

Reflections on the Workshop of 2008 North American Expatriate Youth English Teaching Volunteer Service Program in Taiwan

- From the Viewpoint of an Counselor

臺北縣信義國民小學 洪嘉宏老師

It's amazing how life works out! (Daniel Tsay, 2008)

激灑一整個夏季的藍瓣水花! (Jesse Hung, 2008)

The 2008 AID Volunteer Program (North American Expatriate Youth English Teaching Volunteer Service Program in Taiwan), conducted by both MOE (Ministry of Education) and OCAC (Overseas Compatriot Affairs Commission), was aimed at Assisting Individuals with Disadvantages (AID) in terms of English learning opportunities in remote rural areas of Taiwan, regardless of whether it is at the seashore or in the mountains. Compared with smaller number of admitted volunteers in previous AID Programs which had been implemented in years 2006 and 2007, an unprecedented growth in the number of applicants for 2008 AID Volunteer Program reached more than 900 from which 356 were recruited after careful screening. Meanwhile, the great majority of the admitted volunteers were high school or college students with high GPAs from prestigious academies such as Harvard University (See Table 1).

During July in this summer vocation, I served as a curriculum counselor in 2008 AID Volunteer Program to facilitate TESOL (Teaching English to the Speakers of Foreign Language) training for 15 AID volunteers who were designated to receive training in two training teams. In addition, I assisted AID superintendents in advising 15 volunteers during their subsequent weeks of teaching service and as well facilitated their accommodation to living conditions of their assigned elementary schools right after their training workshop finished. My experiences from, and preliminary study on, AID Programs culminated in this essay in order to shed light on some issues.

TABLE 1 Group Profile of AID Volunteers (Class A, B, & C))

Grade Year	Male	Female	Total
10 th Grade	8	15	23
11 th Grade	61	63	124
12 th Grade	47	55	102
University Freshman	26	22	48
Sophomore	12	15	27
Junior	3	10	13
Senior & Graduate	5	14	19
Total Volunteers			356

Source: AID Website

According to my observations, these volunteer teachers were enthusiastic about, and dedicating themselves to, their teaching service. For this reason, many pupils of the assigned schools, benefiting from the solid bonds and valuable friendship with their volunteer teachers and pupils else during teaching weeks, were provided with recognition of how English could help them touch the world and of what a beautiful global perspective could be delicately and finely woven into their native nature and nurture. Namely, these pupils were motivated and inspired through the AID Program. The volunteers, meanwhile, learned from their young learners and in this case had a different outlook on how life worked out. In a nut shell, the achievements of AID program in some ways exceeded their initial expectation (See Figure 1)

FIGURE 1



Photo by Teresa Chan

A conscientious volunteer teacher could barely take a rest at the break time after her second period. She was responsible for more than twenty-five pupils with her partner on their each regular working day, which consisted of six periods and lunch time, along with breaks and recess.

Nevertheless, despite the impressive accomplishments by AID Program, some function in mechanism of AID Program seemingly should be refined. As a counselor who contacted each member of AID Program (e.g., officials, guest speakers, school staff, volunteers, and other counselors), I was in an adequate position to provide a different perspective on how AID machine functioned.

AID Program obviously was confronted with latent rigorous challenges and risks: which were the imperfect coordination of the collaborative teamwork among AID departments and the training strategies in the workshop prior to their teaching service. Firstly, AID Program technically comprised various departments (e.g., MOE, OCAC, China Youth Corps., Military Boys Section, and assigned schools) and most of their department members enthusiastically exerted themselves to the utmost. Lamentably the collaboration and coordination of these AID colleagues and departments ended up with weakness in harmony and compatibility, which nullified their endeavors.

In addition, those elaborately prepared training curricula in the workshop seemingly did not succeed in effectively transmitting instrumental teaching skills, materials, and methods, to volunteer teachers. Teaching demonstrations and opportunities of teaching skills practices and rehearsals were insufficiently provided with and a gap therefore occurred and hindered their employment of these teaching skills, materials and/ or teaching methods. Consequently AID Program volunteer teachers could neither efficiently absorb the lessons nor effectively integrate and employ which into their subsequent actual teaching, as evidenced by many volunteer teachers' incapability in individual instruction and curricula design as well as numerous AID Program counselors' observations, along with my interviews with volunteers and faculty from many assigned schools.

A typically central issue in the feedbacks by numerous volunteers, who were skeptical about the training workshop, was as follows:

“With so few tutors, volunteers didn't get much individual attention, and with uncharismatic guest speakers that failed to interest volunteers, people began conversations with friends that grew into entire teams simply ignoring the speaker and having absolutely no clue what was going on.”

Some of their counterparts added that the week-long training in the workshop was “a waste a time” in that the lecturing was boring and not able to be applied to their actually teaching in diverse settings.

Most of the provided training curricula, when valued from an unbiased view, were basically with high quality in terms of their profound frameworks of TESOL theories and/ or professional presentations of teaching experiences and documents. The imperfectness of the training workshop very possibly lay in how the said abundant curricula was instructed as well as how the training workshop was scheduled, with considerable resources and lectures along with periods excessively imposed (See Table 2).

These Amateur English teachers (even they were native speakers), were never expected to necessarily teach as well as, or better than, those experienced competent teachers, especially after merely a week-long training. Teaching training prior to subsequent teaching in this case played a crucial role in well preparing amateur teachers for their subsequent teaching. However, the AID Program Curriculum Department still could do more to satisfy the requirement of their teaching service providing with more practical training.

Moreover, except the immersion in tremendous lectures all day long, these young volunteer teachers, according to their intensive schedule in the training workshop, were afterward thrust into their assignments, which were comprised of a two-week teaching plan and an extra lesson plan for a period. Two to four volunteers were required to cooperatively account for a lesson plan and a teaching plan designed for a class. Usually not until late evening did numerous of volunteer teachers suspend their teaching plan on account of bed check. And many of them stayed up keeping on doing their 'homework' at nights. It was even absurd for a sophisticated teacher to complete the feasible teaching project with essential quality, let alone amateur volunteer teachers.

Some teaching plans by volunteer teachers were even abandoned by their assigned school administrations in that these experienced schools had designed other teaching plans beforehand without any AID member else informed. These experienced assigned schools which were fully aware of the defect of the training course designed their teaching plan and curriculum in advance mainly because they had participated in AID Program before while their counterparts which had no idea of what had happened in the training week regarded their volunteers as well-trained teachers and anticipated much. This phenomenon occurred obviously owing to the imperfect harmonious coordination among departments and assigned schools of AID Program. As a result, the success of the two-week-long teaching heavily depended on how proficiently the assigned schools took emergency measure as well as how popular and talented the volunteer teachers were. I am deeply concerned about what was happening if neither of the foregoing prerequisites existed.

TABLE 2 2008 Workshop for teaching in Elementary Schools (Class A)

Date/Time		July 6 th Sunday	July 7 th Monday	July 8 th Tuesday	July 9 th Wednesday	July 10 th Thursday	July 11 th Friday	
M	07 : 00	AID Staff Check in	Get Up					
	08 : 00 ~ 08 : 40		Breakfast					
	08 : 40 ~		Get Ready					
	1 st Period 09 : 00 ~ 09 : 50	AID Staff Check in	Introduction of Training Program & Daily Rules	Theme Based Teaching Planning Part 1	Theme Based Teaching Planning Part 2	Teaching Resource Sharing	Teaching Demo and Sharing Part 2	
	2 nd Period 10 : 00 ~ 10 : 50							Opening Ceremony
	3 rd Period 11 : 00 ~ 11 : 50	AID Staff Meeting	Group Photographing				Panel Discussion & Closing Ceremony	
R	12 : 00 ~ 14 : 00	Lunch & Break (AID Staff Meeting)					Lunch	
A	4 th Period 14 : 00 ~ 14 : 50	AID Volunteers Check in	Sharing from AID Summer Camp 2007	From Phonics to Reading	Song and Music	Teaching Demo and Sharing Part 1	Leaving for the School	
	5 th Period 15 : 00 ~ 15 : 50							
	6 th Period 16 : 00 ~ 16 : 50	Teaching Experience Sharing						
	17 : 00 ~ 18 : 00	Dinner & Break (AID Staff Meeting)						

	7 th Period	18 : 30 ~ 20 : 20	Welcome Party & Grouping	Teaching and Lesson Planning	Course Design Practice	Summer Camp Curriculum Design	Farewell Party	
E	20 : 30~	Shower & Laundry						
	22 : 00	Free time for rehearsals of ceremonies at your hosting schools						
	22 : 00~	Bed Time						

Source: AID Website

In sum, some recommendations are made as follows to meet the rigorous requirement of a more efficient and better organized summer camp for the prospective AID Programs. Firstly, pertinent refinement of the collaborated teamwork with efficient coordination should be tackled. In addition, how a better organized and integrated curricula design can be designed and implemented in order to practically and specifically equip future volunteer teachers with more competent teaching skills and classroom managing strategies is another central issue. Rather, teaching plan are strongly recommended to be predominantly guided by assigned schools and to be schemed out based on their school-based curricula (See Figure 2) as well as North American culture and language arts (e.g., slangs, idioms, and popular usages), with teacher representatives from assigned schools serving as advisors collaborating with curriculum counselors, curriculum lecturers, and volunteer teachers in training workshop. Finally, a prospective in depth ethnographical research on AID Program will further shed light on more meaningful issues.

FIGURE 2



Photo by Daniel Tsay

Four Volunteer Teachers and their pupils were ready for action in their adventure of river tracing, which was a famous school-based curriculum of a local school in Taipei County.