

活學活用的英語課

待熟悉學校的環境後，我比別的同學要多上一門課，就是ESL（第二語言是英語的學生的課）。

ESL是專門給不會講英文的學生上的課。同我一起上課的還有幾個同學，他們已經上了一個學期了。他們分別來自俄羅斯、印度、台灣等處。台灣的孩子和我一樣都講普通話，所以我們一見如故。

老師很有耐心，但是不許我們在課堂上講英語之外的其他任何語言。我們只有嘗試著用剛學到的一點英語來表達自己的意思。

北京的英語課主要是學國際音標和背單詞。只要背得熟練，就能考到好成績。但是並不知道學到的英語在日常生活中怎樣使用。現在上英語課主要是學會使用這門語言。

同其他各門課程一樣，英文課也是沒有課本，所以根本就沒有作業要

求背誦課文，也沒有學過國際音標。上課時老師會帶著我們唸一些單詞、句子，也給我們唸故事書。老師講話的速度要比其他課的老師慢許多，發音也比他們清楚。

上課的內容經常是根據需要來安排。比如在聖誕節前，就學很多有關聖誕節的詞彙：聖誕老人、鹿拉雪橇、聖誕樹、各種禮物的名稱等等和小故事。我們又說又唱，又玩又跳，全是這個內容。路上聽到的歌聲，商店門前的廣告，大家談論的話題都與聖誕節有關。回家打開電視，又有許多節目是有關聖誕節的，有很多機會去聽和設法理解，也有機會去講，去練習。

ESL課經常有家庭作業，但是要求不大一樣。大多數時間的家庭作業是畫畫。就是把老師白天講的內容用自己的想像畫出來。想怎樣畫就怎樣畫，畫得好壞都沒有關係，所以常常



Learning English

After getting familiar with the school environment, I had to take an extra subject, which was ESL (English as a Second Language).

ESL is a language program specially designed for those whose mother tongue is not English. The other students in my ESL class had started the course for a term already. They were from Russia, India, Taiwan, etc. Like me, the classmates from Taiwan knew how to speak Mandarin, so we became friends almost immediately.

The teacher was very patient, but did not allow us to speak any language other than English in class. Therefore, we were forced to try to use the limited English we had just learnt to express ourselves.

The English lessons in Beijing were mostly involved in learning phonetic symbols and reciting vocabulary: it was a matter of fact that if you were better at reciting, you would get better marks. However, this method of study did not teach us how to apply the English we had learnt in our everyday lives. Things were different in ESL — we learnt how to use the language.

Like other subjects, we did not have any textbook, so naturally we did not have any homework involving memorising, nor did we learn any phonetic symbols. In class, the teacher would lead us to pronounce some words and sentences, and read storybooks to us. The teacher would speak much slower and clearer than any other teachers in other lessons.

The lessons were designed specifically to satisfy our needs at different times. For example, prior to Christmas, we were to learn the vocabulary about the festival: "Santa Clause", "tobogganing", "Christmas tree", and the names of different types of gifts, stories, etc. Through singing, playing and dancing, we discussed everything related to Christmas, such as the songs we heard in the streets and the advertisements and posters on shop windows. At home, everything on TV was also related to Christmas. Therefore, we had many opportunities to listen, and attempt to understand, speak and practice the language.

Unlike what I had imagined, ESL did often have homework for us to complete; but the tasks were different.

我在溫哥華

是隨便塗鴉，亂畫一通。我不懂得這和學英語有甚麼關係，可是在畫的過程中，腦子裡也會不自覺地想到有關的詞句和老師講的話。有一次上課講了個冬天的故事，家庭作業要畫下大雪、堆雪人、滑雪、滑冰、圍巾、帽子等等，第二天又玩這些遊戲，很自然就記住了冬天的詞句。

除了ESL課，其他課都與當地學生一起上。雖然都是用英語講課，但這些課程都是教不同的知識，並不是專門教英語，老師對我一點照顧也沒有。能聽懂多少，學好學壞全靠自己。科學課中有關數、理、化的內容比國內淺多了，所以上這些課對當地學生來講比較輕鬆，對我可就不輕鬆。我又要去理解這些詞句的意思，又要去學有關知識，一開始像聽天書一樣，可是慢慢地就有進步了。

除了上面的課程，我還常去兩個圖書館。一個是學校的圖書館，一個是社區的圖書館。

學校每日下午兩點半就放學了，我常借很多書回家去讀。開始時借的小畫冊，大概與幼稚園的看圖識字差不多，以後借一些故事簡單的小畫書，再以後就可以看看同齡人想看的故事了。圖書館的書一個星期就到期，我常常一次就借五至六本。開始時這些書只看懂了五至六成，就該還了。我就還了再借，每天都用很多時間看這些書。

看電視也是學英文的好辦法，最初看電視與上課一樣完全不懂，看起來很費勁。但是天天看，天天聽，很多話反覆重複，慢慢就開了竅。

大約過了一個多月，我可以與同學進行簡單的對話。三個月後，日常的交流基本上可以應付了。按要求，ESL要上四年時間，但是學校很靈活，根據學生的英語程度，可以上的時間短些，也可以上更長時間。

當我上五年級的一天，也就是ESL上了一年多時，像往常一樣，上完了課，我正準備離開，老師走過來



Homework was mostly involved in illustrating (combined with our own imaginations) the contents of what we had learnt each day. We drew whatever we wanted, and the quality of our drawings did not matter. Initially, I did not understand how this could help us improve our English language skills. But drawing and illustrating did, however, unknowingly make us recapture the related phrases and sentences the teacher had uttered that day. Once, the teacher told us a story about winter, so for homework she asked us to illustrate snow, the making of a snowman, skiing, skating, scarves, hats, etc. The next day, we played these snow games and therefore, we quickly and naturally remembered the vocabulary regarding winter.

Apart from ESL, I took my other lessons with my local classmates. Although everything was taught in English, these lessons were not for teaching us English, but for all kinds of knowledge; therefore, I did not receive any special attention. How much I could comprehend, and whether I did well was all up to myself. The Mathematics and other science-related topics were all much easier than what I had learnt in China. Therefore, these lessons were all easy for the local

students, but not for me, as I had to attempt to understand the language while learning the knowledge at the same time. At first it was like listening to "words from heaven" which I could barely understand, but gradually I began to improve.

Apart from attending the above lessons in school, I often went to two libraries. One was the school library, and the other was the district's public library.

Each day school finished at 2:30 in the afternoon, which left me time to borrow books for reading at home. Initially, the picture books I took out of the libraries were kindergarten level (the ones that taught babies simple words). Later on, I started borrowing simple picture novels and finally, I could move on to get my hands on the books read by children of my age. The books from the library were usually due to return in a week's time, so I often borrowed five to six books at a time. First, I could only understand 50-60% of the contents of the books before I had to return them. However, I kept the momentum going and took out more books. Reading, therefore, became a major and very time-consuming part of my daily life.

Watching TV was also a great way to learn English. Initially, watching TV

我在溫哥華

高興地對我說：“祝賀你，以後不用來了。但並不說明我的英文很好。因為當地孩子學習英文，也和國內的孩子學習語文課一樣，是作為一門文化和知識來學習，整個小學、中學都要學習，即使作為專業大學生也要學習。這說明我的英文水平，能夠說話和交流，只能說有了基本的與年齡相近的同學一起去學習英文學習工具。



was like sitting in class for me, as I could not understand anything. Therefore, I had to watch with great efforts. However, after watching and listening to the repeated programs everyday, I gradually overcame the language barriers.

After a month or so, I could have simple conversations with my friends in English. After another two months, I could basically handle daily conversations. Theoretically, the ESL course would last about four years. However, the school was very flexible in adapting this course according to the individual's needs. Therefore, the course could be longer or shorter, depending on the student's English level.

One day, while I was already in grade five (which was the second year of my ESL course), I was, as usual, about to leave the classroom after my ESL lesson, the teacher walked up to me joyfully and said: "Congratulations! You

do not have to come back to my ESL lesson ever again". I wanted to attend ESL for longer, but the teacher told me that new students would be coming and that I, just like other local students, did not need to take the course anymore. This meant that my English was already at the standard of my other local classmates. As a result, I could take the normal language lessons with other students of my age. On the other hand, this did not mean my English was already excellent, because English Language is a subject for all students there, including local students, which is similar to the Chinese Language lessons in China. The language subjects involved learning the culture and the knowledge, which would take all the way through primary and secondary schools, as well as universities. Being able to speak and communicate with others could only mean that I had obtained the basic learning tool.