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Exploring Chiang Mai, Thailand

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Exploring Chiang Mai

Megan Zsorey and Linh Le



About Chiang Mai



- Chiang Mai is in Northern Thailand and was once part of a separate country called Lanna
- Because of the difference in history, there is a distinct culture, which we found to be reflected through the food (my favorites were the yellow egg noodle curry and a spicy pork dish)
- There are huge outdoor markets—one of the biggest is within the ancient walls of the imperial city

EarthRights International School



EARTHRIGHTS INTERNATIONAL

Organization:

- non-governmental, non-profit.
- legal actions to end abuses of human and environmental rights.

School

- Students: lawyers, teachers, activists, community leaders.
- Goal: give training and empower students to make changes.

The Internship



- For our internship, we worked with the students at the EarthRights School on developing their English skills
- We sat in on classes where we learned about land rights and human rights issues affecting the people of the Mekong Region
- The students we worked with were from Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, so we had a very diverse classroom





Traveling to Tha Ta Fang Village

- Our class trip to Tha Ta Fang Village was one of the most memorable experiences I've ever had
- Tha Ta Fang is a very rural village along the Salween River
- We visited to learn about the earth rights abuses the people are facing due to policies of the Thai government, as well as the potential construction of a dam on the Salween River



Teaching adult ESL learners as community leaders

Linh Le

Educational Studies, Illinois Wesleyan University

EarthRights International (ERI)

...is a nongovernmental, nonprofit organization that seeks to end abuses of environmental rights and human rights through taking legal actions and training community leaders. The organization merged their EarthRights School (ERS) Myanmar and ERS Mekong in 2017. Its program consists of classroom lessons from staff and alumni of the program, field trips to Mekong communities, and, lastly, a two-month field work period in their home country.



16 students from 5 countries: Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Vietnam, learning about community organizing. (Photo by ERI)

Pedagogy Of The Oppressed

The school is founded on the premise proposed by Paulo Freire: "Problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation." That is putting power and trust in the people to organize themselves and find the solution. For instance, students went on a field trip to Tha Ta Fang village in northern Thailand. During this trip, students attended talks about anti-hydropower dam campaigning, visited rotational farming sites, learned about a sustainable way of life, and completed interviews with community leaders. Students were inspired to build strong networks to voice their opinion on a national level, and respect local knowledge for its ecological and cultural importance.

Perception on English's importance

"ERI is the only organization I know that teaches about human rights and community organizing in English. I study English because it is an international language, and I can learn about situations outside of my country", shared by Poe Htoo, a Burmese student of ERS. Another Thai student, P.Suwat, said "We need manpower and connections with other countries when we campaign." Recognizing the need for global cooperation and awareness in advocacy, the course at ERS is taught entirely in English, and students have to complete assignments in English. As an intern, I am expected to provide ESL support and give extra English classes for students.

ESL and Affirmative Learning

The goal to teaching diverse group of adult learners should be to affirm their identities and support their individual goals. Most students came to ERS to improve their ability to communicate in English as their biggest motivation. Using Communicative Language Speaking strategies, ESL speakers should be equipped to communicate effectively in real-life situations and focus on content rather than accuracy through practicing conversational English, sharing about themselves and their cultures, and role-playing possible situations at work (Rymniak, 2011). In addition, considering students as "whole language learners," we create independent learners through writing personal goals and choosing curriculum (Schwarzer, 2009). Not only do we work with individuals, but we also foster a positive learning community. "Other students teach me and correct me when I am wrong, so I learn a lot from them." – said Samnang, a student from Cambodia.



Interview with the women religious group's leader in Tha Ta Fang village about women leadership and participation in the community. (Photo by ERS)



A student demonstrating Laos traditional way of wearing scarf. (Taken by author)



Students presented on a human rights abuse case, applying what they learned from UDHR. (Taken by author)

During one of the English classes, students played *Taboo* with the help of a facilitator. (Photo by author)



Reflection

This internship has been a challenging yet rewarding experience. As I stayed in a foreign country with a group of culturally diverse students and staff, I learned about different cultures, sub-cultures, and necessary integration skills to become a successful global citizen. Also, I had a chance to engage in a professional work environment at ERS, experiment with different teaching strategies and receive feedbacks from students and staff at ERS. The experience truly expanded my understanding and skills in teaching adult learners. On the other hand, my exposure to students' training as community leaders taught me that a leader needs to be compassionate about the livelihood of the community. The leader must also bear the great responsibility of building solidarity and trust with the people before taking any action. Above all, the internship further reinforces my mission of an IWU future educator – to become a teacher scholar for social justice.

Things to Reflect On



- It is very easy to travel in Asia
- People are essentially the same, even if we all speak different languages and have different cultural customs
- Development is good and bad, and the level of development of a particular place doesn't determine the intelligence or value of the people living there

Things to Reflect On



- Putting yourself out there will earn you friends and unforgettable memories!
- Teaching adults is just as much fun as teaching kids.
- Teaching for social justice is the kind of work that I am inspired to do in the future.

Thank you for listening!

