

The Most Unforgettable Learning Trip

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I am not an adventurous person. I am used to my normal life. I do not like to experience new things. I don't like to take a risk in my life. That's what I am but when I decided to join this program, I knew that I made a big progress to my teaching horizons and broaden my views of the world.

I have been to Japan, Thailand and Czech Republic, but America is always the country I want to visit. The real reason is not for the scenic spots, but because I really want to hear "standard English", to use "English" to communicate with people who can speak "good English." That is why I always yearn to visit America. Therefore, at the moment we arrived at LAX Airport, I knew I am going to have a brand new English learning experience in my life.

This report will be divided into four parts. First is the reflections in ABC Adult School; second is the classroom observations of a 1st grade class in Stowers Elementary School and the applications to my teaching; third is my stay with my host family and last my overall reflections of this wonderful trip.

ABC Adult School

Every morning session of the first week, I was in the Intermediate Low Class and my partners were Ivy Tu and Pheobe Yang. I was so lucky because the teachers were so experienced and their teaching styles were totally different.

The first teacher was David and he taught vocabulary. His humorous and active manners always aroused participants' interests to the course and his friendly attitude stimulated all the participants to talk and discuss during the class. And I felt respected from his enjoyable and polite manners which were his greatest charms to all of us. From David, I learned that as

teachers we need to create a delightful learning atmosphere in order to encourage every student participate in the learning environment.

The second teacher was Christine and she taught grammar. When we joined her class, she was teaching the concepts of “demonstrative adjectives.” The way she taught was very systematic and she used a lot of activities to practice the concepts which included worksheets, games and conversations. Then she introduced new sentence patterns “How much is this/that _____?” and “How much are these/those _____?” with demonstrative adjectives. Her lecture on the topic was quite similar to how we teach in Taiwan. Therefore, I found it quite useful to my teaching from her courses.

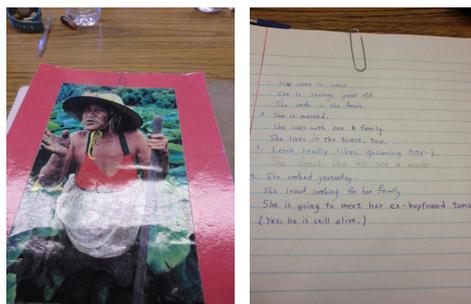
The third teacher was Mona and she taught reading. The first impression I had for Mona was that she was so elegant, just like a movie star Ingrid Bergman and later I learned that Mona was also from North Europe. From the number of the participants, I could tell Mona’s class was very popular. The way she talked and taught were quite serious, but allow me to explain further, she just seemed to have the power of authority and you couldn’t help but respect her. During my stay, she taught the idea of “present perfect.” She explained the concepts very clearly and used many activities to reinforce the ideas for the participants. From Mona, I learned that as a teacher you need to create your professional attitude in your working area, and then your students will be convinced.

In the afternoon courses, the first day topic was “Songs, Chants and Drama.” The trainers were Susanna and Joanne and content they introduced was very suitable for young learners. For example, “*A Practice Rhyme: I sing. You sing. He, she, it sings. We sing. They sing. All the pretty birds sing.* (The verb can be substituted for walk, go, sit and sleep)” The trainers asked every group to practice the rhyme and create the actions, and then we had to perform in front of the class. Back to my class, how am I going to use this rhyme? The students are learning

the pronouns now and this activity is very interesting and useful for the kids to practice the pronouns because through the actions they create. The discussion they had can help them memorize the usage of the pronouns.

The second days topic was “Vocabulary and Cooperative Learning.” The trainers were Jenni and Joanne. From the course I found one useful activity which could be used to practice vocabulary. It is called “Conversation Bag.” Firstly, each student would get one question. Then they should go around the classroom and ask three students about the question and then write down their answers and names. Third, they need to report the answers to the other group members. For this activity, I could use in my 5th grade class because they’ve learned many sentences patterns and vocabulary, they can practice to speak English to communicate with each other. For example, I could give them the sentence pattern “What do you like?” In this question, they can answer “I like _____.” The answers could be food, sports, games, animals and etc. Therefore, through this activity, they could practice speaking and listening and learn to share with group members.

The Third day’s topic was “Writing and Conversation.” The trainers were Mona and Laurie who introduced an activity called “Interactive Writing.” It was too hard to use in our class, however it was very interesting. First, each member of the group would get one picture and a paper. Second, students will answer one question which should be based on the picture they got and write it down. Third, students give the picture to the person who is sitting next to them. Fourth, they need to go on the second and the third steps until they finish the eight questions asked by the teacher. Fifth, the sentences they write would become a story. This writing activity was very funny and we really enjoyed it, however, it needs some adjustment when I apply to my teaching.



The Fourth day's topic was "Improving Listening Skills." The trainers were Susanna and Rebecca who reminded me one important idea that I should train students to use more classroom English, for example, "Excuse me," "Pardon," and "Say it again, please." I demand myself to use a lot classroom English, however, I neglect students to use more classroom English. For this part, I have to help students to speak more during the class. As for the activity "Cloze Using Songs", I already used in my teaching, however, they gave me one more idea which was "Pair Dictation." It reminded me that "dictation" was more efficient and practical for students to practice listening and writing skills than using a lot of so called "games" to waste time. Sometimes, keep students busy by doing basic practice is definitely necessary and important.

The Fifth day's topic was "Integrating Pronunciation into a Lesson." The trainers were Bob and Vicki. As for my teaching, I always put emphasis on pronunciation, stress and intonation because I think that learning to speak naturally and smoothly helps students to communicate with people and therefore they can establish their confidence in English.

Stowers Elementary School

In Stowers, I was in Mrs. Thompson's 1st grade class. As soon as I entered Mrs. Thompson's class, I found it very comfortable, well-organized and colorful. The way Mrs. Thompson talked was very friendly, nice and warm, at that moment, I wasn't so nervous anymore. She introduced me to the class right away and she showed them the location of Taiwan from the map. Then, the students were so excited that they asked me many questions

about Taiwan. There were twenty-five students and eleven of them were from Asia, and three of them were even from Taiwan. I felt quite relieved and happy because everyone was so lovely and friendly.



From my observations on Mrs. Thompson's classroom management, I found that she was very experienced and her teaching style was very suitable for 1st grade students because she put great emphasis on the classroom rules. For example, once the students did something not appropriate, she would say "principled?", "disciplined?" or "respectful?" and when she said so, she let students ponder and decide their behavior was proper or not and she never yelled or shouted and always talked in a steady tone. Mrs. Thompson said that she used about one month to let students get used to the classroom rules. Still, she taught the students "*The Golden Rule: treat others the way you want to be treated,*" and "*to respect, be a friend, be helpful and be nice.*" Once the students disobey the rules, she would keep reminding them and try to reduce the negative parts. On the other hand, she gave students compliments all the time and she always said all the magic words "thank you, proud, smart, beautiful and etc." I reflected that I should set my serious attitude and keep reminding my students when they misbehave because nowadays Taiwanese students are not as well-behaved as before. Therefore, after I came back, I kept reminding them "no shouting" and "respect." Now, when I say "no" and they would continue to say "shouting." From seeing my serious attitude, I think the rules will be firmly rooted in their mind.

The school hours in Stowers were from 8:10 to 14:15. Mrs. Thompson spent most of the

time in language arts which included storytelling, poems, phonics, writing and reading. The most impressive part was the teacher did reading groups while the students did their writing and worksheets. Students were divided into four groups according to their levels and they went to the reading corner group by group and the teacher guided them to read. It reminded me that maybe I can do reading groups in my 5th grade class because there are only twenty-three students in Wednesday afternoon. After coming back, I used twenty minutes from one session to do the reading groups and I divided them into two groups. The higher level group, I guided them to read “The Diary of a Wimpy Kid” which was very funny and interesting, though it was a little bit hard for some of them, however, the content did arouse their learning interests. The other group, I guided them to review the textbook and most important of all, I got the chance to attend to lower level students’ learning situation. I don’t know whether it works or not yet, but at least I give it a try.



How lucky I was to have the chance to introduce them about Taiwan. The Power Point my colleague Carol made, “A School Day in Taiwan” which showed them the classes, school hours, lunch time, the cleaning block and etc. in Taiwan. They were all amazed by the differences between Taiwan and America. Then I told them the story of “Chinese Zodiac” and guided them to guess the twelve animals. At Last, I showed them some beautiful videos about Taiwan. I wasn’t nervous at all maybe it was because they were only 1st grade students and they were so focused and adorable. I really enjoyed my stay in Mrs. Thompson’s class and I learned a lot from her and the students.



Host Family

During my stay in America, my host, Ricci Zinger took good care of us. At first, I thought at first Ricci were not so easygoing because she looked quite serious, however, after getting to know each other, I found that Ricci was very nice and humorous. She talked a lot of idioms and slangs and she talked really fast. However, I really enjoyed chatting with her and loved the time when we shared each other's life experiences. On the last two days, we spent time in a Korean market and we showed her the food we knew and explained some stuff she didn't know to her. Then we went to the Cerritos Library and saw the beautiful architecture. I was so grateful to be her companion and she was really my unforgettable friend in America.



Above all, I finally had a different culture experience. As an English teacher, I am very

grateful to have this opportunity to broaden my horizons and I am very glad that I can show my students my culture experiences and use what I learned in ABC Adult School and Stowers Elementary School to my English teaching. I am so glad that I took a risk and made my life different this time. Finally, during my stay in America, everyone I met, everything I did would become the most unforgettable learning trip in my life.