

## My Junior High Students

- For 6 years I taught English to junior high students at the 5th Junior High School In Makkah. I taught 7th, 8th and 9th graders. The first year, I taught 4 classes of 8th graders (24 hrs per week). Their English was poor but they were willing to learn. I always asked them to use the new words they learnt in class in sentence at home. One of the words was "pour". So a student wrote "I pour poetry out of my heart".
- Only once I taught English to two classes of 7th graders and continued to teach them in 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades. The result was fantastic. They were the best students a teacher can ever teach. They used to bring boxes and bottles from the cafeteria that have the English words we studies in class, and bring stories to class.
- They used to watch T.V., pick a word or 2 and when they came to class, ask me about their meanings. A student cut pictures of reptiles and glued them on a large card-board, brought it to class and asked me to write "Reptiles on it". They used to watch T.V. and write a summary of the stories.
- They used to prepare the school broadcast program once a week. They turned "Joha and the figs", a story in their textbook into a play, memorized it, made their own costumes, brought a basket with plastic fruits and played the roles of Joha, Joha's wife and the Sultan. They used to write their own stories.
- I used to type a legal size one-page story with 30 questions. They used to read the story and answer the questions in less than 40 minutes without asking me about anything.
- We used to take lessons in the garden. I would bring a map, a ball (to teach "play, throw, catch") animals and other realia. The students.
- Although they did not know many words and structures, they used them to talk about anything and to express any idea they had in mind.
- I used to teach them English songs. They would use some of the words and expressions from the songs in their composition.

- We used to write one composition in class per week. I never wrote the compositions and never asked them to memorize anything. Instead I trained them to write. I used to choose easy topics like "My School, My Mother, My Classroom, Our Garden, What I do every day and so on." Once I asked them to write about what they do in the morning, so one student wrote " I wake up in the morning, open the window and see a drop of golden sun", a phrase from a song.
- Some had a notebook in which they wrote their own stories and poems.
- Before reading a lesson, I used to ask them to tell me what they could see in the picture to prepare them for the reading. After giving the names of all the things, the smart ones would come up with answers that I never expected like : i can see 4 legs (of the chair or table" , a cat on the floor, a floor under the cat, a cat under the chair, a chair over the cat and so on.
- When we first participated in the school broadcast, I used to teach them songs, poems and have them act a short play. Once I asked a student to memorize a poem called my dog. Few days after she recited it in the school broadcast, she asked me to look at a poem that she wrote. Her poem was entitled "My Cat" and she wrote things about her cat similar to the ones in the dog's poem. It was a surprise for me. I thanked her and encouraged her. Her poem did not have rhyme at the end of each line.
- Every week, we had an English club for 2 class sessions. The students used to bring books with stories and poems. I read a poem and showed Sara the rhyme at the end of the lines. Then I changed the words at the end of her cat poem to make the line rhyme. I left the classroom to get something and when I came back, the students showed me 2 poems that they wrote together while I was away. I was so thrilled and started to jump up and down. I took the poems all showed them to my colleagues all over the school. I was so happy as I never expected students in grade 8 to write poetry.
- I had twin sisters in one of my classes. They were our neighbors. They used to memorize 15 words on their own (not related to the textbook). A cousin of theirs went to London during the summer holiday and took an English course and when he came back, he was competing with Ahlam & Sameera and they were smarter. So their father told my brother and asked him to thank me. When I was in the States, their father always asked my brother to say hi to me.

- Everyday they had a spelling quiz, Everyday, they had to memorize the new words they studied that way.
- When my students were in grade 7, I never asked them to spell words. Once the English supervisor visited my class. At the end of the class session she asked few students to go to the board and spell some words. I was a bit nervous as I never asked them to spell. To my surprise, they could spell words like 'car, cat, book, pen' correctly.
- Every time we studied a new grammatical structure, they were supposed to use those structures in sentences at home. For every correct sentence, I used to give them gold stars on the honor list posted in class. I was surprised when one of the students write 45 sentence using 'if", a rule that even college students find difficult and make mistakes when they use 'if'.
- Whenever they went to the Secondary School, my students were always the best and their teacher used to send me their praise and greetings.
- The 9th grade final exam used to be a general exam with unified questions all over the Kingdom. All the English teachers used to gather in a test center in Makkah where we graded the exam papers for all the students at all the schools in Makkah region. We used to get sealed envelopes with 50 test papers in it. The students names and ID numbers were covered and sealed. It was difficult for most of the students to answer the questions. For the composition question, students of the same school used to spit out and we would grade 50 carbon copies of the same composition. All of a sudden, the teachers would be surprised when they came across a group of students who wrote the 2 composition topics instead of one and who use their own words to write different compositions from each other. If they were asked to give 2 sources of energy, they would list them all. They would all pass with high marks and the poorest student of mine would give better answers than the best student at the other school. Out of curiosity, they would remove the seal and find that those students were from the 5th Junior High School. That always made me proud and made me more confident of the effectiveness of all the teaching strategies I was using with my students.
- Once I had to give a model English lesson (to show how to teach English) to all the English teachers in Makkah. The demonstration was in the afternoon. To make the lesson a real one, I asked my 7th and 9th grade

students to come in order for me to teach them as I do in class. To my disappointment, my 9th grade students did not come and some of my 7th grade students were present. Although I was disappointed, I did not want to tell the audience what had happened. The lesson was about a television interview with a football player (so the new words were something like "T.V. football, play, catch, game, playground, goal etc.". In class, I used to teach the new words to 7th and 9th grade one by one, using pictures and real objects. So I started to teach the new words to 7th grade students using the same presentation technique that I use with them in class. They were answering and participating very well and every time they gave a correct answer I encouraged them and praised them with enthusiasm. When it was time to read, I asked them to open the books and asked them to tell me what they could see in the pictures, i.e. "a tell and say" activity that I usually use with my students before they read a text; and they had no problem. I asked them to read the lesson, paragraph by paragraph, silently and they could answer the comprehension questions very well. I could not change anything or make anything simpler as the audience knew what the lesson was about, and which words I had to teach. When I finished, the audience gave us a big applause and admired my students and how responsive and smart they were. "I would like to tell you that those students are in 7th grade not 9th grade", I said with a big laugh which made the audience give us another big applause. The following day I thanked them in class and told the school principal about what they did. They felt good about themselves.

- When some of my students went to Umm Al-Qura, they majored in English. While doing their teaching practicum, i.e. teaching English in the schools, their supervisor, who was my classmate in college and my friend later, used to tell me how creative and enthusiastic some of them were when they were teaching. When I asked about their names, I found out that they were my junior high school students and they were teaching the way I taught them.