

Example 17

Nurturing humanistic qualities in students through an experiential tour to a mountainous region on the Mainland

Cognitio College (Hong Kong) has organised an experiential tour to a mountainous region on the Mainland for Secondary 3 and 4 students to help them foster a concern for the well-being of people living in poverty areas through personal experience, reflect on their values and attitudes towards life and cultivate contentment and gratitude. On the last day of the event, the school has arranged visits to historical sites and a museum in the city to enrich students' learning in Chinese History. During their three-day stay in the city, the students also has the opportunity to experience changes in urban life brought about by the reform and opening-up on the Mainland, which has also expanded the gap between urban and rural areas – an issue our country has to address in its development process.

Before the tour, students participated in a repair training programme organised by Engineers without Borders to learn the use of simple repair tools and maintenance procedures and to perform simple repair jobs. During the experiential tour, students were assigned maintenance tasks based on their abilities.



A student participating in feeding livestock.

During their six-day experiential tour, the students were impressed by their visits to local schools and exchanges with local students, and their stay at the homes of villagers where they experienced rural life such as farming and feeding livestock.

During the process, they were moved by the local students, who despite living in a difficult environment, remained optimistic and adopted positive attitudes towards learning. This experience fostered kindness and concern for others in the students and inspired them to reflect on their own attitudes towards learning and life.

Happiness is just that simple.

When we visited a primary school, we played games with the students, and I got immense pleasure from their smiles and forgot all about my everyday troubles. I realised that happiness is just that simple and easy to come by. We really don't have to be upset by trivial matters.

~ Student's reflection ~

A student playing games with local primary school students.



A villager's house.



Happiness is not determined by how much you own.

In the mountainous regions of Guangxi, there is a lack of resources and travel is inconvenient. You have to climb mountains or spend hours walking to the market simply to buy groceries. The schools are usually poorly equipped, but the students are industrious. They know that studying is the only way to break out of poverty. They were very happy to receive small gifts from us. This reflected their contentment with life, and it led us to reflect on our attitudes living in a well-off environment. We came to understand that we should not complain about life and should treasure the opportunity to study in a favourable learning environment.

~ Student's reflection ~

Contentment brings happiness.

I have learned from this tour that Guangxi's primary and secondary students study hard even in a poor environment, but we are vulnerable to the lure of materialism.... We tend to pursue materialism. Are we taking our good fortune for granted?

~ Student's reflection ~



Students staying in a villager's home.

The students felt happy and satisfied in working to help local students improve their learning environment despite their lack of professional repair skills.

Little power, big blessings

The primary school is poorly equipped, but the students study hard without complaint in a harsh environment.... With the guidance of the accompanying volunteer mentors, we fixed the old, broken doors, windows and desks in the school. Even though we were "green", we were satisfied and happy with what we had done for the school.

~ Student's reflection ~



A student painting a window frame for a primary school in the mountainous region.

The teacher leading the tour and the accompanying volunteer mentors say that the exchanges with people encountered during the tour enable the students to become mature and to learn how to work with others. When they talked with local students, they showed tenderness, care and respect.

Ms Yu Nga Lai, the teacher in charge of the experiential tour and the panel chairperson of Chinese History, believes that the experiential activities have enlivened the knowledge students acquired in their Chinese History classes. She states that the students have also demonstrated interest in and concern for the lives of ancient Chinese people. All of the students' experiences arouse their interest in Chinese History.

Students viewing the waxworks in the museum.



Not so difficult to enhance historical literacy in students.

In Chinese History classes, I often tell my students that China is a country built on agriculture. Living in the city, students know little about this concept. However, after living in the countryside for just two days, they learned about China's peasants, rural areas and agriculture and realised the importance of farming to the Chinese people. This way, the concept that China is a country built on agriculture was brought to life.

When visiting the museum, students showed special interest in the exhibits on the lives of ancient Chinese people. For example, seeing the waxwork of a Qing dynasty official talking to a Westerner, they asked many questions about the lifestyle and conditions of people at that time, such as how Chinese people in the Qing dynasty communicated with Westerners. Given that the students were so interested and asked such questions, I felt that their interest in history and historical literacy were enhanced in just a few days.

~ Ms Yu's reflection ~

If you are interested in humanistic qualities, read also Examples 1, 13, 18 and 50.