

MEP Special Events

By Keith Mangan

Quizzes, tests, homework, notebooks, blah, blah, blah—every single day my Prathom 3 students hear me utter these words. Surely they're sick of it! Luckily, over the course of this past year, my fellow MEP teachers and I have enjoyed the opportunity to have multiple fun events outside the classroom.

The first fun event was Sports Day in late June. Having taught in Korea previously, I



wondered what this might entail. Would it be the same? Different? I was very curious to find out. It seemed like each afternoon my science lesson was cut a bit short—the students always had something to practice, like formation marching, choreographing skits, or simply learning their route. In fact, even the MEP teachers were called out to the play area for games of Chairball—similar to basketball, but students hold up a basket as the goal. It got pretty competitive!

The morning of Sports Day was hectic! Grades of students identified by their color of polo assembled throughout the school. Little did I realize we would be walking with our classes in the heat and humidity! It was adorable to see the kids dressed up, but I felt bad for them as it was so hot! We made a long lap around the streets nearby the school, up to the pier, and back to the main courtyard area inside New Thida for plenty of song and dance! I've never seen parents take so many pictures!

That was only half the day, however. My fellow teachers and I hopped on our motorbikes and went out to the Stadium, where we were greeted by hundreds upon hundreds of kids chanting something (maybe about us?). We played a series of games vs. some Thai teachers—soccer (or football), tug or war, a relay race, and volleyball. The volleyball match was interesting—during the third and deciding game, once the 'Farang' teachers surged ahead, somehow the rules changed mid-match and we lost. All in all, I believe we won three of the four events!

Next, almost immediately after Sports Day was the MEP Spelling Bee. Each of the MEP teachers created a list of words for their class—some easy, some moderate, some difficult. The students were given a few weeks to study before we held preliminary competitions in our classrooms. We each selected five finalists to represent our classes. We divided these winners into three groups—Anuban and P1, P2-P3, and P4-P6. Much like classic Spelling Bee fashion, we brought up the kids to the front of our assembly and asked them a word. To keep the kids from cheating, we had to make them face sideways so they could not get 'air letters' from their friends. It was an exciting time! I was particularly happy with my finalists—a few good surprises and even though my students didn't win the Swenson's ice cream gift cards, I think they really enjoyed it! This is an event I've already penciled in for next year.



Before the close of the first term, MEP teachers were whisked away for a weekend in Phuket. While it might sound like sun and fun, it wasn't quite that! Roughly 50-60 students of all levels packed busses one Friday morning in late August and headed for the West Coast. Of course,



along we enjoyed a traditional Thai meal (I couldn't tell you where it was!) before we arrived at our hotel.

First thing Saturday, we hopped onto the busses again and visited a bird farm and a local temple. The students loved it as the birds were extremely well trained and performed mini bike races, cup flipping, and ring carrying games. Even the hawks got in on the action. The trainers would make their calls, and they would fly down and rest on one of the children's arms. Very cool and incredible to see!

It wasn't all play, of course. The main objective of the course was an afternoon English camp at the hotel that Saturday afternoon. Earlier in the month, each teacher submitted an idea for a 15 minute ocean-related station to help the kids improve their English. There was face painting, a Ring Around the Rosy elimination game, balloon popping, drawing, and more. To break down some of the children's excess energy, they went swimming afterwards and had a ball! I've never seen so many exhausted children in one area at a time!



We concluded our weekend at the Phuket Aquarium—I think I was just as excited as the kids were! It's been awhile since I've been back in my native Florida, and it was awesome to see all the sea creatures! I won't soon forget the looks of many of my P3 students with their hands pressed against the glass and mouths wide open.



Being a Native Western teacher means we can share some of our culture with our MEP classes as well. Just about all of my students were familiar with Halloween and Christmas, but not many of them knew much about it aside from a typical TV or movie scene. During the few days leading up to Halloween, we learned some simple Halloween vocabulary and watched some easy Halloween videos and songs on YouTube so they could understand a little bit more. The day of Halloween, all the kids rotated classrooms and practiced their best "Trick or Treat!" scream throughout MEP. Can we say sugar overload afterwards? In addition to candy, my students made jack o lanterns and colored them to show their parents a little bit of what they learned. Maybe next year we will all dress up!

Finally, I learned during Christmas time that "Christmas is a time....Christmas is a time for love!" as it was repeated during morning assemblies each and every day during December. To compliment that, each MEP teacher took one song for their class and practiced singing during a bit of their class. My students really enjoyed "Jingle Bells" and even after the New Year still wanted to sing it!

The MEP classes concluded the 2014 calendar year with a Christmas party. Beforehand, I taught the students a bit more about what Christmas entails and how we celebrate in the States. I tried, unsuccessfully, to arrange some games in class during the party the last day before break. The excitement for the Secret Santa exchange and a child's birthday on the same day were no match for me! They loved watching the YouTube loop of Christmas videos (the Grinch was a favorite) and stuffing themselves full of holiday cheer. I



was happy to see this, as I thought it was a reward for studying so hard all year long.

These events have been some of my favorite days at Thida—I learned a lot about their unique personalities and more about them as people. That’s not always easy to accomplish with younger students. Learning isn’t always about the traditional methods, and I’m happy as an MEP teacher to be able to teach outside the box with them. I’m hoping they all stay so we can have many more fun days together!