

## **An Inspiring Journey toward Better Teachings**

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I am so thankful that I was given such a precious opportunity to join the international short-term training course. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to those who devoted themselves so much and made this journey possible and successful. Since this was my first trip to USA, I had gone through several sleepless nights before the trip took place. During 2- week stay, all the visiting teachers were boarded by families within ABC School District. Every host family expressed their warmest kindness, enormous hospitality, and great enthusiasm to make this trip beyond expectation. Definitely, this was once in my lifetime experience that I could be so close to Americans to experience their lifestyles and their education and so much more. Moreover, I regarded the trip as an adventure, and I served as eyes and ears of my students to explore the different part of the world on earth. It's quite amazing to see how American children make their days at school.

A short recap on the itinerary for the training trip starting from October 4 till November 4, 2011:

Date	Activity
1 <sup>st</sup> week	AM - ABC Adult school – attend ESL (English as Second Language) Intermediate high level  PM - Attend workshops – Instructional Strategies for Teaching English as a Second Language

2 <sup>ND</sup> week	Teaching observation at Stowers Elementary
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### Teaching Materials could be Anywhere

We incidentally discovered that teaching materials came so handy at the airport of Taiwan. There was a “Hello Kitty” specialty lounge on my way to the boarding gate. It’s rather eye-catching using worldwide icon figure to introduce Taiwan’s culture. I, immediately, took all the pictures and prepared myself a similar topic to introduce Taiwan. Certainly, they will become resources I would like to share with my co-workers. Personally, I will vote this, the most adorable idea to teach Festivals as listed below:

- . Chinese New Year
- . Aboriginal Culture
- . Moon Festival
- . Dragon Boat Festival
- . Lantern Festival



Also, there was a poster with easy, clear tips to make a “Hello Kitty”!



### Time to Polish English

Every morning at the first week, I attended ESL (English as Second Language), Class Level Intermediate-High. The emphasis is on developing greater fluency and oral communication as well as reading and writing skills.

Apparently, all the participants should have completed ESL Beginning or equivalent and have a basic knowledge of survival English.

The first session of class was to watch the movie “Remember the Titans” It’s a movie about football team with a new African American coach and his team was a mixture of Black players and White players. A sensitive issue of racial tension was the core element of the movie. We watched the movie scene then defined/discussed vocabularies. With time restrained, we did not spend our time till the end of the movie. Nonetheless, we still had a wide range of discussions over sports, racial prejudice, and coaching technique.

The second session of class was based on a sad, true story – a man who went to a prison over 25 years. With DNA testing technique, he was finally proved innocent. The focus was on building listening ability and learning vocabularies about criminals. We were paired up to practice conversation between two friends about DNA testing. A very interesting topic associated a famous American crime drama television series CSI (Crime Scene Investigation).

And the third session was about “Drive Carefully”. A general guideline helps to drive safely. A video labeled “Do Driver and Police Officer” vs. “Don’t Driver and Police Officer”. It clearly explained what’s considered “do’s” and what “don’ts” is. It was a very useful lesson helped participants learn to communicate accurately and appropriately with the police officers in case one was asked to pull over to the side of road.

Since the ABC adult school is designed for immigrants from around the world who seek to learn English to acquire citizenship or a better job. A notable poster in the classroom, with heading “Improving Our English” that consists of many practical ideas to learn English more effectively and efficiently:

Make friends with English speakers.

Speak to your children's teacher.

Use an English dictionary.

Speak English with neighbors.

Use English at your job.

Write English letters, e-mails.

Read English books.

Sing English songs

Take other classes

Shop in the mall.

Talk on the phone.

Record your voice.

Listen to English radio

Read road signs and advertisements.

Talk to utility company employee.

Watch cartoon.

Volunteer in the community.

Speak English at home.

Shop in the mall.

Read English poetry.

Shop at new stores,

Make appointment.

Small talk conversation.



Go to the library.

In general, the mission of the class is to teach participants to communicate in English and become a better thinker, more independent, good sense of own selfhood to live in American society

### **Intensive English Workshop at ABC Adult School**

The workshop was divided into five sections which reflect key areas in primary language teaching. Each section was provided with specific goals and essential methodologies. These are:

- (1) Songs, Chants, and Drama
- (2) Vocabulary and Cooperative Learning
- (3) Writing and Conversation
- (4) Improving Listening skills
- (5) Integrating Pronunciation into a Lesson

All the instructors are best rated with many years of teaching experience for their professional expertise. Some of them have worked with young learners in several different countries in Asia. They generously contributed their creative teaching ideas through vigorous activities. The entire workshop was so enjoyable, useful and – above all - we benefited greatly by a wide-range of resource of practical ideas which can be adapted flexibly in different situations. Many of them were worthwhile and worth trying.

#### **Here are some Highlights:**

##### **Songs, Chants, and Drama**

Young children love music and movement. The virtue of songs, chants and drama is to allow the children to let off physical energy and concentrate more in

the class. During the workshop, we were given an example of taking a familiar tune and substituting words from the original lyric. Through repetition of the song, that made it memorable to sing in round.

Speak Your English (to the tune of: Row, Row, Row your Boat)

Speak, speak, speak your English

Speak it every day;

Then you practice, practice, practice, practice, you'll know what to say.

After working on the example, we formed groups of four and decided on a familiar tune, modified the lyrics then alternatively presented to the rest of the class. We all enjoyed a relaxing classroom atmosphere. As a reflection, I may like to use the pattern as a warm up routine for my third-grade students and let my fifth-graders make their own chants toward the target language.

### **Interactive Writing**

I love this part the best. Everyone had a picture of a person. The writing paper was attached to the picture.

The instructor asked questions according to the character wheel. After the student finished writing, they showed

their picture to the other student in the group and read the story. After each person in the groups had read their story, the group picked the story they liked the best. One person from each group came up and read the story in front of the class. This is an innovative process of team share required cooperative spirit to accomplish. It was a remarkable team-building exercise.



### **Observation at Stowers**

It is a great privilege to make acquaintance



with the wonderful faculty of Stowers . We spent most of the second week at Stowers to have close observation at Stowe Elementary school - a magnet school of international studies. What's a magnet school? A Magnet school is part of American public school system. Usually students are zoned into their schools based on location. Students mostly go to the school to those they are closest. With Magnet schools, the public school system has created schools that exist outside of zoned school boundaries. Each school emphasizes a particular theme, giving its students more opportunities to acquire skills that will help prepare them for success in the future.

#### The core values of Stowers International

##### Studies:

- All students will learn foreign languages.
- Worldwide communications and joint projects with other countries.
- Have diversity of learning program
- Each month focus a particular country... Students will learn some of the language of the country, participate in activities that represent the culture of that country, and learn some of the history of that country.
- International communications currently established with Ethiopia through HAPPY (Hands across the Planet to Poor Youth.)

#### **At a Glance of Harvest Carnival**

It was week of Halloween when we visited Stowers . A big event “Harvest Parade” to celebrate was held on Friday, October 28th. All the students were in costume reflecting their traditional culture or as in their favorite story book characters. The parade began at 8:30 am on the playground. We, the



visiting teachers, were also in Chinese traditional costume in the parade. Not only the children but the parents were quite enthusiastic to participate in the activity. The air was full of joyfulness.

### **Classroom Observation**

My host teacher was Mrs. Kris Andaya, a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher. This was her first year at Stowers. Although being relatively new, she actually had been ABC Unified for four years. I was greatly impressed by her passionate, motherly characteristic. She could always capture eyes of her children. I'd like to outline hereafter some of her teaching styles that enable me to grow considerably in my career.

### **Way to begin the class with routine**

Familiar routines help to make children more secure and confident in the classroom. Routines are patterns that everyone knows to anticipate and what they should do. All the students stood in front of the National flag and said the pledge of allegiance, which was a routine across the country. Here is the content of the pledge:

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands. One nation, under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all.

It's hard to measure how this actually transits into patriotism, yet, I believe cultivate young minds loyalty toward the nation should start at early childhood.

Following up, they sang in accordance the Stowers school song:

We are students here at Stowers

We learn to read and write

Best of schools will be our slogan

We will work with all our might

Can't you hear the school bells ringing

Stowers school hooray, hooray!"

It was cute and inspiring to start a day. It can also ensure each student is in their “comfort zone” to face new challenges ahead.

### **Math is Full of Fun**

The goal of the lesson is to identify odd/even numbers. It’s virtually impossible to become proficient at a mental task without extensive practice. Mrs. Andaya applied all possible situations to root the notion of odd/even number. For example, she used the one hundred number chart to have a lot of drills, asked students checked the calendar to tell what number is odd/even, even before the recess she called odd/even number to leave the classroom. All in all, she provided plenty of instructions to reinforce the notion. After a series of exercises, she designed games which naturally fuel the learners to the climax. Making game fun, she demonstrated first, the students practiced, and then they did altogether. It’s a pattern of “I do, you do, we do.” Step by step, motivated students and helped them pay more attention to win the game. I can easily adopt the activity in my class when teach “numbers”. It provides me with more creative, diversified activities.

### **Getting to Know about Taiwan – a Glimpse of Interculture**

I was given certain period of time to introduce the place where I am from. I downloaded from YouTube a short film “the heartbeat of Taiwan”, so they could take visual journey to Taiwan. At the end of the film, Mrs. Andaya drew a Venn

diagram and let her students expressed possible relations between USA and Taiwan. There was a scene of sky lantern in the film, so I prepared some paper crafts for the students to make their own miniature of sky lanterns. Hope this serves their best memory of Taiwan.

### **Reflection**

Bill Gates has spent about 5 billion trying to research and reform American education, asked by a journalist if he were running a school district and could wave a magic wand. What he would do. His response: hire the best teachers. That's what produced the best results for students, more than class size or money or curriculum. Great teaching becomes the biggest investment worldwide. We are few lucky teachers to have such a great training program. During this program, we had been exposed to a lot of ideas and activities. We will quickly see how it will be applicable to our situation with just a few small changes, we can make them work with our class. The value of the trip makes me learn how to think not just what to think. Thomas Edison said that genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration. **The end of a journey is the beginning of another.** With confidence, my voyage sets off toward a more capable English educator for my young learners!