

**Of the extra-curricular activities, personal activities or work experiences you have described, which has meant the most to you and why?**

Being a volunteer tutor at a local government school during the summer of 2006 taught me how to communicate with people from different backgrounds and expectations. The students that I had to tutor did not only fail their English, but also lack the motivation to learn. In my family, trying our best at all times is an unspoken expectation, but the students that I tutored did not even want to listen, let alone trying their best. The tutoring task was more challenging as I did not have any prior teaching experiences and the 3 classes that I had to manage each have 20 students.

Teaching was impossible during the first several of days because classroom discipline did not exist. As I came from a school where classroom discipline was taken for granted, I then thought the chaos was because I was not well prepared. The situation did not change no matter how thorough I prepared. I quickly realized the problem was because I did not establish connection with the students. I imagined a more interactive way of teaching might be more effective in engaging the students.

Instead of feeding students with vocabularies in a one-way manner like their teachers did, I challenged them to memorize twenty words in ten minutes every day and practiced what was learned through games such as hangman and pictionary. Instead of asking the students to read out loud on stories that were assigned but were unrelated to them, we sat in a circle and chatted about their school life to brush up their oral. As time went by, the students' attitude changed for better and I began to gain respect from them. The sense of satisfaction was beyond description as I witnessed the students changed from unwilling to listen to taking the initiative to try speaking English among themselves! As I looked back, I realized the students did not have the confidence to speak English in front of a complete stranger. A trusting relationship was vital in bridging the gap between myself and the students and this could not be achieved without observation and trying. At the end of the program, over 90% of the students passed the English test assigned by the school and were allowed to proceed with their studies.

I was happy that I was able to show the students that English could be fun and they could improve their English if they were willing to try. I learnt that patience and understanding is very important when communicating with someone. Also, I should keep thinking of alternative solutions to overcome challenges I encountered.