



RCEF Attends Clinton Global Initiative Asia

RCCEF was invited to the Clinton Global Initiative Asia, held by former U.S. President Clinton to bring together Asian government, business, and civil society leaders.

An expansion of the Annual Meeting in New York, President Clinton is crossing borders to convene conferences in different regions across the globe. The first of these meetings was held in December 2008 in Hong Kong centering on three main areas: Education, Energy & Climate Change and Public Health. Several hundred Asian leaders of corporations, governments and non-governmental organizations attended to explore ways each of them can strengthen the “culture of social and global responsibility” and to create collaborative solutions to perennial problems such as those relating to education, poverty and urbanization.

Kiel Harell and **Diane Geng** represented RCEF in attending two days of panel discussions and interactive working sessions. Kiel and Diane met new potential partners and learned about exciting innovations in Asian education.



A Note from the Field

Final exams fever affected everyone at Guan Ai over the past month. While test scores are only one narrow measure of learning, we believe that better teaching should translate into students who can apply their knowledge and skills in the real world *and* on tests. Thus, improving test scores for all Guan Ai students is an important goal for RCEF.



At the same time, we will not lose sight of our core goal: students’ well-rounded development. Everyday, Guan Ai students engage in many extra-curricular activities and teachers are constantly improving their teaching methods. For example, this month, students had a chance to create their own skits and presentations on a school-wide theme: “Conservation.” One of the most remarkable moments was when a fourth-grade boy who barely spoke or looked people in the eye last semester, stood up confidently in front of the class and recited an entire poem by himself.

We look forward to reporting more such stories and progress in 2009. Thanks for your support!

*Diane Geng
RCEF Co-Executive Director*



RCEF Staff in front of Guan Ai School

Meet the RCEF Teaching Coaches

RCCEF Teaching Coaches are full-time staff at Guan Ai. They partner with local teachers to improve teaching methods and develop innovative curriculum. **Ron Sung** and **Kiel Harell** started their jobs in September 2008. Now, with a semester of experience, they share what they've learned and upcoming plans.



RON SUNG

宋云荣 is from the United States and earned a Bachelor's degree from the University of Texas at Austin. After graduation, he was a middle school

math teacher in Oakland before joining RCEF. He works with Math and Science teachers at Guan Ai.

What is a typical day for you at Guan Ai?

I make a concerted effort to observe all science classes and as many math classes as possible. After breakfast usually there are two science classes and a math class. I try to consult with teachers before each observation to see how I can improve their class or what methods I think should be used. Before lunch there's student reading time, which is my favorite part of the

day because I have a chance to play table tennis, which was set up after the community service class raised money to build it last month.

There is usually a science class after lunch. I then try to figure out what math teachers are doing for their late afternoon and evening classes, often times persuading them to use activities or games after a day of sitting in class. Twice a week, I teach Chinese Yo-Yo at 4:30 PM during the activity class time. Otherwise, I do some paperwork and relax until school gets out at 8 PM.

At night, I give the teachers feedback and we discuss lesson plans for the next day.



Ron's Chinese Yo-yo students

What do you like best about your job?

The best part about my job is working with teachers and thinking of ways to engage students in learning. The long hours don't faze me.

Any new discoveries?

I thought that kids in rural China would all be obedient and quiet, but they're not, which is good. I find a great many similarities between my middle school students in inner-city Oakland and elementary school students in rural China. Kids are kids wherever you go, and you really have to understand them to get them to learn.

I also found similarities between working with teachers and working with students. When I want teachers to perform a certain way, I can't just tell them. Improving teacher and student

performance in a classroom both involve soft nudges and rational explanations for everything. Teachers, like students, need structure and guidelines from which to work and succeed.

Tell us about a student who has made great progress, in your eyes.

Guan Ai School and RCEF try to implement student-centered learning, which is very different from the norm in China, where teachers lecture and explain this and that for an entire class period and hand out assignments for students to complete during the next class period. The results stink, at least for those in the bottom half of the class, those who simply don't learn in the traditional format.

Fourth grader Zhang Long has made incredible progress in our system. This kid, when he entered our school near the end of the last school year was without knowledge of pinyin and addition, and now discusses topics with other students in his 4th grade group and raises his hand to answer questions. By no means is he 'caught up' with his peers, but Zhang Long epitomizes the success of our school's philosophy of student-centered learning as the key to engaging all students to learn.

What are a couple of the biggest challenges you face and how do you deal with them?

Guan Ai has a number of young, inexperienced teachers who struggle in the classroom. As a recent first-year teacher, I offer them my full support in thinking through lesson plans, self-reflection, and classroom management. They require patience and fresh ideas to engage students' learning.

We also have a number of veteran teachers who only teach in the above-mentioned traditional methods of lecture and individual work.

At first, I practiced my debate skills with them; negotiating and breaking down their logic of a rigid classroom environment, but this was pointless. Instead, I shifted towards working on student-centered projects with them, letting them teach how they teach, but also letting students experience hands-on activities.



Ron works with Teacher Sun

What major plans do you have for next semester?

For the next semester, I hope to make math as much fun as science already is. We've started some math projects, such as the friendship bracelet company and math board games, both of which have been tremendously successful so far. Best of all, even the veteran teachers enjoy doing them with the students.



KIEL HARELL works with English teachers at Guan Ai and conducts an English night class especially for teachers. He

is from the United States and earned a Bachelor's degree from the University of Minnesota, Morris with degrees in Political Science and Anthropology. For the last two years, he worked as a special education teacher in the Rio Grande Valley as a member of Teach for America.

What is a typical day like for you at Guan Ai?

My days at Guan Ai are spent mostly working with teachers, in

We have two English teachers on campus and I am in most of their classes during the week. Sometimes I am observing their lessons and other times I am actively participating in their classes. After the classes, we talk through what worked well and what things need to be changed in the future. When I'm not working directly with the teachers, I am preparing lessons for the adult English classes I head-up, in the evenings. Half of the Guan Ai teachers attend these classes.



Kiel helps the sixth graders test out the wood structures they made in Science class.

What do you like best about your job?

I love working with the teachers. I really enjoy giving them advice about their lessons and pointing out things that they can improve in their teaching. Sometimes I take over parts of their lessons to show them how I would approach teaching a certain set of vocabulary or grammar rule. Collaborating with other teachers is the best way to learn.

Any breakthroughs?

I've had some breakthroughs with communication. Both of the English teachers at Guan Ai participate in my adult English class in the evenings. Their conversational English has improved considerably and they seem more confident in their language skills.

If their progress continues, they will be very strong English speakers by the end of the year. This of course makes it easier for us to communicate, but it also makes them better English teachers.

Tell us about a student who has made great progress in your eyes.

There is a girl in fourth grade that instantly comes to mind when I think of student progress. While she is far from the top of her class, she has made major strides in her behavior. According to her past teachers (before she came to Guan Ai), she would often not even attend her classes, preferring instead to stay on the playground or hide somewhere else around campus.



At Guan Ai, she is always in her classes and generally well behaved. Knowing the student well, I believe the style of instruction at Guan Ai appeals to her

and she is able to, better grasp the content

because our classes are more participatory. Recently, one of the Guan Ai principals visited her home with a RCEF staff member. Her mother and grandmother reported that her behavior at home has also greatly improved. I'm excited to see where her progress leads during the next semester.

Kiel teaches English to students

What are a couple of the biggest challenges you face?

Even though Guan Ai's English classes are much more interactive than the other ones I have observed in China, it's still very difficult to get students to practice speaking as much as I would like. It has been a challenge this semester to get students (and



teachers) to become comfortable speaking with me. At the beginning of the year, the students were very nervous to try using English with me but now they come up to me during recess and practice. I try to speak to students outside of their classes so that they will be able to use the language beyond the walls of our classroom. Having several English speakers on campus, I think the students are now starting to really see the value of English as a communication tool.



What major plans do you have for next semester?

The 6th grade students will be working on new 'pen pal letters' for their friends at Trinity School in California. Expanding on this relationship, the 4th and 5th grade classes will be exchanging class letters with Trinity classes. I also plan to create some activities where the 5th and 6th grade students will visit the 3rd grade class to pass on some English to them. I will be re-launching the English corner at Guan Ai as well. I'm really looking forward to this because the students' vocabularies are really expanding. We will be able to do a lot more next semester. Hopefully, the English Corner students will be able to create some of their own dialogues to present to the regular English classes.

Reflection on Teaching: Computer Class for Villagers

Steven Liu, RCEF's Director of IT, delivered a computer literacy course in a Shandong village. Below are excerpts from his reflections. His full writings can be found on the RCEF Blog: blog.ruralchina.org.

The Value of Peer Teaching

The class has ten students of varying abilities, though none are very experienced. The plan is that this first class will go on to teach other villagers how to use computers, thereby increasing the uptake (purchases) of computers and raising the villagers' knowledge and skill levels in the process.



Mother and daughter learning team

Outlining what people need to learn is fairly easy (i.e. turning on the computer, word processing, browsing) but the devil is in the details. For instance, there are a lot of concepts that need to be taught for typing, such as creating a new line of text, using the shift button to access various punctuation marks, and copying and pasting. If it is your first time teaching computer usage, you might easily overlook these things, but if you do then you're

in for a world of pain. You will soon have a classroom full of students pulling you left and right, asking, "How do I move the thingy down to the next line?"



RCEF Intern Fan Guibin helping a student surf the web.

Recently at Guan Ai, we've been discussing a lot about how to get teachers to lecture less. They should quickly present the concepts once, and then let the students get on with figuring it out on their own. This works particularly well with computer classes, possibly because the students are so eager to press buttons and try things out. During a two-hour lesson, I spend little more than fifteen minutes explaining new functions.

Most of the time there really is no need to spend that long. Some students get it and some only kind of get it, but that's okay. As long as you have helped all students achieve even a fuzzy level of understanding then what you'll find is those that do get it will help those that don't. For example, they can teach them the steps of, say, how to create a border around their image. As a teacher, it makes my life a lot easier because I only need to step in every now and again when there is something they want to do that I have not yet taught them.

Of course I have used similar techniques when teaching English, but I can honestly say it has never worked quite as well. I'm curious as to why. One possible factor I have considered is the layout of the classroom. It is small, about four by two meters, and so

there is only space for one chair per computer. Everyone else has to stand up, which has the effect of encouraging those standing to roam about and spread the knowledge that they have picked up from other users. You could say they're information bees, spreading knowledge pollen!



Guan Ai teachers discuss the future

Guan Ai Strategy Meeting

Jiang Peng, a RCEF Teaching Coach, reflects on a meeting that he called to discuss Guan Ai's future with teachers.

So much goes on every day at Guan Ai School. Teachers are so busy they don't have enough time to consider their own futures, what kind of people they want to be in five years, or what the future of Guan Ai School will be. That's why, one evening after the students had gone to bed, I gathered all the teachers together to analyze the present situation and consider the future.

First, they split up into three groups and did a "SWOT Analysis" of Guan Ai School. This is a process of brainstorming Guan Ai's strengths and weaknesses and the opportunities and threats it faces. The results surprised everyone! The teachers came up with an analysis that covered nearly every aspect of Guan Ai's development.

- **Gain** parental and community support for our educational approach
- **Catalyze** reforms at surrounding schools by training their teachers
- **Develop** innovative curriculum that will exemplify the “Guan Ai Brand.”
- **Build bridges** with universities to close the gap between academic theories and practice.
- **Foster** teachers’ life-long learning so that all can become educational experts.

The next step is to devise realistic strategies for tackling these goals and I gave a demonstration on how to break down a long-term goal into realistic steps.

I believe that our teachers should become “Innovative Teaching Experts”. In other words, it is not enough just to have many years of teaching experience. They should have *innovative* teaching experience. Each teacher can hone a personal area of expertise in rural education.

Teachers at Guan Ai should not just have a lot of teaching experience. They should have innovative teaching experience.

Examples could include improving students’ reading and writing, coming up with effective practices for class management, or tutoring slower students. Each teacher should develop a strong suit and use his or her own interests as a way to focus and build up their teaching career. This is where Guan Ai’s future goals lie. Now, it just depends on whether or not we can achieve them!



Parents share tips with each other

Parents Talk

Guan Ai started a Parent Education Program in early December. The first meeting was a great success.

Each teacher helped to choose approximately twenty parents for the program, enlisting those who have been the most supportive and involved with their children’s education in the past. We view these training participants as potential members of a Parent Committee that will eventually participate in making school decisions.

With the help of RCEF staff, six teachers planned the meeting from beginning to end. Due to their efforts, the conference had a warm and positive atmosphere. A survey conducted at the end of the conference confirmed that the parents had a positive outlook on the meeting.

The meeting was split into three major parts. First, the teachers shared about their student-centered teaching methods and the school’s philosophy. Then, they discussed a common problem in rural families: parent-child communication. This is a problem we have heard many parents complain about in home visits. For example, one mother said that her



Teacher Yao Caimei presents

Daughter, a fourth-grader, proceeds to watch television all day whenever she returns home from school. Mother and daughter have often gone two weeks or longer without speaking to each other. Another couple returned home this year after working out of town for two years to find that their son and daughter had become entirely different people. Bewildered by their children’s uncharacteristically quiet behavior, the parents are at a loss for how to deal with the situation.

Teachers and parents broke into small groups to discuss the problem in more detail. The meeting imparted the school’s concern for family education to the parent attendees and gave them practical advice based on their peers’ and teachers’ personal experiences.

After the meeting, many parents stayed behind to talk with the teachers. Some parents even suggested that more meetings be held. We hope that this is only the beginning of a stronger relationship between parents and Guan Ai School.



Parents had a lot to say about communication problems with their children.

Open Positions

The positions are unpaid and no formal contract is signed. Applicants should send their application and CV/resume to recruiting@ruralchina.org. All positions are available immediately and open until filled. Applications will be considered on a rolling basis.

Materials Design

Time Commitment / Week: 2 hours

Duration: minimum 1 semester

Tasks: Help design promotional materials for RCEF that that we can publish and distribute, such as brochures, posters, T-shirts, and book-marks. You will get to contribute your thoughts on RCEF's present design, and what it should look like in the future.

Start Date: immediately

Monitoring and Evaluation Researcher

Time Commitment / Week: 4 hours minimum but varies depending on project demand

Duration: minimum 1 semester

Responsibilities/Qualifications:

- Familiarity with educational program evaluation methods
- Demonstrated ability to conduct educational research and evaluation
- Expertise and/or experience with qualitative and/or quantitative methods
- Broad theoretical background in rural China education
- Commitment to assigned tasks
- Capability to work independently and within teams as well as communicate efficiently in virtual environment

Start Date: immediately

Academic Relations

Coordinator

Time Commitment / Week: 4 hours minimum

Duration: minimum 1 year

Responsibilities/Qualifications:

- Establish and maintain long-term relationships with academic community (in education particularly) to seek inputs, organize dialogues, circulate information within committee;
- Broad theoretical background in rural China education;
- Excellent written and oral communication skills
- Capability to work independently and within teams as well as communicate efficiently in virtual environment

Start Date: immediately

Assistant IT Administrator

Time Commitment / Week: 6+ hours

Duration: Minimum one year, with possibility of promotion to paid, permanent role after one year.

Responsibilities/Qualifications:

RCEF is looking for an experienced web administrator to take on web administration responsibilities. The role can be fulfilled remotely, though there is an exciting opportunity to work 'on the ground' at one of our rural partner schools in Yongji, Shanxi Province.

Examples of duties entailed include the following:

- Keeping web application software up to date.
- Making CSS and PHP edits to alter the look and functionality of website, blog and gallery.
- Updating and maintenance of mailing list address books.
- Solving general technical problems RCEF staff and volunteers may be having with website and other applications.

Skills:

- Unix, and more specifically executing administration tasks via a Unix shell interface
- SQL
- HTML and CSS
- a high level programming language, including at least one of the following: Java, C++, Ruby
- Some knowledge of PHP would be an asset. If applicant is not familiar, he/she will be required to learn it.
- Excellent English reading ability and proficient spoken English a must.
- Ability to read and speak Mandarin Chinese at an intermediate level
- Teaching experience would be a plus so that you better understand the context RCEF works in

Should the applicant be qualified and also have the desire to work directly in a RCEF site in rural China, they would have the extra responsibility of training teachers how to use computers to research teaching topics and track student progress. RCEF provides housing and a modest local living stipend if the IT Assistant is based at a RCEF site.

The Rural China Education Foundation (RCEF) is a 501(c)(3) public charity registered in the U.S.A. Donations are tax deductible in the U.S.A. Our Employer Identification Number is 20-2753350

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