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Cross cultural **communication**

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updated: October 27, 2002

Once upon a time, English was seen as a boring subject for many Thai students and Thailand was merely seen as an exotic holiday location for many farangs. But now, thanks to a pioneering project called Inside Thailand, local students in far away provinces like Uttaradit are enjoying learning English much more and American high school students are seeing the real face of Thailand.

Inside Thailand is a student exchange programme run by Mac Bakewell which recently brought 11 grade 9-12 students from America to experience Thai culture by spending 30 days living in a village in Uttaradit and teaching English at the local school.

The students were divided into two groups: the first for 12-15 year olds and the second for younger students.

"We used different teaching methods for the two groups. We taught the older group in the library but taught the younger group in the classroom and in the fields. For the younger group we used many activities such as popping coloured balloons, playing bingo, singing, dancing and acting," said Larissa Borofsky, one of the American students.

While it sounds like fun, the teaching wasn't always easy. "The shyness of Thai students was the problem. They were shy to speak English with us," said Larissa. This didn't put the student teachers off though, it just made them be more creative in their approach. "I just made a big fool of myself. Made my face look like a dog and hid under the table. When they saw how silly I was they were not so shy," Larissa added.

Inside Thailand not only gives the student teachers the chance to teach but also to learn. "We learnt new things about Thai culture such as Kreng Jai," said Rachel Ko.

While the girls stayed with Mac's wife, Boosaba, the boys stayed in the local wat. This gave them the opportunity to get a clearer picture of the true nature of Thais. "They learnt about Thai culture from many local activities like making bamboo baskets, climbing coconut trees, riding buffaloes and planting rice. A local farmer supervised the rice planting to make sure that it was done properly," said Mac.

For most of the student teachers it was their first visit to Thailand. "There is a girl in my school who came to Thailand with this programme before. I talked to Mac when he came to my school because I thought it would be an interesting opportunity. It's not every day you get a chance to do something useful like this," said Christian Kanschat.

Though most of the young Americans had heard about Thailand before, to experience the country first-hand was what they had all been waiting for. "I had heard how wonderful Thailand was. I'd heard about the beautiful people, beautiful smile, and beautiful scenery. But, I want to experience it myself. You don't really know much at all before you actually live the lifestyle," said Xoco Shinbert, after climbing a coconut tree.

Their first time in Thailand was an unforgettable experience. "There was a

shy girl in my class. We hardly had a conversation because her English was not very good. On the last day of class she gave me a small piece of paper on which she asked me if I would come back. Then, she sent another one, asking if she could be my a little sister. We made a connection and I will be back to see her when she is in high school. We're like siblings now," said Rachel.

"For me the most unforgettable experience happened last night. We had a farewell party and it rained very hard but everybody came to say good-bye. Even with the language barrier everybody felt like close friends. We danced together in the rain, ran around in the mud. We really connected. It was wonderful," said Larissa.

Before they set off on the long journey home the young American students showed-off what they had learnt by breaking into the song Kan Krai Kai Pha Mai. Kai Neung Bai Song Baht Ha Sib. Ha Sib Song Baht Nueng Bai. Using sign language they showed they understood the meaning.

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