



English Acquisition Project

Project Completion Report - by Karma Tensum

The most important phase of TCEF's English Acquisition Project, giving training to Tibetan teachers to help students acquire English faster has concluded successfully. Recall that, phase 1 was the initial travel to India by Sara Buckerfield and Valerie Hellermann in October 2013 to study current practices in Tibetan classrooms.

Travel to India

Sara left for India on Friday, April 11, 2014. Valerie, very kindly made initial travel arrangements through Ama Travels to make sure that Sara's team had a great driver and car for the long road journey from Delhi to Dharamsala.

Meeting with officials of the Tibetan Department of Education, Dharamsala

On Monday, April 14, Sara and Tsering Phuntsok, Director of Kyitsel-liing Tibetan Children's Education Center, Clement Town, N India, who represented TCEF, had a scheduled meeting with a delegation of the Tibetan Department of Education, headed by Mr. Ngodup Tsering, the

Education Secretary. At the meeting, Sara shared a brief outline of her four day workshop, emphasized the need for language acquisition at an early age and discussed the possibility of introducing standardized assessment for English Language. She gave the DOE samples of the Language Assessment System (LAS), an English proficiency assessment.

Content of Workshop

Sara worked extremely hard to develop a content that is both professional and has the potential to immensely benefit the teachers at the workshop. Sara and I shared multiple e mails and telephone calls collaborating on the content. While Sara is the undisputed expert in the field of language acquisition, from my side, I offered whatever insight I had on Tibetan education in exile, the English standards of both the students and teachers in Tibetan schools. Throughout our conversation, my focus was on developing strategies that will translate to practical benefits for the teachers when they go back to their classrooms.

Right from the start of our discussions, I was most excited about Sara's focus on increasing student participation and talk in English to help acquire English faster.

TCEF and Sara are also grateful to Sara's friend and co author of her powerpoint presentations - Nancy Eberhardt. Nancy is also a TCEF sponsor helping Kunga Chodhen at Kyitsel-ling, Clement Town, N India.

Who attended the workshop?

26 TGTs (trained graduate teachers) from 15 different Tibetan schools attended the workshop. A list of the teachers created by the Tibetan DOE is attached/ enclosed.



The Workshop Through Images



Ngodup Tsering, Education Secretary, DOE, and Sara address the press at the opening of the workshop. Mr. Tsering Phuntsok who represented TCEF is to the extreme left.





Sara taught her heart out at the workshop. The feed back from the teachers clearly showed how much they appreciated her diligence and commitment to the teaching task at hand.





Sara just loved all the teachers. She found them totally engaged, diligent and committed. She was also surprised that a number of them were actively engaged in discussions and ‘totally blew away the stereotype of shy Tibetans’, she remarked.





Taking a well deserved break. Notice the married ladies in their colorful aprons.



The Tibetan Department of Education was very happy with the workshop. Participants were awarded certificates after their training together with the traditional Tibetan scarfs or khata(s).

Press/ Media Coverage of Workshop

The opening ceremony of the workshop was covered by Tibet online TV. The link to that coverage is at: <http://tibetonline.tv/videos/1984/15-apr-2014-tibetonline-tv-news>

How did the Workshop Go?

A: Feed back from Sara Buckerfield

Throughout the duration of her workshop, Sara and I have been in constant e mail touch. Sara is genuinely honored and very excited about this workshop. In her blog www.saratcef.wordpress.com, she describes this experience as “a high point in my educational and personal journey.” In yet another e mail she asked, “When can I go back?”. Pema Thang, the hotel where she stayed owed her a little money from her initial deposit. Sara told them to keep it because she’ll be coming back!

B: Feed back from the Tibetan Department of Education

I received a warm e mail from Mr.Ngodup Tsering, the Education Secretary of the Tibetan Govt. in Exile to thank TCEF for this project and to say that the workshop went very well. In a lighter vein he wrote that a few teachers (at the workshop) felt it was too short, which he interpreted to signify that they really enjoyed it! I also received an official letter from the Department of Education, signed by Mr. Tsering Dhondup who was the coordinating officer for the project. A copy of that letter is attached/enclosed.

C: Feed back from the teachers who attended the workshop

For the project, perhaps the most important feed back is from the 26 teachers that attended the workshop. Before Sara left for India I sent with her two TCEF evaluation forms for all teachers to fill - an objective evaluation form where at one glance we could get a sense of how participants felt about the workshop and then a short subjective written evaluation form. On her return, Sara promptly mailed them back to me and I’m happy to share the feed backs received.

Please review the summary of the objective evaluation report. I have 25 paper copies and the following is a summary. The figures in red represent the number of teachers who checked that particular column.

Professional Training Workshop by Sara Buckerfield, April 2014



for TCEF in collaboration with DOE, Dharamsala .

Summary of Evaluation Survey of Teachers at the Workshop

Responses received from the teachers to the survey below. The numeral under each section indicates the number of teachers that checked that particular box.

1. Do you think your understanding of how children learn Academic English will be useful to you as a teacher?

5 YES! It will be very useful	4 Yes. Fairly useful	3 Somewhat useful	2 Not really sure it will be useful	1 Not useful at all
22	3	0	0	0

After this workshop, how confident are you of increasing the amount of student talk in your English language classrooms?

5 Very confident	4 Fairly confident	3 Only slightly confident	2 Not really sure	1 Not confident at all
13	12	0	0	0

2. Did you find the strategies to increase reading comprehension useful?

5 YES, Very useful	4 Fairly useful	3 Somewhat useful	2 Not really sure	1 Definitely not
23	2	0	0	0

3. Do you think a similar workshop for primary school teachers would be useful?

5 YES, Very useful	4 Fairly useful	3 Somewhat useful	2 Not really sure	1 Definitely not
24	1	0	0	0

The same absolutely positive responses are also reflected in the longer essay type evaluation form that each of the teachers filled in. Every teacher responded to say that the workshop was very helpful to them and that they very much hoped that we could do similar workshop to train primary school teachers. So, overall, great feed back from the teachers.

What next? Where do we go with this project from here ?

Sara is enthusiastic about the teachers that she trained. She wants to further help them if they have any problems, especially in implementing her strategies when they are in their classrooms. The plan is to set up an interactive window addition to the TCEF web site, so that teachers in India can post all the questions to Sara and she can respond to them. Sara is committed to the sustainability of this project and has assured us that from her side she can and will devote whatever time it takes to respond to the questions.

Also, both Sara and Tsering, during the workshop and in conversations afterwards, have identified a few teachers from the group who they feel have true potential to be project support teachers or resource persons. Sara can use this interactive window to continue to be in touch with them, and if necessary, give them additional instructions, so that we can hopefully groom a core group of Tibetans who can then train other teachers down the line.

This workshop was for middle school teachers. Ann, I know that you and the Good Works Institute believe strongly that children learn a second language best when they are younger. One of the feed backs that we sought from the teachers was, if they felt a similar workshop would benefit primary school teachers and everyone thought it would truly benefit them. So, if the TCEF board approves, we could initiate plans for Sara to conduct a similar workshop for those teachers. At this time, Sara is enthusiastic and happy to return to Dharamsala!
