

Research Report for TECC in Yellow Sheep River

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After talking to a number of teachers and students at the Yellow Sheep River Middle School during the past few days, here's an update on our project.

■ **Location:** Yellow Sheep River is a town in Gulang County (near the city of Wuwei) which lies in the eastern part of Gansu province, a 3 hours' bus ride from Lanzhou, the capital of Gansu Province.

■ **Transportation:** The trip from Beijing to Yellow Sheep River will consist of 3 steps:

1. From Beijing to Wuwei. (28 hours by train)
2. From Wuwei to Gulang (1 hour by bus)
3. From Gulang to Yellow Sheep River (half an hour by bus)

■ **Accommodation:** I suggest we live in Gulang, where the hotels are much better than those in Yellow Sheep River. A double room costs 40 RMB (\$5) per person. The triple rooms cost 30 RMB (about \$3) per person. Potentially, there will be an additional 30% group discount since we have 15 people.

■ **Teaching Modules:** I've discussed with the school officials about our project and have received an enthusiastic response. Both the teachers and the headmasters have promised to put their full efforts in making the TECC program a success. There are quite a few points we should pay attention to in the following preparations.

◆ English:

* Very few English teachers here have English degrees. However, some of them are certified in English proficiency with degrees from technical schools (a 3-year training program). They can handle a majority of grammar problems when teaching junior high students, but their conversational skills are almost non-existent. Even among the English teachers, the proficiency levels vary greatly, which will likely bring considerable difficulties to our training courses.

* The teachers are dedicated to improving their English skills, but the sub-par training and lack of available resources are not conducive to a suitable learning environment. The hope is that we can send them some original English books, tapes, optical disks or other educational materials.

* The faculty has suggested that we conduct an extensive three-year English training program. Even before we take the initial trip to Gansu, we may mail them some materials, so the teachers are able to conduct some pre-training preparation work as a group every week. Hopefully, this will significantly lessen the gaps in English levels between the teachers and make the on-site training more effective.

Note: Our English program will emphasize two modules: 1. Intense training on speaking and listening English skills. 2. Introduction and integration of English teaching methodologies and concepts into current curriculum.

◆ Computers:

* There is a computer lab in each school, containing about 40 computers. All these computers have two types of operating systems: Windows 98/ME and Linux, along with MS Office. But additional software will be needed for software programming or web design.

* Each computer lab accesses the Internet through a single modem, making browsing all but impossible. Fortunately, apart from the Internet, the LAN operates smoothly within the lab. They have installed LanStar Active Workstation to enable PPT and demo sharing on each computer terminal. I've even used it in the majority of my classes here to great effect.

Note: The headmaster says that plans are in place to set up a new LAN that will cover all the classrooms and offices at school by the beginning of summer, and the overall internet access speed will be vastly improved with the introduction of broadband.

* All these computer labs were built by Town & Talent Technologies for use by these schools.

* Suggested teaching modules (with teacher feedback):

Software:

1. Network:
 - (a) LAN administration: How to install a software environment in a LAN and run efficient daily administration.
 - (b) Website design and administration: How to establish a school homepage by using ASP or JSP. They have suggested that we help them set up a framework for a school website during the training week and teach them to program in JavaScript, VBScript, etc.
2. Programming: VC & VB programming. The goal is to enable them to write independent courseware for individual classes such as English, Math, and Physics.
3. Database: Use network resources to streamline administrative activities, ranging from managing informational archives of faculty and students to centralizing financial affairs.

Hardware: Educating the faculty and staff on the principles and processes of building up a school LAN.

Note: Donations of teaching software for the schools from IT companies would be especially helpful, along with laptops, if possible.

■ **Others:**

The relationship with Town & Talent Technologies: initially, they served as an intermediary between our team and the local school officials. But with the development of our own relationships with the school staff and faculty, it is now possible to plan and strategize with them directly.

The relationship with local government: The schools are governed directly by the Education Authority in Gulang County. The school staff will contact the Educational Authority if we want to further expand the scope of the project, with official government approval and cooperation from local authorities extremely likely.

Notice: More information will be updated in a couple of days. If you have any questions, please email me at clj@mails.tsinghua.edu.cn as soon as possible. I'll go back to Beijing on Feb 20th. Any suggestions or ideas will be appreciated. Thanks.