

At Beijing BISS International School, New Staff Get an "Experiential" Orientation

By *Ettie Zilber*

Many international schools offer their incoming new staff some form of orientation program (and if they do not, they should!) As the head of three successive international schools, I designed and delivered unique orientation programs for new staff. The goal of these orientation programs is to get newcomers to interface with the school, the city, the culture... and to bond as a supportive cohort.

In Barcelona, Guatemala City, and Beijing respectively, my faculty were introduced to the city, the transportation system, and survival shopping. They also learned about the culture, history, art, and language of the country. However the experience was not passive, not written, nor in lecture format; rather it included a variety of active, experiential learning activities.

And in each country, one activity in the program has remained the most memorable, amusing, and interactive: the scavenger hunt.

Each scavenger hunt had a different design for each of the cities, cultures, and schools, but incorporated the same basic elements:

- Participation by new teachers, their families, and volunteer staff and students—all with cameras to record



Lost and delirious, new staff pause for some enlightenment (photo: E. Zilber).

the artifacts, participants, and certain hilarity.

- Division of the cohort into teams, depending on total numbers, with host nationals for translation and support.

- Design of approximately 15-20 clues and instructions, focusing on local culture, history, and artifacts, such as ceramics, jewelry, fruit, language, crafts, health accoutrements, furniture, architecture, traditions, etc. Explanations of artifacts accompany the clues, as well as vocabulary in the local language.

- Travel to and from the site with public transportation, supported by local staff volunteers who help with ticket purchases and bus/subway system navigation.

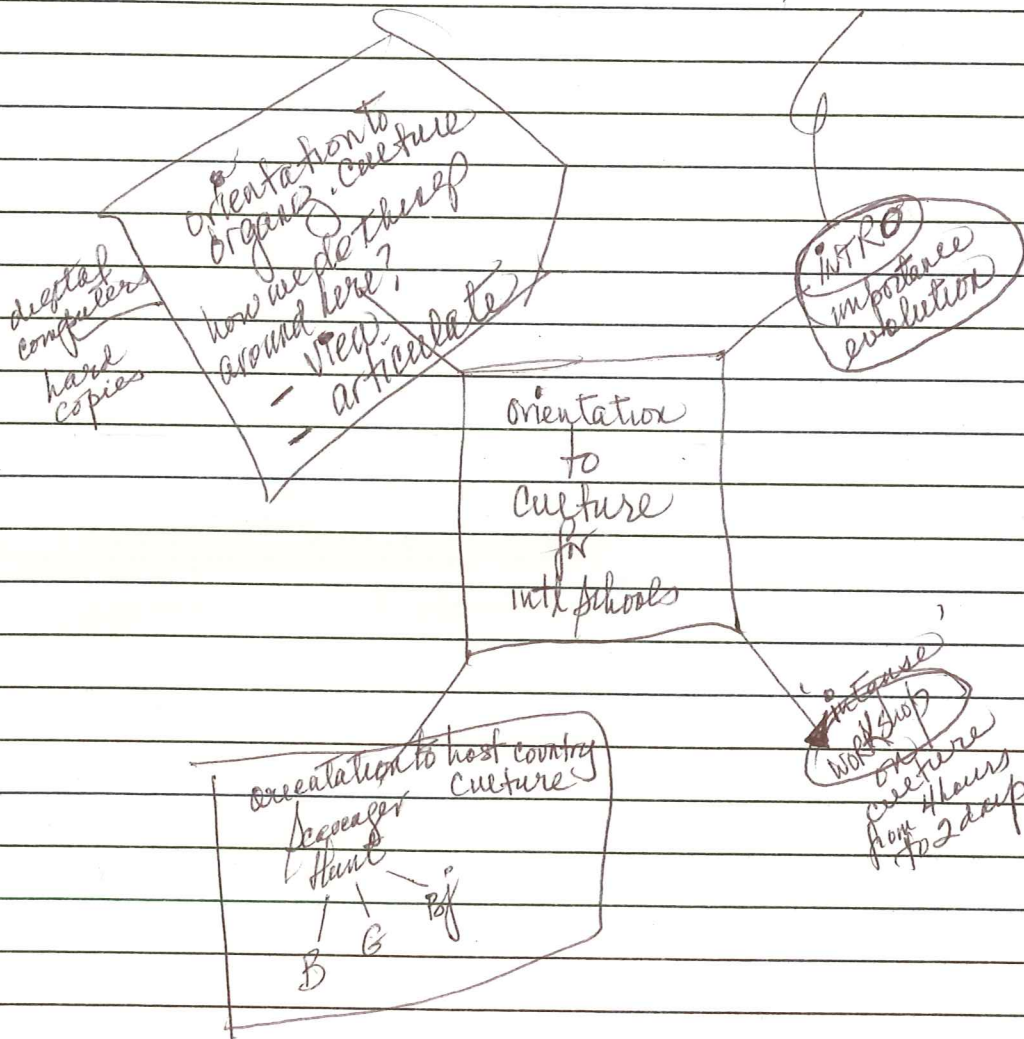
- Distribution of instructions to each group (varied for each).

- Synthesis and editing of the collected images into a three- to five-minute video clip with music, to be presented to returning teachers.

The final presentations, made to the entire faculty, are always well received and full of humor. They are an effective ice-breaker between incoming and returning staff. We are already planning for the next scavenger hunt here at Beijing BISS International School, and encourage you to plan one for your community too! ●

Visit our website (<http://www.biss.com.cn>) to see our video clips; I would love to see your versions, ezilber@biss.com.cn.

T.I.E 4/2012



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Japan?

2 articles

① Get to know
the city &
cultural
heritage

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another weekend
workshop? for my staff?

Concordia
Shanghai?

New staff
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Beijing

Scavenger
hunt

Workshop
on culture

Oh No!
Oh No!

City/Country
Culture

Why bother

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photo
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Concussion

BSS
JMP

Valuable for adults
+ kids
a long way
to next
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Cultural
Orientation
School programs

Cultural adaptation
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Artifact

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3 part
approach

Intercultural orientation
"Orientation to Culture" set on board the

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