

Baan Gua Fan - April 2007

By Ceri Cockram.

I arrived in Chiang Mai in early April 2007 after spending a month in Mae Sot. I had heard there was a position available for a volunteer English teacher and decided to take it on for a month as part of my Gap year. I didn't know what to expect and knew only that I would be doing some teaching.

My first day at Baan Gua Fan was memorable in itself. The students were a variety of ages and abilities and I immediately picked out the characters of the group! They were all welcoming and pleasant and appeared genuinely pleased to have me there. The language barrier was always more of an entertainment for us than a problem as we tried to communicate with actions and expressions when words failed!

I was a very inexperienced teacher and the students were all extremely patient with me and always tried their best. The main difficulty was when it came to testing. They seemed to have very little idea of how to learn things for themselves and revise a topic taught in class. I spent a whole session with them one day, after an end of topic test had produced very variable results, practicing some techniques for learning word spellings and vocabulary. After repeating the same test, every student except one performed better after actually revising the topic themselves.

It was very interesting to see the differences in ability levels between the students. Some were obviously academically intelligent, whereas others found writing hard, while others found verbal pronunciation hard. Others struggled with English, but were strong in Maths. I remember several doing really well on visual tasks that included drawing, but their English ability was limited. What struck me however was the way they all tried their best, no matter what their ability.

My stay was short, but the support I received from all at the Child's Dream office and at Baan Gua Fan itself was brilliant, not only with the job, but with more personal issues. I would like to express my thanks to all the staff for their welcoming hospitality and to the Baan Gua Fan students who were so patient with me. I learned as much from them as I hope they were able to learn from me and it is certainly a month that will stay with me.

Thank you again. All the best

Yours Sincerely

Ceri Cockram