

An Observation on American Education: From Teaching Approaches to Classroom management

Celine Wu, Jhonggang Elementary School

Introduction

In the recent decades, Taiwan government strives to equip our next generation with good English proficiency in order to let them become more competitive in this fast-changing global village. Not only Taiwan, but also other Asian countries, such as Japan, Korea, and China almost have the same thoughts. In other words, the topic to train teachers with qualified TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language)



certificates and to enhance students' English language proficiency attracts more and more attention and becomes a big concern in Asia.

It's a great honor and privilege for me to be chosen as a member of New Taipei City English Teacher Delegation. I appreciate that New Taipei City government provides this wonderful opportunity for English teachers to refresh their teaching skills and background knowledge. In this 14-day educational training, we have not only observed a variety of teaching approaches commonly used by American teachers, but also acquired the latest models, such as SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation

Protocol), Quantum Learning, and Balanced Literacy, implemented effectively in urban, suburban, and rural districts around the United States. Also, for a long time, classroom management is a significant issue for all teachers worldwide and a topic I am interested in and concerned about. I always believe that a meaningful, high-quality instruction can only be delivered under a well-organized classroom management. With a good learning atmosphere, pupils could engage actively and cognitively in their tasks. Therefore, in my report, I would like to share what I've learned in these days with all outstanding partners devoted themselves constantly to English education in New Taipei City.

Changes in Teaching Approaches for English Learners

In the beginning of twentieth century, teaching approaches more focused on direct method of instruction or a grammar translation approach. Later on, direct method and grammar translation approach languished and audiolingual method rose in the 1950s. In the late of twentieth century, the communicative method replaced audiolingual method and became more popular. Then, as time went by, the communicative approach engendered the content-based approach that emphasizes learning about subject areas which vary according to the students' language proficiency rather than just learning about language (Canatoni-Harvey, 1987; Chamot & O'Malley, 1994). However, it is proven that using only content-based instruction (CBI) is not sufficient to help all students get academic successes. Therefore, sheltered instruction (SI) approach was developed as a conjunction to connect with content teachers and viewed as a program in which students could get more language support. Nowadays content-based instruction (CBI) and sheltered instruction (SI) are widespread and extensively used by educators for English learners (ELs).

What We Learned from Schaumburg School District 54

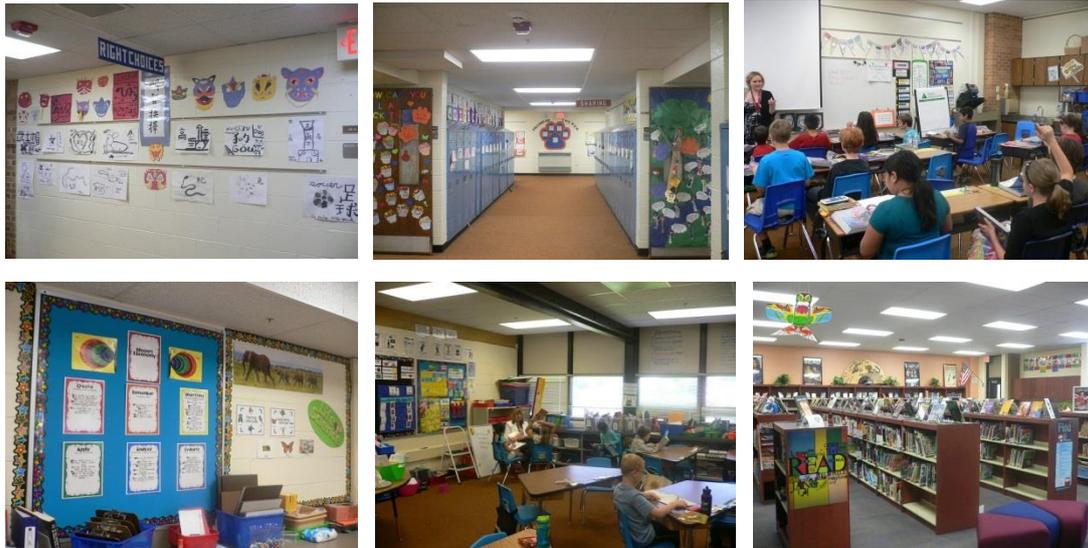
During the three half-day trainings in Rauch Center, lecturers introduced the situation and the approaches implemented in Schaumburg School District 54. In this district, there are

- 22 elementary schools
- 5 junior high schools
- 86 different languages spoken by District 54 families
- 67 different languages spoken by English-language learner (ELL) students in ELL program
- 19 languages are spoken by ELL department staff

As for language learning programs, there are

- Dual Language (9 schools)
- Chinese Immersion (1 school)
- ELL Resource Programs (26 schools)
- World Language Spanish/ French at junior high schools

According to the data above, it presents that there is a heterogeneous mix of native and nonnative English speakers in this district. Hence classroom teachers need to be more sensitive and well-prepared to take care of these linguistically and culturally diverse students. And it is believed that sheltered instruction (SI) plays a big role in that and should be used when nonnative English speakers are learning content area.



The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)



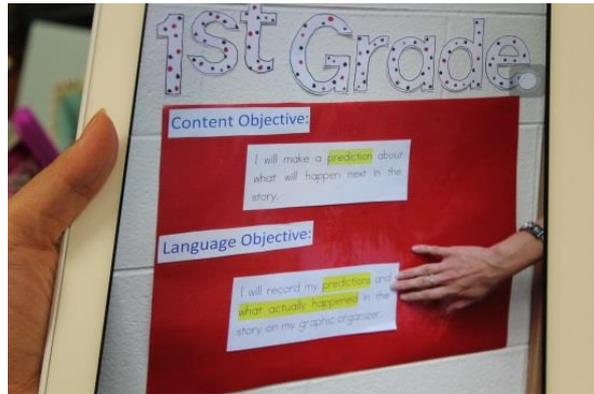
What is SIOP? Before we took the training, I guess most people might have emerged the same question as me in mind when seeing this pattern. In short, the SIOP model is a professional development framework that provides

an approach for integrating language develop with content teaching. For teachers, the SIOP model is a guidance helping them to plan lessons appropriately and deliver instruction more effectively. Furthermore, it also can be used as a valid observation and rating instrument and provides feedback on lessons (Short & Echevarria, 2011).

The SIOP model includes eight interrelated components and 30 features (See Appendix A for details). And there are two terminology patterns need to be clarified (See Figure 1). These 8 components are

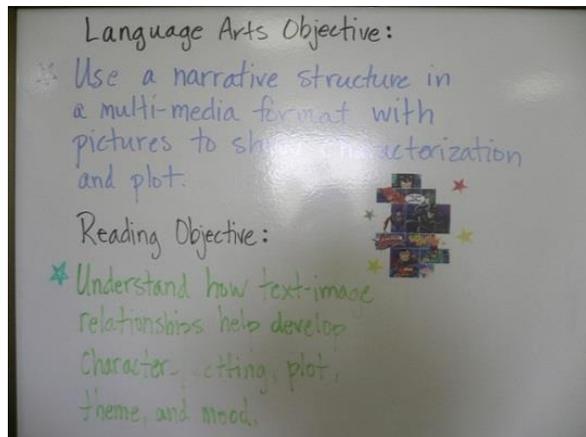
✘ Lesson Preparation:

1. Content objectives
2. Language objectives
3. Content concepts
4. Supplementary materials
5. Adaptation of content
6. Meaningful activities



✘ Building Background

7. Concepts explicitly linked
8. Links explicitly made
9. Key vocabulary

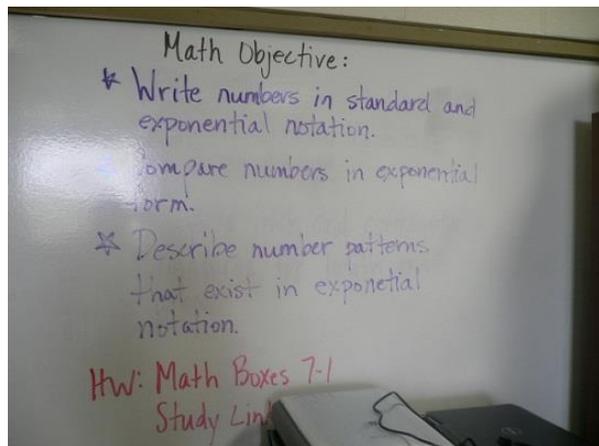


✘ Comprehensible Input

10. Speech
11. Clear explanation
- 12 A variety of techniques

✘ Strategies

13. Learning strategies
14. Scaffolding techniques
15. Questions or tasks that promote higher-order thinking skills



✘ Interaction

16. Interaction

- 17 Grouping configurations
- 18. Wait time for student responses
- 19. Clarify key concepts in L1

※ Practice and Application

- 20. Hands-on materials and/or manipulatives
- 21. Apply content and language knowledge
- 22. Language skills

※ Lesson Delivery

- 23. Content objectives
- 24. Language objectives
- 25 Students engaged
- 26. Pacing

※ Review and Assessment

- 27. Review of key vocabulary
- 28. Review of content concepts
- 29. Feedback
- 30. Assessment of student comprehension and learning



FIGURE 1 *SIOP Terminology*

SIOP Model= the lesson planning and delivery system

SIOP protocol= the instrument used to observe, rate, and provide feedback on lessons

The beginning birth of SIOP was in the early 1990s. It was designed based on many research projects to develop an accurate model of sheltered instruction and use this model to help teachers to learn effectively sheltered strategies. In the Schaumburg School District 54, we observed that many teachers have already implemented SIOP mode. In the beginning of the class, they will write down the content objectives and language art objectives on the whiteboard in the front, which tell students what they will learn through next sixty minutes. And students have explicit concepts to predict the content going on and make a connection to their background knowledge or prior academic knowledge which promotes their learning. Moreover, in the SIOP lessons, interaction is used to a high degree, no matter with teachers, with other classmates, or with content which leads to high-order thinking. Last, as SIOP teachers, they must take account into students' needs, culture diverse backgrounds and learning styles. To sum up, SIOP model is a guide to teach high-quality sheltered instruction and to integrate language develops with content areas which help students get academic achievement.

Balanced Literacy

Balanced literacy is another model implemented in Schaumburg School Dist. 54. It is designed to help students learn to read and write effectively. Hence reading and writing are two major components in balanced literacy model (See Figure 2).

Balanced Literacy Model



(Picture from: <http://web.sd71.bc.ca/literacy/>)

Figure 2. Components of Balanced Literacy

Reading	Writing
1. Shared Reading	1. Shared Writing
2. Guided Reading	2. Guided Writing
3. Independent Reading	3. Independent Writing
4. Read Aloud	4. Word Study

When teachers implement balanced literacy, it is recommended to deliver a minimum of 140 minutes instruction for the Literacy Block in Grades 1-6. To illustrate the Literacy Block, the time allocations of each part are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Literacy Block—A minimum of 140 minutes instruction

1	2	3	4	5	6
20-30 min	35-45 min	15-20 min	15-20 min	15-20 min	25-30 min
Daily Shared Reading	Daily Guided Reading	Independent Reading	Read-Aloud	Word Study	Daily Writing
Whole class	Small flexible group	Individual self-selected reading	Large group	1. Large group 2. Small group	1. Shared 2. Guided 3. Independent

✘ Shared Reading (20-30 min)

It is common in the states that all students are gathered in the front of classroom, sitting on the ground and listening to teacher with all ears. In this part, teachers mostly work with whole class and choose a text book, a smart board, a copied article, or a big book as a shared reading text which may be enlarged by using overhead projector so that every kid can focus on the same text with teachers.



“Teachers are doing Shared Reading by using a big book or overhead projector.”

✘ Guided Reading (35-45 min)

The goals of Guided Reading are to teach students using their own reading strategies to identify unknown words in order to comprehend the text and to expect them to use the same scheme to work independent reading in the future. Guided Reading can be viewed as a bridge between Shared Reading and Independent Reading. Normally teachers arrange and work with small flexible, homogeneous group, based on students’ needs, interests, and academic proficiency. The size of the flexible group should not be more than 6 children.

※ **Independent Reading (15-20 min)**

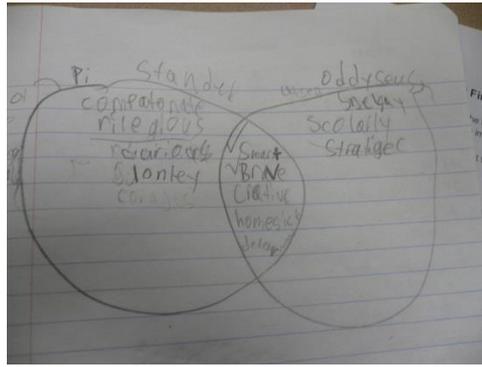
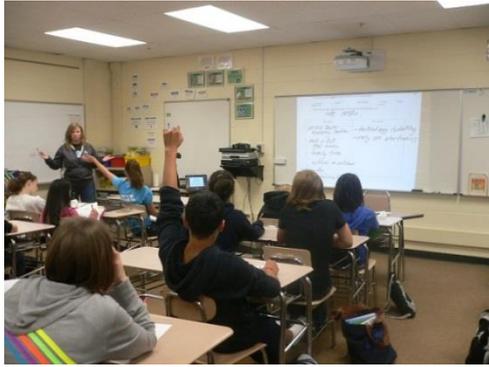
According to Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), “Independent Reading describes a time set aside for students to read an appropriate, interesting, and self-selected text.” During this time, teachers become observers to monitor students’ choices of reading materials and their independent reading process. Students can read independently or with a peer by using computer or other assistive technology, such as audio supports. And at the end of Independent Reading, students can share what they read in small group or with partners. At last, please be reminded that at this stage students try to build their own reading confidence. Hence creating an encouraging climate and choosing a proper reading text fitting their literacy levels are extremely significant.



“Students read independently by using audio supports”

※ **Read- Aloud (15-20 min)**

Teachers read to students with appropriate materials at students’ listening levels in order to enable them to hear rich language of stories. Teachers may encourage students to make predictions of the text and stop periodically by using think aloud skill to model reading strategy.



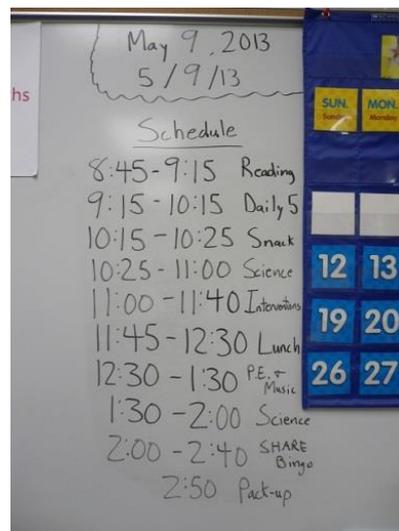
“Left photo: Teachers guided students to analyze the topic. Right photo: A Student used a compare & contrast strategy in writing.”

Daily 5

After observing many classes, I found that almost every American teacher has Daily 5 in his/her classroom. In the beginning, I had no clue and was very curious about that. Finally I got the answer by discussion with a classroom teacher. Here comes Daily 5.

Daily 5 are

1. Read to self
2. Read to someone
3. Listen to reading
4. Work on writing
5. Spelling word work



Daily Five is a routine usually embedded within a morning literacy block. Students engage in five fifteen-to-twenty-minute activity rotations and complete

various tasks to develop their habits of reading, writing, word learning, and working independently. Teachers could modify the Daily Five to Daily Six or Daily Seven in the classrooms according to the students' need.

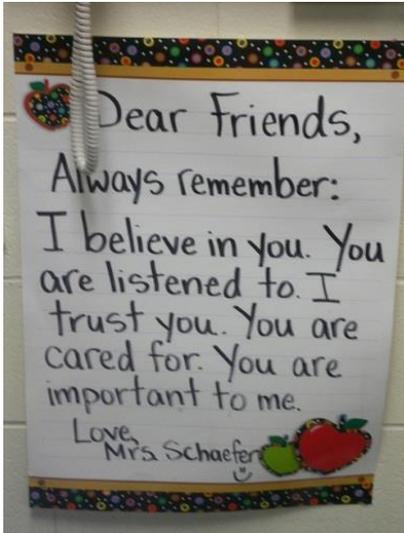


As we can see, the photo on the left shows that there are six activity rotations and students need to put their name cards in group they are working in. When the limited time is up, students will change the name cards to the next group and engage in different tasks.

Classroom Management

Classroom management plays a big role in effective instruction delivery. It describes a process that teachers try to establish a positive learning environment with minimal distractions. When a good classroom environment is created, teachers could run lessons smoothly and students could engage themselves in lessons entirely that results in a high rate of academic achievement. On the other hand, research from Moskowitz & Hayman (1976) shows that once a teacher loses control of the classroom, it becomes a disaster and things turn out to be increasingly more difficult for them to retake the control. Hence, in order to create good classroom management, teachers need to establish rules and procedure at the very beginning of the school year. In this American trip, I observed that many teachers use the diverse ways to maintain their classroom management and these secret tips are shown as follow.

※ Classroom Announcements / Slogans : High Five



Classroom Announcements or slogans give students a clear concept and a direction to follow what teachers hope them to do and learn. Students will know what good behavior is that they are expected to do. The left photo below is an announcement giving students a safe feeling that they are trusted, cared for, and believed in. Teacher Schaefer creates a successful and positive climate

promoting students' learning motivations and in which learning is expected to take place effectively.



※ Classroom Rules

An old adage says, “Hope for the best, but prepare for the worst”. Classroom rules give students boundaries when it comes to good behaviors in class. Many educators all agree that it is essential to build classroom rules which should be told

to students in the first day of school year and last the whole year through. Some teachers may involve students in establishing their own rules. However, no matter in teacher-created or student-created ways, the main key point is to keep these rules clear and simple. In addition, the consequences should be setting once the rules are broken.



✧ Behavior Charts

Behavior charts are good tools to modify students' behavior. From the photo below, we can see there are seven levels of behavior: parent contact, teacher's choice, think about it, ready to learn, good day, great job, and outstanding. The chart includes compliments and consequences. Students get a sense of honor when they gradually achieve the top, outstanding level. Vice versa, students learn what consequences they will face when they misbehave.



My Reflections

This American trip is fabulous and amazing. I strongly recommend that every teacher in New Taipei City should grab this once-in-a-lifetime chance to join the abroad training. In these two weeks, I was deeply impressed that those students we observed behaved so well. There was a scene at John. B. Murphy public school, students were sitting on the hallway in front of boy's/girl's restroom and utterly absorbed in books while waiting for their classmates using restroom. At that moment, I was speechless shocked by what I saw. It reveals a message that the school creates a successful reading climate for students. Under this positive reading environment, pupils are influenced unconsciously and then they do act exactly what experienced educators hope and expect them to do. It's really not easy, especially we all live in this new digital era. Students are distracted easily by those 3C products and cannot focus totally on real books. In addition, SIOP model and Balanced Literacy are other issues I would like to learn more and try hard to implement these teaching strategies in my class in the future.

References

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- Short, D., Echevarria, J., & Richards-Tutor, C. (2011). Research on academic literacy development in sheltered instruction classrooms. *Language Teaching Research*, 15 (3), 363-380.

Appendix A

Table 1. Eight Components of the SIOP Model of Instruction

Component	Description
1. Lesson preparation	The features under lesson preparation examine the lesson planning process, including the incorporation of language and content objectives linked to curriculum standards. In this way, students gain important experience with key grade-level content and skills as they progress toward fluency in the second language. Other features include the use of supplementary materials and meaningful activities.
2. Building background	Building background focuses on making connections with students' background experiences and prior learning, and developing their academic vocabulary. The SIOP Model underscores the importance of building a broad vocabulary base for students to be effective readers, writers, speakers, and listeners. In the SIOP Model, teachers directly teach key vocabulary and word structures, word families, and word relations.
3. Comprehensible	Comprehensible input considers adjusting teacher speech,

input

modeling academic tasks, and using multimodal techniques to enhance comprehension (e.g., gestures, pictures, graphic organizers, restating, repeating, reducing the speed of the teacher's presentation, previewing important information, and hands-on activities). The academic tasks must be explained clearly, both orally and in writing, with models and examples of good work so students know the steps they should take and can envision the desired result.

4. Strategies

The strategies component emphasizes explicit teaching of learning strategies to students so that they know how to access and retain information. Good reading comprehension strategies, for example, need to be modeled and practiced, one at a time with authentic text. SLOP teachers must scaffold instruction so students can be successful, beginning at the students' performance level and providing support to move them to a higher level of understanding and accomplishment. Teachers have to ask critical thinking questions as well so that students apply their language skills while developing a deeper understanding of the subject.

5. Interaction Interaction features encourage elaborated speech and grouping students appropriately for language and content development. They need oral language practice to help develop content knowledge and second-language literacy; thus, student–student interaction is important and needs to occur regularly in each lesson. ELs need to practice important language functions, such as confirming information, elaborating on one’s own or another’s idea, and evaluating opinions.
6. Practice/application Practice/application calls for activities that extend language and content learning by encouraging students to practice and apply the content they are learning, as well as their language skills. It is important to build and reinforce reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills within content learning.
7. Lesson delivery Lesson delivery ensures that teachers present a lesson that meets the planned objectives. Successful delivery of a SIOP lesson means that the content and language objectives were met, the pacing was appropriate, and the students had a high level of engagement.

8. English learners need to revisit key vocabulary and concepts, and
Review/assessment teachers need to use frequent comprehension checks throughout
lessons as well as other informal assessments to measure how well
students understand and retain the information. Each SIOP lesson
should wrap up with some time for review and assessment and time
to determine whether the lesson's objectives were met.

Copy from Echevarria, Richards-Tutor, Chinn & Rattleff (2011)