it just makes life a little more interesting when you have to rely more on non-verbal communication. You can learn as you go along.

My experience at the beginning of my internship:

Week one of my internship was training week. I met staff and was given a tour of the kindergarten I would be teaching at. I observed the classes of another foreign English teacher for a week and talked with her about her job as a teacher. We talked about her daily schedule, what went into lessoning planning, and things I could expect being an English teacher. At first, I was very concerned

about how this internship was going to go. I was afraid of public speaking, and I didn't know the first thing about teaching. I had not taken any classes on how to lesson plan, nor had I had any education on teaching children. I did however have plenty of volunteer experience working with children. I had to remind myself that I choose this internship for a reason, I wanted to learn and grow; I wanted a challenge.

The next week I began teaching. In the beginning, I nervous about meeting my students, I was told that most of them knew absolutely no English at all. For some of the children, I was the first foreigner they had ever seen. This I found to be quite interesting during my first of week teaching; I got lots of wide-eyed smiles and one little girl even cried. Before each class, I would have nervous butterflies, but when I entered the classroom they went away. All the children were excited to talk to me, even though we could not understand each other most of the time; well, all of the time really. Both the teachers and students were very happy to have me in their classrooms.



My daily schedule:

In the morning at 8:30 am, I would head over to my first classroom. The kindergarten I worked in was about a 5-minute walk from my dorm; which is located on the school grounds. To start the day I would do morning exercise with the kids. Each day I have about three English lessons to teach, and another exercise class after lunch. They give you time every day to lesson plan for about 2 hours. At the start, I was given what my students needed to learn (teacher's books), but you have to come up with

how you are going to teach them. For planning lessons, I would make PowerPoints, come up with games, and songs to teach my students. My day finished around 3:30 pm.

For me, I had special qualifications from my university about how much time I needed to work at my internship, so I asked my supervisor for more work, she was understanding, and the staff were very flexible. So, at 4:30 pm I would attend the after school English lessons in the primary school and observe the lessons taught by other foreigner teachers. If they needed any help, I would serve as a classroom aid. The after-school class ended at 6 pm and then I would head out to dinner with some friends I had made with the staff my first week at Jinqiao. On occasion, I also edited English papers for students who were struggling with English, and made voice files, so they could hear the correct pronunciations. I also got to be a substitute teacher multiple times for the afterschool primary student English classes. Although it was unexpected, substitute teaching resulted in a good learning experience by teaching a different age group.

Special Experiences:

During my internship I took every opportunity to experience and explore new things. On a daily basis I met lots of people and did my best to communicate, but due to my lack of Chinese language, I made most friends with people who were Native Chinese and foreigners who knew some English. Almost every single day for a month, I was eating something different. Because I am an open-minded and adventurous person I even tried the more questionable looking dishes, such as chicken feet, fuzzy peas, and the century egg. Don't let me throw you off, Chinese food is delicious, but there are some weird foods.

On the weekends, I would take the subway and go out into the town, sometimes with friends and sometimes on my own. I even got to travel twice to other cities in China. During my internship, China had its national holiday. So for a week in the fall I did not have work, so I used this time to take a

bullet train out to Shanghai. Again, I went on my own to a huge city and stayed for 5 days. My second trip I did over a 3- day weekend with another foreigner teacher I had met. We went “Heavens Mountain” and also got the walk the famous Glass bridges.

Overcoming challenges:

I felt frustration sometimes when my students were a little too rambunctious. In all my classes, there were at least two Chinese kindergarten teachers there to help me with the children during my lessons. But sometimes, the Chinese teachers would use the time I spent teaching, as their break time. It is quite difficult to get children to listen, if they don’t understand you. So, I had to find other methods of getting them to pay attention such as games and stickers. But, most of the time, the teachers in the classroom were very good at getting the children to calm down and pay attention.

If I could change one thing about my experience, it would be that I wish I had learned more Mandarin before coming to China. I think knowing more Mandarin would have helped me a lot with classroom management. In each class you will have Chinese kindergarten teachers to aid you, but they are not there all the time, so its beneficial if you learn how to say, “what is this?”, “look at me”, and for daily life “ “I need to go...”, “Thank you”, “ I don’t understand” and “how much is it?” learning Chinese is not needed to do this internship, but it would have made it a little easier.

Tips and things to be knowledgeable of before coming to China:

1. WeChat. This Is China’s number one social media and messaging network. If you are going to China you need WeChat, if you want to make friends or just to communicate with people in general over the phone.
2. Take the subway. At first it may be a little confusing, but there is a Wuxi metro phone app. It will save you money and it is just a simple way to get around town.

3. Food. Most definitely, you will be eating out for dinner every night. The dorms have a refrigerator and a single plug in burner for the whole floor to share; but you must have your own appliances. I suggest buying out. Restaurants in China are very cheap. The average Chinese dinner will cost between 1-5 dollars, if you want western food, you're looking at spending about 10-15 dollars.
4. The Staring. If you do not look Asian you will be stared at. This was something I was aware of before coming to China, but I was not expecting so much. China is a 95% homogeneous culture, so when they see someone who is not Chinese looking they will stare at you. After about week 3 you get over it and ignore it; though it is interesting to randomly start a staring contest with some one on the subway.
5. Weather. My internship was in the fall, I arrived in China in September. I was not ready for the weather. In my town and most of China, the humidity is insane. 70-degree weather will feel like 110 degrees. For the first month in China, I was a sweaty mess. Lots of rain, so plan to buy an umbrella. Around late November it cooled down.
6. Tissues. In China when you enter a restroom, you will not find toilet paper, 100%. It is just not done. So pack it in your carryon and buy more when you get to China. Also, pack hand sanitizer and deodorant.

My final thoughts:

The students and staff at Jinqiao were so amazing and welcoming. I am so happy that I choose to pursue this opportunity. I learned how much I really care for children and how much I actually enjoy teaching. My favorite moments were when the kids would catch a glimpse of me in the hall, smile and frantically wave their arms to get my attention. I came to really care about my students, even the rambunctious ones. I was able to learn new skills that I will use, should I choose to pursue a path in education such as classroom management, versatility, leadership, and communication techniques.

During my time in China I have met so many great people, both at my school and out in society. I even have plans to go back and visit next year. I am glad I took a chance and made the most of my experience as an intern at Jinqiao Bilingual experimental school.



