

S.T.I.S. Academic Camp  
By Whitney Reynolds

For two weeks during the summer, S.T.I.S. opens its doors to the student population and hosts what is referred to as an “Academic Camp.” The idea behind the camp is to facilitate teacher-student relationships before the school year starts. My perception going into the camp was that it would be similar to a typical American summer camp. I imagined outdoor games, team-building exercises, and lots of crafts! However, my perception changed when I realized the camp was more like a two-week jump start on the school year.

At 9:00 sharp on the first day of camp, the Thai teachers had the kids in assembly reciting the National Anthem. After that, we went into the cafeteria and lined up by class. Peter allowed all of the teachers to make quick introductions. I noticed there was a strong sense of comradery at this school. Within the first 30 minutes of camp, I already felt like I was an integral part of this tight-knit community. The staff, students, and teachers are all welcoming, friendly, and open-minded. After the introductions, we made our way to our individual classrooms.

We removed our shoes at the door and began unpacking our backpacks. The students started to sit down at the desks when I stopped them and asked them to join me for circle time. In my previous teaching experience, the morning meeting is a common practice that is expected and sometimes even required by the school. My students acted like I had just asked them to enter another dimension. They seemed thoroughly confused by my request, but they followed directions and came to join me on the floor. It was a little awkward at first, but by the end of the first week they understood the routine and it went a lot more smoothly.



The circle time was an attempt to build a classroom community by sharing greetings and non-academic conversations. However, I neglected to consider the fact that my group of kids had been together for two years before coming into K3. They already felt a sense of community, so they were ready to learn! With that in mind, I was able to jump right into the curriculum and gauge their reading abilities and learning preferences. The Hamster class thrived during Academic Camp, primarily because we focused on academics.

We did have a couple of special days that made the camp more fun. One day we had “snack day” in which everyone brought a snack to share with the class. The whole school went to the cafeteria at the same time and ate together. It was awesome getting to see them in a social setting. On the last day of camp we had “character day” in which everyone got to dress up in a costume, including the teachers. During the morning assembly we went up on stage one

by one and showed off our ensemble. Each student was supposed to tell the school what their character was and then share one thing that character does. For example, I dressed as a fairy and told the school I could fly. We also had Elsa and Olaf that were a dynamic duo! One of the teachers dressed up in a full Spiderman costume. He was extremely popular as everyone wanted to get pictures with him. I thought everyone did a good job sharing their costumes and it was a great way to end the camp.



By the end of the two weeks, I felt very comfortable in the school and in my class. I developed a very close connection with my students and I feel confident with my teaching style and classroom management plan. The camp is almost exactly like school, but an hour shorter and a slightly different schedule. It was a really great way to get to know the students and setup definitive classroom rules and routines for the school year. We did play some games and we enjoyed our special days, but it was definitely not a typical American summer camp!



**"Hamster Hands"**

*The finished product of one craft I did with my class during the camp.*