

Teaching English for Peace

Morocco

University of Alberta International House, Edmonton Alberta, Canada

University of Alberta International House Students who went to Morocco: *Caitlin Cobb (Canada); Alex Freeman (United States); Tinu Johnson (Canada/Nigeria); Nyamal Guet (Canada/South Sudan)*

University of Alberta International House Students who contributed to the project in Canada:

Nicole Webster (Canada/South Africa); Christa Jette (Canada/Mexico); Victoria Yeo (Canada); Yue Qin (China); Joyce Tani (Japan)

Independent Volunteers with the Creative Learning Project: *Maggie Wohlfarth (Canada);*

Andrew Fawcett (Canada)

<http://teachingenglishforpeace.blogspot.com/2993076>

Section I

Project Goals

Through three week-long summer camps, Teaching English for Peace aimed to enhance intercultural understanding and offer creative ways to teach and learn while fostering ideals of peace building and conflict resolution. By bringing in a team of “foreigners” who were able to bond with local children, the project was meant to change common perceptions and foster openness, curiosity, and cooperation.

Fundraising Efforts

Our team raised additional funds in two ways. First, we held many events at International House and raised about \$1500 through a “Hire a Hand” auction, a Valentine’s Fondue Night, selling Candy Grams, selling frozen meals, and sewing and selling 200 rice bags. Secondly, our project received a University of Alberta Lee Global Education Award for \$2100 that helped to cover travel expenses.

Project Details

Going into this project, we knew to expect things not to go according to plan, but we did not expect most of it to change. In the end, we delivered the three Peace Camps we had prepared for. However, a month before the project was to begin, we found out that our third school (of three) had cancelled. One week before we began, we found out that our second school had also cancelled even though we had confirmed the dates numerous times. Despite these setbacks, we did not let it get us down and we found two other interesting opportunities. The first was to work at a children’s home called the Haven. There, children all spoke English as their first language, so we decided to run a Leadership & Peace-Building camp. The second was to work at a language school with beginner and intermediate level English students. On the day of these camps however, we discovered that almost none of the children spoke English. So, we had to change our plans. While we used some of the materials we prepared, each camp was unique. In the end, this meant a lot more work though many more ideas were generated on how to use our curriculum.

Language barriers were also more difficult to deal with than we had expected, especially in the third camp where we were not prepared to be teaching from square one. In the first and third camps, the language barriers made it difficult for us to connect with the parents. Some commented to our helpers that they wished they could communicate freely with us and express their gratitude for what we were doing for their children. Nevertheless, we built good relationships with the teachers who said they gained a lot by working with us and were looking forward to implementing what they learned.

Another major cultural challenge was dealing with the aggressiveness of the children. Schoolyard and classroom fights were common and normal. In one of our schools, in the medina, some kids almost laughed when we would put a stop to the hitting or shouting that would go on. The mentality is “every man for himself,” something difficult to address with students in the medina, given language barriers. We made better progress with fighting at the Haven because we did not have the same language barriers.

Overall, when it came to things that worked well and did not work well, they changed with each camp. Using competitive games in the classroom for the medina camp worked really well at getting the children engaged. In contrast, at the Haven, we found competition to be more counter-productive when teaching teamwork and conflict resolution. As a result, we tried to remove the competition between two groups

and focused on teamwork. During a team building activity at the Haven, the children were getting frustrated and were arguing over how to solve it. One of the girls then said “arguing isn’t going to help us get this done—we need to work together!” The other children then quieted down, nodding in agreement. Often times an activity would work perfectly with one group of students and not at all with another. Hardly anything was predictable or consistent so the team was kept on their toes during all of the camps, never knowing how each group of students would respond.

That said, the main thing that we learned during the first camp, which we applied to all of the camps, was dividing the children up by age. Ideally, we wanted the older and younger kids to do the activities together until we realized that the aggressiveness of the older kids was too overpowering for the younger ones. Once we split the groups however, we saw better teamwork.

Finally, having such a large project team was rewarding but came with its own challenges. Different team members were able to adapt to the new circumstances in Morocco much easier than others, and culture stress showed itself in different ways. By the third camp, our team was quite tired out, and had to overcome illness, homesickness, and challenging team dynamics while presenting a high-quality program that still garnered much positive feedback from the children, teachers and parents.

We worked with over 75 children (and their parents, indirectly), co-taught with four Moroccan teachers, and led a Teacher’s training session with four Moroccan teachers. The impact of Teaching English for Peace does not stop here. Being in an educational setting and in the hearts and minds of children will carry the program into attitudes long into the future. More directly, the owner of Amira Alla Aisha (the medina school) said he wanted to see our program run in two of his other schools across the country. Parents were very happy with the program and many wished we could have expanded it to include more ages. With continued involvement by the hosting teachers and at least one of our team members, we will continue to run English Camps in the years to come, furthering the long-term goals of building peace through positive and deliberate intercultural interactions.

Section II

Defining peace; Contributing to peace; Change in us and how we see the world

Living in peace means that people can respect the humanity of one another and, in doing so, do not seek to harm them. Living in peace does not mean people are necessarily happy with one another, their actions, or their opinions. It is possible to not respect someone for the choices they make but to still respect their humanity.

In the short term, we built peace by giving students, teachers, parents, and volunteers opportunities to interact with one another, see each other’s cultures in a different light, and share their stories with others. Students also practiced ways to decrease conflict by reinforcing teamwork and respect. In the longer term, these new perspectives may lead to different courses of action. Given the tensions that still exist between the east and the west, this shared experience offers a peaceful alternative to media perspectives.

This project greatly impacted all of the team members. We learned that head-knowledge and experience are very different. For example, we know that every society is composed of individuals yet we will still make stereotypes. In Morocco, the team was able to see the individuality in those we met and how it was not possible to make assumptions about all of them. This was also the first time that many of our team members had experienced life outside of North America and Europe. From the challenge of killing a rat together, to that of facing our false expectations of what teaching children of a different culture might be like, and handling a constantly changing game-plan, we gained immense personal awareness of how we might behave in similarly unpredictable circumstances. I am sure that we will be learning from this experience for many years to come.

We were reminded that:

Communication in the form of body language, spoken language, team dynamics and more, are all key to the strength and success of relationships. The better your genuine communication, the better your trust. –Nyamal Guet

Teaching English for Peace: Interacting in the classroom



Teaching English for Peace: Parents and teachers, celebrating



Teaching English for Peace: A collective peace puzzle

