

A Brief Introduction to American Campus Facilities

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Preface

It has been weeks since I came back from California, USA, and I still feel grateful for those who assisted us in every way to make our trip fruitful and successful. It was definitely not my first time been to America; however, attending the English teacher visiting delegation means a lot to me. I was luckily enough to visit 3 beautiful campuses including ABC Adult School, Stowers Elementary School, and William F. Elliott Elementary School. When I was there, I talked to different teachers and staff to understand their thoughts about classes, schools, or even the American education system and was very happy that they were all willing to share their ideas with me.

Before I went to America, I set up the goal for this trip and my focus was mainly on observing the American campus facilities; meanwhile, I also planned to purchase some teaching supplements and classroom decoration. I reached the goal with the help from my host family and would like to express my gratitude to them here. They spent hours to take us to the teachers' supply stores and bargained for a better discount. All their effort has made my learning trip so meaningful and unforgettable.

American Campus Facts

	Min-Yi Elementary School, Taiwan	Elliott Elementary School, U.S.A.
School type	semester	trimester
School	7:30 am ~ 3:45 pm	8:30 am ~ 2:30 pm

hours		
Recess	10 ~15 minutes after each class	10:30am ~ 10:45am
Main subject teaching	By homeroom teacher	By teaming teaching
Class last	40 minutes	Varied, but mostly 30 minutes
Lunch	In the classroom with teacher	In eating area without teacher
Intervention class	None	Reading and Language Class

Here are things I found quite differently from what we do in Taiwan.

1. Students who are coming to school early have to wait outside of the gate till the janitor opens the gate at eight o'clock (see picture 1). However, students are still not able to get into the classroom and have to wait in lines outside the classroom till their teachers open the door at eight thirty (see picture 2).



(pic



(picture 2)

2. Teachers' teaching schedules are tight and limited, and sometimes they are too busy to prepare for classroom routine jobs like making copies, handouts or checking homework log. Therefore, American teachers like to invite volunteers, mostly student's parents, to work in back of the class or in the copy room and help sorting things out.

3. Library time is a required subject listed in the school curriculum. Once students go to the library, they start reading book quietly or looking for books to read. The librarian will then ask students to stop reading, sit in front of her on the carpet, and read them a book for the last 10 minutes.



(picture 3)



(picture 4)

4. It brought up my curiosity when I first saw the sign "Restrooms are for student use only." The doors of the restrooms are always opened and students have to take the restroom pass with them if they want to use the toilet during the class time (see picture 3 and 4). Teachers or guests have to use the restroom in the main office. It is often seen that teachers wait in line during the class recess.

5. Lunch hour starts at 12:00 for students from 1st grade to 3rd grade. Students have their lunch in an open area near the playground. They are under the janitors' supervision during lunch time (see picture 5). After finishing lunch, they have to clean up their table before they are free to play with their friends on the playground. Later students assembled at twelve forty-five waiting to get back to the class and see their teachers again.





(picture 5)

(picture 6)

6. School provides a public area for teachers to make copies and get some stationery supplies, or receive message, mails, and packages from outside. This area also serves as an information-distributing center between the school and the teachers (see picture 6).

Classroom Facts

	Min-Yi Elementary School, Taiwan	Elliott Elementary School, U.S.A.
Air Conditioner	No	Yes
Sink	No	Yes
Document camera	No	Yes
Computer devices	1 computer with/out printer	3 Apple computers and a printer
Carpet	No	Yes

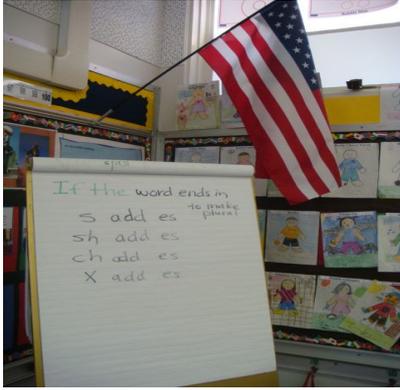
Projector	Yes	Yes	I
Subjects studied	Chinese, Math, P.E., Art, English, Social Science, Science, Dialect, Music, Computer, and Health	Reading, Language Arts, Math, Social Science, Science, P.E., Music, Library, Cursive, Health, and Computer	reall y enjo y Ame rican class

room settings. All the equipments they put in the room are all considered to be beneficial to the students' learning. I would like to share something that I have seen in the elementary schools as follows,

1. The ceiling is high and provides a comfortable learning ambiance. The classroom has one side with big windows and the other side with smaller windows near the ceiling. The smaller windows bring in the nature light.

2. Most of the classrooms are equipped with air conditioners, carpet, computers, document cameras, and printers. A sink and a drinking fountain are also seen in a classroom. They tried to build a pleasant and comfortable ambiance for a successful learning environment for students.

3. Things commonly seen in a standard classroom would be a Star-Spangled Banner, a world map, a reading corner, and a stationery corner (see picture 7). Besides that, teachers tried to fill the empty space with pocket charts, wall charts, posters, birthday, or flash cards as many as possible and make the room more colorful and interesting (see picture 8).



(picture 7)



(picture 8)

4. Students' projects, composition, and artwork can be part of the classroom decorations. Teachers usually save a big part of the bulletin board for students to demonstrate things about themselves.

5. The document cameras are used in almost every classroom I observed this time. Teachers show the contents or pictures from the books, fill in the answers, or even use a timer to remind students how much time has left.

Reflection

I took teacher training courses at ABC Adult School and learned some new concepts like tableaux or round robin. The classroom observation leads me to reflect if there is anything I can do to make my teaching better. In all, I really appreciate to have such a good opportunity to practice my speaking and broaden my range of teaching activities and skills. There are things I learned from this trip that I would like to point out.

1. From observing the class, I noticed that there are some techniques most American teachers use- they try to encourage students to read stories, comics, or games, and then ask students to work meanings out independently. American teachers appreciate creative writing in various forms and help students organize and experiment with language.

2. When children make things for others to see, they will try to draw nicely and neatly for their friends to see or sometimes compare what they are doing with other students' work. Teachers should look for the ultimate possibility to demonstrate students' work in the classroom or on the hallway.

3. Students learn in a variety of ways by watching, by listening, reading, imitating, or even doing things. A good language teacher should provide students with all kinds of materials for them to think or to create, and eventually foster their interests in learning second language.

4. Language learning required dedication in practice and oftentimes it is hard to see a huge change or improvement in a short time.

5. I have heard about Teaming teaching from the textbook, but it is seldom seen in really classroom. However, this time I really saw how it works in 3rd grade classrooms at Elliott Elementary School. Students had been divided beforehand into 3 groups according to their reading, language art, and math abilities respectively.

Teachers have less concern to the mixed-ability problem in the class and focus mainly on teaching students with same level of understanding. Furthermore, teachers also arranged intervention classes for those who really can't catch up on their studies. They asked for volunteers, helpers, or staff to design special courses or games for slower students to play with. This intervention class is aimed to rebuild the confidence for slower learners with their studies. I saw students having fun with their helpers, and I did not feel they were ashamed of themselves when they came back from the intervention class. I believed teachers did something to prevent teasing among students in advance. American teachers understand the importance of offering helps for slower learners and are not afraid to speak to parents about area of concerns.

6. The scheduled class hours for American elementary school are less than Taiwan, but it doesn't mean that they provide fewer subjects or learning items than us. According to the 3rd grade curriculum, they teach the fundamentals for elementary students like "I-message" vs. "You-message", the beginning algebra, and the cursive. Some of these topics are quite difficult for 3rd grade students to understand, even the teachers admitted that; however, they will review these subjects every year in their curriculums and expand deeper and broader gradually on these topics. Teachers in America believe their students might not understand some of the ideas at once, but at least the students know something about it. The teachers assume the students might get the ideas someday in the future.

7. People regret they don't gain enough knowledge when they need it and that was how I felt when I encountered with young curious students at Elliott Elementary School. All the visiting teachers were told to present two or three mini lessons to the classes we observed, and I did actually perform how to play Chinese toys – tops and shuttlecocks to 3rd grade students, after considering the time and the cost.

I learned how to play Chinese tops and shuttlecocks from my students. I kept practicing and practicing these toys before I set out for my journey, and the class I had with 3rd graders introducing Chinese toys at Elliott Elementary School turned out to be a successful one. This experience tells me that a language teacher is not only teaching language itself, but also teaching the background knowledge, the deeper thoughts, and even more the culture within. After coming back to Taiwan, I paid more attention to some of the seminars or workshops discussing Chinese culture or products. I bought and read a book introducing the beauty of Chinese calligraphy. I hope I will be well-prepared to teach young curious students with pride and confidence when the time comes.

8. I tried to furnish my classroom with something I brought from the United States. Flyers of my favorite fast food restaurant- El Pollo Loco, postcards, newspapers, and pictures that I have collected for my students are all on the bulletin board now (see picture 9). Students are curious (see picture 10) and like to ask things about my trip and that's how I was able to satisfy them with real pieces from America.



(picture 9)



(picture 10)

Conclusion

Many of the new ideas and questions have been brought up to the teachers at the workshop we attended this time which made us to think again at specific activities and solutions, to listen again to extracts, and then to organize, carry out, and write down ideas for classes accordingly. And this is the reason why I like to attend workshops or seminars, because I can be inspired by some new concepts and ideas or sometimes just retrieve things from old memories. After getting used to the daily routine life of teaching, I forgot my essential passion and enthusiasm to when I wanted to become a teacher.

Then, I received a handout called A Creed For ESL (English As Second Language) Teachers (Toll, n.d.) from one of teachers I met. This Creed is not new to me, but somehow I forgot. When I looked back on it again, I still feel touched and grateful for it reminds me how much I wanted to become an English teacher.

As an English teacher of the elementary school, I am always concerned about how to make English-learning more enjoyable and fun. I think it is my responsibility to keep working

on these thoughts, because I might be the key person to influence my students' second language leaning attitude for their whole lives.

After visiting American elementary schools, I strongly believe that the satisfaction I gained and the knowledge I learned from experimenting with new ideas and trying out new language can benefit both me and my students in the future.

I like to encourage myself as well as my students to continue in our own personal self-development with English. It is good to learn new things, and more importantly, learn how to apply such knowledge in everyday situations.

Reference

Toll, M. (n.d.). Director, American English Institute, California State University, Fresno