



Classroom Layout and Classroom Management

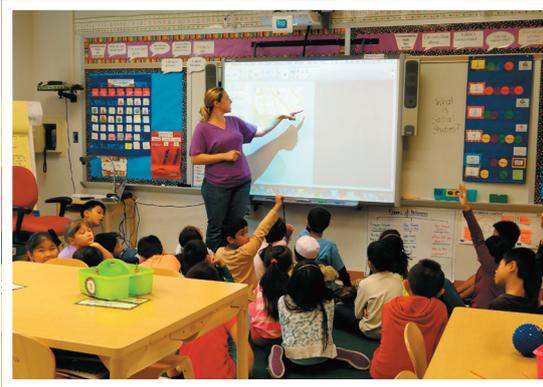
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New York, a metropolis with rich history and culture civilization, is also one of the well-known financial and commercial cities in the United States. Through the movies, theaters or songs, one can always feel the vitality and diversity of “the Big Apple.” Luckily, in October, 2014, as a member of New Taipei City Educators Delegation, I was very honored and excited to be able to visit several American primary and secondary schools in New Jersey and in New York. Besides, lectures given respectively by superintendents and professors in Colts Neck High School, Columbia University, and Brookdale Community College were informative and aroused some reflective thought in my mind.

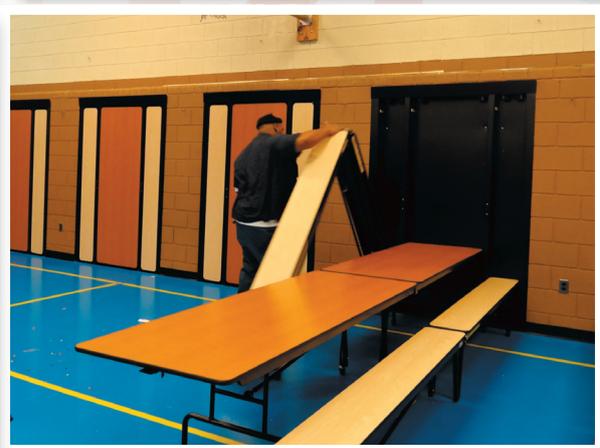
This unique two-week overseas intensive training made it possible for me to step into the highly-guarded American campuses. I therefore had the chances to closely observe school layout and teachers’ teaching and to exchange ideas with teachers, students and administrative staffs, which I deeply appreciated. In the following, I would like to divide what I have learned through practice into two sections: the first section is classroom layout, and the second section is classroom management.

Classroom Layout

The elements of learning a foreign language include the language itself, the culture of the target language, and learners’ interest. There were slight differences in physical environment of public schools and private schools owing to funding or school space. However, each school I dropped in made great efforts in integrating learners’ preferences, distinct students’ native languages, and culture into their daily lessons and school layout. In addition to basic handy hardware devices, such as electronic white boards in each classroom or ‘Chrome Books’ for each student, every layout or facility in the campus or classroom had its own meaning and purpose.



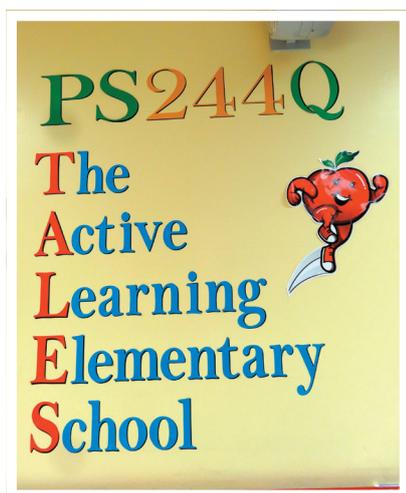
Take Freehold Learning Center for example, due to limited school space, the way the principal worked on the overcrowded problem was to settle students from grade one to grade five in the same big room. Every class was merely separated by partitions, which was quite new and challenging for teachers in Taiwan. The school's multifunction room was served as a gym, a cafeteria, and an auditorium. The tables and chairs for lunch could be folded and fixed onto the walls, which indeed made good use of school space.



Generally speaking, when I entered schools in New Jersey or in New York, the similar impression came to me: how warm, colorful, and thriving the schools were! Low ceilings for installing air conditioning equipment made people feel genial and cozy. Dry climate in eastern America kept the wall paints intact and colorful. Walls in the classrooms with few windows made classroom decoration more possible and easy, for posters or wall paper would not be blown away from wind. The following items were examples I noticed regarding classroom layout at schools in New Jersey and in New York.

A. The School Signals

In place of rigid schools signs, encouraging, positive, and even humorous marks or slogans were shown around the school.



B. The Visual Aids for Alphabets

In “Jump Start” program in New Jersey, the remedial reading program was designed for the lowest 10 percent reading difficulty students from kindergarten to grade two. Students with literacy problems would relearn alphabets in several systematic ways. To help students get more familiar with twenty-six letters and sounds,

teachers gave each alphabet a specific realia which corresponded to the beginning sound of the alphabet. The twenty-six realia as eye-popping visual aids were put in a card bag, which was hung on the wall as teaching aids and perfect decoration as well.



C. The Card Bag

With the use of the card bags, teachers could swap target vocabularies, festival words, or any messages students needed to know with word cards in the card bag. There was no need for teachers to repetitively write information on the board, and students could easily spot class notices or announcement in the classroom. For instance, the class schedule, blending words, or numbers were all sources for learning.



D. The Calendar

Teachers might begin the morning class with daily routine questions, such as the day, they week, the date, the weather, or the remaining days for the school year. With

the help of the calendar, lower graders would have clearer concept of time and routine work.



E . The Carpet

Continuous learning time is the distinguishing feature in American classrooms, which makes curriculum design more flexible and makes students' learning more intact without interruption. Changing learning places between the students' desks and the big carpet in the corner of the classroom kept students busy and making non-stop learning, even there is no or little recess time is fine with students. The carpets were cleaned daily after school by school janitors by the way.



F. The Word Wall

The word wall was arranged in alphabetical order. High frequency words, new words, topic words, subject words, and even students' names could be resources for the word walls.



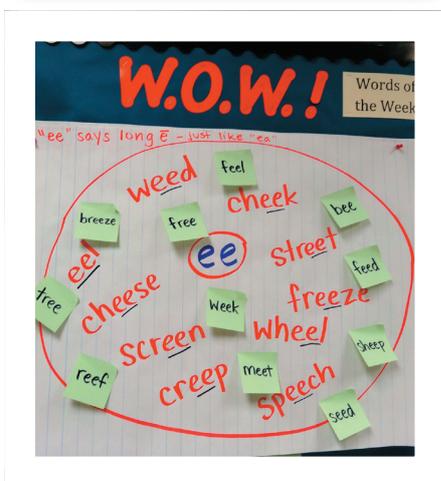
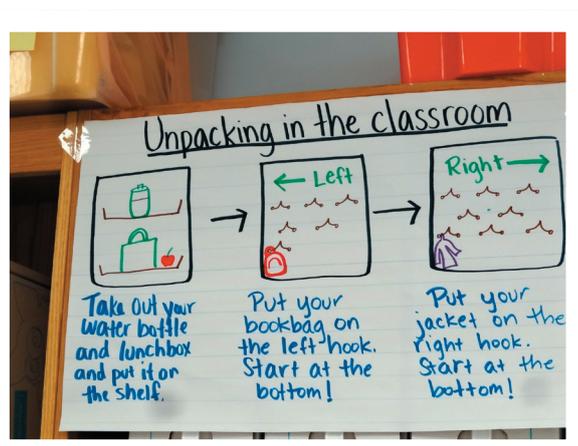
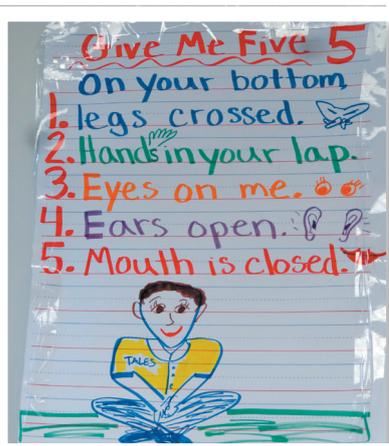
G. The Reader Classification Box

Students have developed reading habits since they were in the kindergarten. In the elementary school, they could choose readers based on their interests and ability. Hundreds of the class readers were classified according to the themes or reading levels in the colorful boxes, which was beautiful scenery in the classroom, wasn't it?



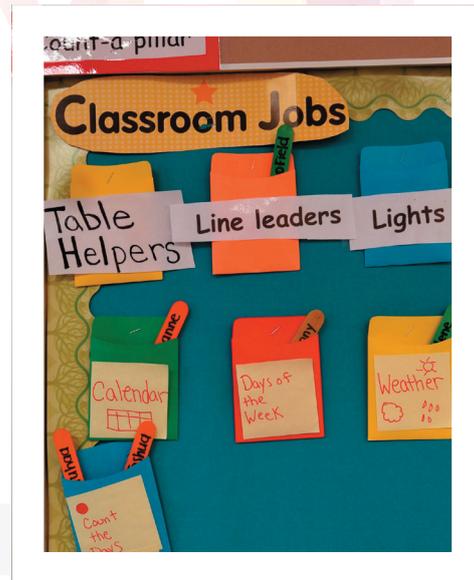
H. The Thinking Map

The thinking map is one of the way teachers in America guide students learning through thinking step by step. After teaching, the thinking map completed by the teacher and the whole class is the best learning material and layout in the classroom. The topic the class discusses might cover classroom rules, phonics rules, how to use the bathroom, how to do pair reading and independent reading, how to write and article, and so on. Via periodically review the rules and procedures of the classroom or the subjects, the students could successfully adhere to them.



I. “Colorful Helpers”

To make the class issues be students’ responsibility, every student took turns serving for the class. Each student could be a pencil sharpener, a floor checker, a board cleaner, a bus caller, an attendance line leader, a lunch counter, a door holder, a light person, or a librarian. Everyone tried to make the class better.



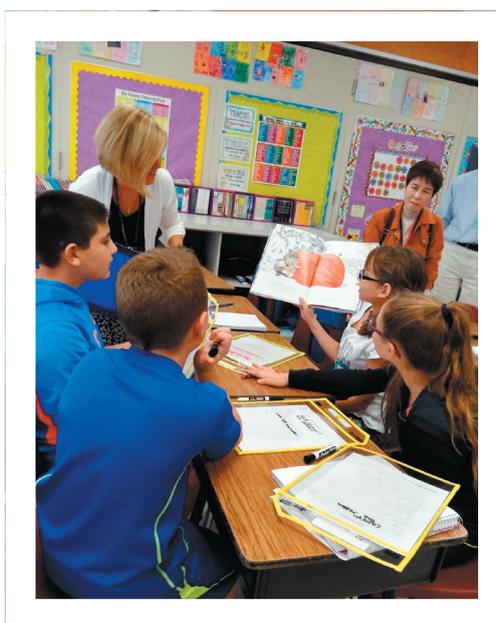
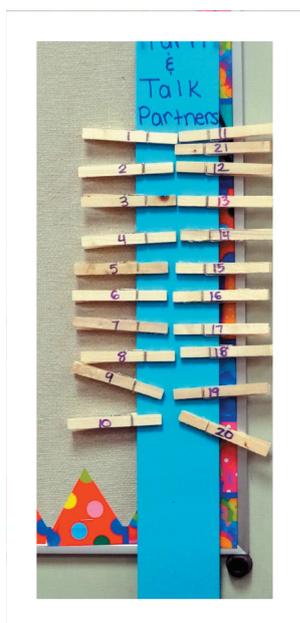
J. “Writing Partners”

Writers are great thinkers. Why not share ideas with others? Writing partners are the ones students can share, give opinions and discuss writing works with. Students could learn to express themselves orally and mentally.



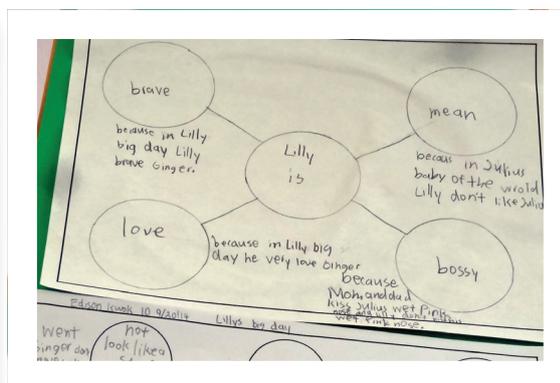
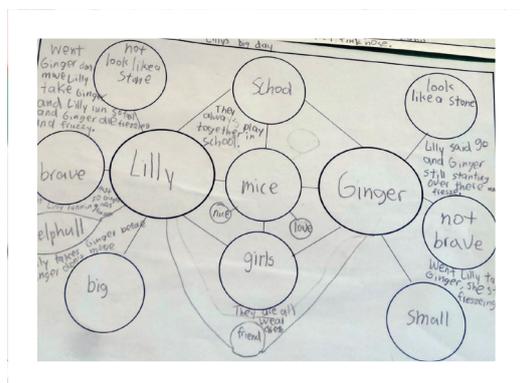
K. “Turn-and-Talk Partners”

Always listening to the same person lecturing is not fun. While introducing new ideas, new books, or new concept of the subject, teachers would stop for a while and let students turn around and talk with their partners. Through predicting, discussing, or even arguing, learning became more amusing and accessible.



L. "Check Me Out"

If students' works were not 100 percent correct, it is okay. As long as they were trying to learn, errors they had made can be the records of making progress.



Classroom Management

Rich classroom layout creates enjoyable learning environment. Nevertheless, effective classroom management makes learning more productive. Evertson and Weinstein (2006) characterize classroom management as the actions taken to create an environment that supports and facilitates academic and social-emotional learning. Douglas Brooks (1985) reports that effective classroom managers organized their activities on the first day of school consistent with the emerging very needs of the students.

Classroom management is closely connected to issues of motivation, discipline and respect (Gootman, 2008). In the lectures given by Dr. Susi Long in Columbia University, she encouraged teachers to identify students' expertise in and out of school. It reminded me of a saying by a great sculptor, Auguste Rodin, "I invent nothing, I

rediscover.” Certainly, students walk into the classrooms with their own knowledge and expertise, and they wait for teachers to lead and educate them and make them more confident. It is the notion of respect, and it is indeed happening in the American classrooms.

Before departure for the United States, I was looking forward to unique rewarding system or resources for classroom management. After observation, I surprisingly found that there were few or even no students yelling or ‘racing’ during recess time in the campus. Teachers spent little time on disciplining students practically. How did teachers in America make it? Except for treating students as respectful individuals, what teachers did were properly planning lessons ahead, organizing students’ learning in a meaningful and busy way, and actively engaging students in the class activities. That is, teachers guided students to take their own learning responsibilities.

Through further observation, I discovered that teacher-student mutual understanding allowed courses to go more smoothly. Teachers talked in respectful tone and in school voice and led students to speak in good manners and proper ways. Via teachers’ positive reinforcement and students’ strong learning motivation (as immigrants needed English and knowledge power to survive), students might become active listeners. Teachers gave praise to the entire class as frequently as possible. Teachers’ words such as “Give yourself a double pad.” “Good job! High five!” or “I love the way Tina puts her workbook on the desk.” could be magical and make students well-disciplined.

Moreover, in Asher Holmes Elementary School, I found a pile of colorful blocks in the corner of one classroom, which was one of the rewarding means of the brilliant teacher. That is, if the whole class general performance of that day was fine, the teacher would stack up one Lego block to form a skyscraper bit by bit. As long as the building was complete, there would be another surprise for students!



Other useful classroom management tips and dialogues between teachers and students are presented as below.

As the teacher said, “Reader! Look,” students would reply, “Up!”

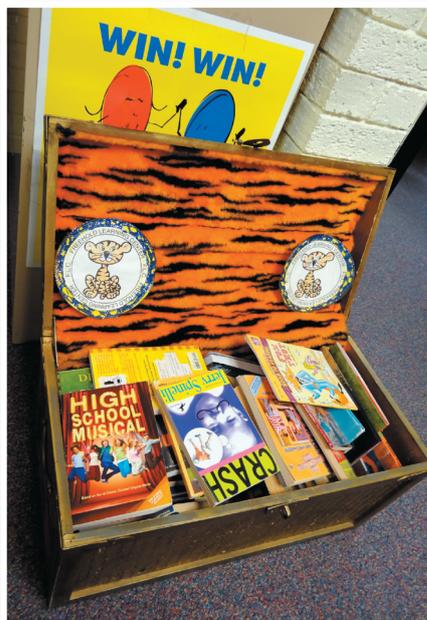
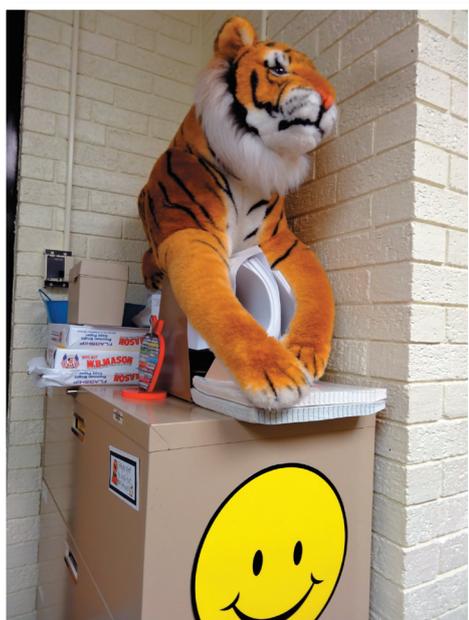
As the teacher sung, “Stop and listen!” students would sing back, “Okay!”

As the teacher said, “Babali!” students would reply, “Baba!”

As the teacher said, “1, 2, 3!” students would reply, “Back to you!”

Additionally, teachers in Freehold Learning Center together established a rewarding system for the whole school. Well-behaved students would receive one “Tiger Card.”

(Tiger is the mascot of Freehold Learning Center.) Whenever students retained ten “Tiger Cards,” they could have one terrific reader from a “Treasure Chest.” Students with good manners or behaviors were able to have a bonus surprise, which was having lunch with the principal along with movies and popcorn. As for general ways of dealing with misbehaved students, home-room teachers would first use simple verbal reminders when the misbehavior occurred. The reminders were to the point, moderate in tone, and private. However, if the unacceptable behavior continued, detention during recess or with the help of the principals and guide councilors would be implemented. It was very different from ways teachers in Taiwan would take. The administrators would set higher expectations for students with unacceptable doings, work with students and get parents involved. Suspension is even permitted in the United States. Cool idea! With parents’ full support, the morale of school would be positive.



Furthermore, in Active Learning School, teachers might ask misbehaved students to go to another classroom, or teachers might call parents for close conversation or communication which was based on mutual trust. One of the school disciplines I was amazed is the “Thinking Chair.” Students with slight misbehaviors would be asked by teachers to sit on the “Thinking Chair” to cool down or to do the reflection. As long as the misbehaved students felt ready again for the class, they could be back to learning. Another example of respect, wasn’t it? School atmosphere is not possibly formed in a short time, but imperceptibly takes place in daily life. Children are mirrors of adults. Teachers speak and act in a calm, tender, and firm way, and students will do.

Summary

Overall, providing a diverse and supportive environment, offering innovative opportunities for students, and enriching learners' exploring fields are teachers' missions. How to work for students' long-term benefit, how to make individual growth and transformation, and how to expand beyond a comfort zone are my challenges. Last but not least, I would like to wrap up my two-week educational training in New York and New Jersey with a student's feedback, which was shared by Dr. Susi Long: "Thank you for believing that there was a flower waiting inside and for taking time to help and watch it grow." Through humbly learning and diligently teaching, I expect that I can be a dedicated gardener in my future teaching career, and I look forward to another intensive training overseas as well!

