

Teaching and Learning in Shanghai and Fujian

I have spent the last 9 weeks working with Stepping Stones Shanghai to deliver high-quality English education to underserved children across China. Before setting off to China I set 3 SMART goals:

1. Create English Teaching Resources
2. Make English a Subject Students Enjoy
3. Create and Maintain a Good Classroom environment

During my first 5 weeks of my LiA I was based in Shanghai spending 3 days in Stepping Stones' office and 2 days teaching across Shanghai. In planning my SMART goals I aimed to spend my time in the office creating teaching materials. When initially planning my LiA I thought most of these materials would be for the Home Classroom programme, an initiative that connects children in rural China with poor access to English education to volunteers through video lessons. While I did spend some time working on home classroom materials, the majority of my lesson materials were for a new English programme for young adults with autism.

On my arrival in Shanghai through conversations with Stepping stones staff, and in alignment with the Laidlaw Change Maker Values, I took on the task of creating a new curriculum with 2 other volunteers. I was part of researching and creating a 12-lesson curriculum. It focused on practical English for students with a partner organisation which offered employment opportunities for high functioning autistic young adults in a café and art gallery. The curriculum included homework tasks, audio examples, visual aids, and lesson plans. I created 4 of these lesson plans and associated materials. In addition, I created 2 lesson plans for the Home Classroom programme and Shanghai English programme. In total I created 6 lesson plans in these first 5 weeks. This matched the timebound and measurable criteria of this SMART goal to create at least 5 lessons by the end of my initial 5 weeks in Shanghai.

When not in Stepping Stones' office I was teaching English classes. First in Shanghai to first and second grade students twice a week, and then in rural Fujian province where I spent 3 weeks teaching full time. When teaching I focused on my other two SMART goals, making English a subject students enjoy,

and maintaining a positive classroom environment. Before beginning teaching I received teacher training from Stepping Stones, familiarised myself with all teaching materials and spent some time reviewing TEFL and TESOL materials before my arrival. This successfully prepared me to create a positive teaching environment and make English a subject my students enjoyed.

An important milestone in tracking the progress of these 2 goals was when I finished teaching in Shanghai before setting off to Fujian. This was a good time for me to reflect on how successful my classes had been and how I could improve to ensure I was on track to achieve my goals while teaching in Fujian. Reflecting on my time teaching in Shanghai I had two key takeaways. First that I should be more proactive in taking control of the classroom. I found often, especially in the second half of classes, noise levels would become too high which in turn made the class more restless. Initially I had wanted to take a lighter touch in a hope students would grow to enjoy class more. However, after my experience in Shanghai it was clear to me that I should take initiative in controlling the classroom early. This allowed students to engage with the material and could increase student's enjoyment of English classes. A calmer atmosphere is better for both the student's learning and enjoyment. In addition, I decided to use more Chinese phrases for lower-level students. I made this change to ease students into class. This gave them the opportunity to start enjoying learning English rather than being scared off by the difficulty of learning a second language. But I still preserved as much of the immersion aspect of Stepping Stones' English classes as possible. While it can be challenging for students, immersion has been shown to be very effective when teaching a second language.

I focused on improving my classes based on these reflections when I started teaching in Fujian. I spoke to colleagues about useful Chinese phrases and words to ease students in, and also discussed proactive classroom management which I then implemented. I measured the impact of these changes on classroom atmosphere and English enjoyment through continued discussions with colleagues. Each morning before class I would discuss with another volunteer teacher how the class went the previous day and how to improve for the lesson ahead. Later in the day the same informal feedback would be discussed before the afternoon lesson led by the other volunteer teacher. This

allowed me to keep a track of my progress towards my two teaching SMART goals.

I am confident that my personal teaching goals were relevant to both the aims of Stepping Stones and the principles behind Leadership in Action. Stepping Stones' key aim is to provide high-quality education for underserved children in China. In Fujian I was working with children who have little access to English education at the primary school stage. Many children in my classes had only had 1 term of very basic English, a stark contrast to the curriculum in urban "Tier 1" cities in China like Shanghai. In Shanghai, English is a key part of the curriculum often from kindergarten giving these students a large headstart. This is particularly important for language learning where early exposure has been shown to make a long term impact on learning. English as a foreign language is one of the 3 mandatory subjects for the Chinese university entrance exam, so a lack of English teaching can be a major hurdle for a student's access to higher education. By delivering on my teaching goals, I was improving the English education of rural children in Fujian. I was, alongside other hardworking volunteers and stepping stones staff, making a relevant contribution towards my partner organisation's goals and to the broader aims behind Leadership in Action projects.

A key component of Leadership in Action is putting the Changemaker Values developed throughout the entirety of the Scholarship programme into practice. My research summer and leadership days were vital preparation for the challenges I faced over the summer. It took the ambition and bravery nurtured through the programme to plan the project. Ambition to want to make a difference, push myself out of my comfort zone, improve my foreign language skills, and develop my character. The bravery needed to spend 2 months across the globe in a new place without friends and family. Over the course of the summer these two values were needed again and again. When taking on the challenge of building the new English curriculum I needed Bravery and Ambition. I needed to be curious and determined to deliver my Leadership in Action project too. Curious about my students, about education in China, and English as a foreign language teaching. How could I teach effectively if I didn't understand the needs of my students, the context I was teaching in, and the most effective teaching techniques? Determination to keep going, to ensure I was teaching for

every child not just the best in the class, and to make the most of the great opportunity I had to develop my character.

I developed my character during my Leadership in Action summer through my work teaching but also, arguably more importantly, through the people I met. Hard working volunteers, full-time staff at Stepping Stones, and the students themselves all dedicated to teaching and learning on their own time. Mrs Wu who worked tirelessly at the library hosting Stepping Stones' summer school programme in Fujian showed me what it meant to act with purpose. Driven by a passion for education, and pride in her local area. Whenever anything was needed, she was the antithesis of dither and delay. It could be building maintenance, teaching assistance, anything that was needed for the smooth running of the library and summer school. She knew the importance of her work, and it gave her the drive to do good work each and every day. Mr Chen, head of the local volunteers organisation in Fujian showed me the meaning of hospitality throughout my stay. Proud of his town, passionate about its future, and the future of its children. Mr Chen had the Laidlaw character values of love and wisdom in abundance, he was the beating heart of civic society in the area, had a reflexive knowledge of the people, businesses, history and organisation of the area. He was happy to share and keen to help those he could. On one occasion a young man from New Zealand with a family background in the area came through looking for his late grandfather's relatives. He spoke very little Chinese, when Chen and Wu heard, they arranged to meet him at the library as other volunteers could translate properly to and from English. Once the young man introduced his goal to Wu and Chen, they began ringing around local officials and friends with similar names to help check family records for his grandfather. The way they threw themselves into helping someone who they hardly knew with no real incentive was inspiring. They showed me that Global Citizenship and character, discussed throughout the Laidlaw programme, begin with kindness to strangers, a willingness to give up time for others, and working together for the good of us all.

Global Citizenship was embodied by the staff and volunteers at Stepping Stones in Shanghai. They help deliver important programmes for underserved children across China in English, Social Emotional Learning, and Digital Literacy. They know the intricacies of their beneficiaries needs, spending thousands of hours

improving the education of migrant kids in Shanghai, rural kids, kids with autism, and so many others. They show true global citizenship not by being rootless and transitory but instead, by knowing how to use the great advantages of global cooperation to make a long term change for their beneficiaries. By connecting volunteers from across China, and the globe to the students who need their support. Through stepping stones volunteers from Australia, India, China, the US, France, and Britain have all been connected to students who have benefited from each volunteers individual perspectives, unique skills, and experiences.

Working with Stepping Stones this summer was fantastic, and I can't thank them enough for all their help and their important work. However, there are things I could have improved on, when setting my goals for the summer, as well as in the planning and delivery more generally. For my first goal to create English resources I should have been more ambitious, aiming to deliver more resources, alongside a more concrete definition of what a successful lesson plan looks like. This would have made it a more specific goal that would have made monitoring easier and my lesson plans of a higher standard. For my both my teaching goals more concrete criteria for monitoring and standards for success should have been made. I lacked obvious checkpoints, with the exception of rather informal tracking through conversations with colleagues. During my time in China I should have put more emphasis on improving my language skills, while I came prepared with a solid base through evening classes, I could have made more out of this perfect opportunity to practice. I did improve my mandarin skill, definitely, but this was through flashcards, passive immersion in conversations, and more active learning in my last couple weeks. I should have taken more steps earlier on to make the most of this perfect opportunity for skill development. I still believe I achieved what I set out to achieve through my three SMART goals, but I could have raised bar and gone beyond the basic criteria if I had improved my goal setting at the outset. I will consider this when setting complex goals in the future and the Leadership in Action programme has been a great way to develop this aspect of my skillset.

More broadly I have been able to develop my skills and character over the Leadership in Action summer. I improved my Chinese language skills, improved my goal setting, improved my resilience by getting out my comfort zone, improved many facets of my character through the people I met and the

challenges I overcame, I have improved my public speaking and empathy through teaching. I'm proud of the work I was able to, while still knowing I could have done better. I feel extremely lucky to have had this experience and would wholeheartedly recommend the Leadership in Action portion of the Laidlaw Scholarship. A big thank you to the Laidlaw Foundation, Lord Laidlaw, the St Andrews Laidlaw team, Stepping Stones, St Andrews University, and everyone else who made my leadership in action summer a success.