

# Principal's trip an eye-opener

**w** Elly Jimenez  
Staff Writer

Over winter break Principal Dale Vogler embarked on her first trip to China thinking it would be a vacation. However, according to Vogler, the trip opened her eyes to a whole new world. "It was truly a cultural experience, as well as an educational experience for me," she said.

During her trip Vogler considered herself lucky to have a personal Chinese guide, Zen Bao Chung, a friend of her husband. He took them to all the sights, such as The Great Wall and Ming's Tomb but also taught them about his culture by inviting them into his parents' home and introducing them to friends and family. "Spending time with people of a different culture and really getting to know them gave me a heightened awareness of the differences that our students have to deal with when they come here," Vogler said.

Vogler spoke of two experiences that really impacted her. Her first experience was her first visit to Zen's parents' home. They had a young maid, about 15 years old, living with them. Vogler expressed concern for the girl when she heard that she didn't go to school and didn't even finish high school. She expressed even more shock and concern when she was told that because of the fact that she was born into a poor farmer's family, she would never be able to go to college. The young lady made about \$80 a month and sent it all back to her family.

Vogler said, "I was a little heartbroken about that because I felt really bad for this kid, this kid was very grateful that she was able to make this money and work for this family."

Her second experience was once again with a child. While having dinner with another family, she met a young boy in fifth grade. He spoke a little English because he was taught in school, "which is the big thing now in China, a lot of the schools are teaching English," Vogler said. When asked what he was doing over his break the boy answered, "Studying." He explained to Vogler the importance of getting into a key school for junior high. After going to a key school, it was a natural route to go into a top university and get a top job.

He also explained to Vogler his typical day which consisted of mostly school and tutoring. His day started at 8 a.m. and ended at 9:30 p.m., five days a week. "So, here you have a 5th grader who is studying like crazy, has no real personal life. This is what his parents obviously want him to do, but he really wants it himself, you could tell. He was already in a social class where he was better off than the other girl, so if he worked hard and got into this key school, he'd have all these advantages," said Vogler.

According to Vogler, the trip made her realize how difficult the change of culture must be for students coming from different countries, especially with simple things like food.

Before going to China, Vogler noted that going to the ESL Thanksgiving lunch, she was amazed that the kids didn't want to eat the food. "For me it was: cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes—what's the big deal?" said Vogler. However, while in China, she had the tables turned on her. She ate Chinese food the whole time, except once when she went to Pizza Hut. "Here on this turn table is stuff that I don't know what it was. Even when they told me what it was, I didn't want to try it! I thought, no, I'm not going to eat duck heart. No, I'm not going to try chicken feet or snake or duck liver."

Vogler stressed how much the trip made her realize the hardships of such a drastic change in culture. "This trip really gave me an awareness of what our kids and our kids families go through in moving to this country," Vogler said. "They have these hopes and dreams of having a better life, but it's a very different life, and as teachers and educators we need to understand that. They're not only coming with a desire to be successful but they're also coming with all these differences that can affect their success. I've been to other countries but their differences didn't affect me as much. China was just so different. It was just a wonderful experience. It helped me to be more effective here and a lot more sensitive to the diversity at our school."