

Li-lin Elementary School (麗林國小)

Michelle Ho (何慕華)

A trip to remember...

“Unforgettable...” , just like one of Frank Sinatra's greatest hit, and again “ Unforgettable...” - indeed an unforgettable trip!!

First I would like to show my appreciation to the New Taipei City Government as well as The Jay School Corporation for offering us this rare and unique chance to the States to exchange, with the great teachers we met there, the views on teaching methodology, required courses and the English-teaching and learning skills.

During this 14-day visit, we went to some schools in Chicago and while in Indiana, two other Taiwanese teachers and I were assigned to Albany Elementary (2 days) and Redkey Elementary(1 day) for full day observation. I was, to be honest, pretty nervous at the beginning of this arrangement which I would never think of having one before, but all our anxieties simply went away after meeting Dr. Timothy Long, the Superintendent of the Jay School Corporation and Mr. Tomas Jerles, the principal of the Redkey Elementary . They are incredibly nice to accompany us almost everywhere (we can easily get lost there, you know, new faces!) and simply offered whatever help we might need to make our stay there comfortable and easier. And the happy couple of the host family, Mr. and Mrs. Jerles did really make our stay with them the happiest time of this trip, nothing better. It’s really nice to live the real American life which I would never get to see, hear and feel before, even for such short period of time.



So here are some ways of teaching, learning, classroom management and the implementation of reading recovery at Albany Elementary and Redkey Elementary which I found can be very useful and applicable even to my class:

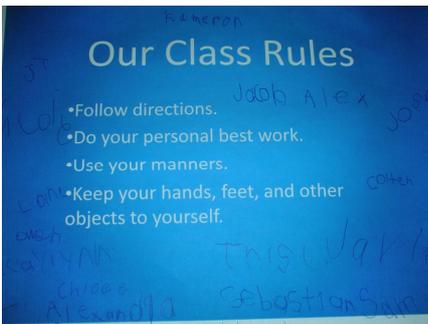
Extensive reading

We noticed at the Albany Elementary that after reading to the class, Mr. Huber (1st grade teacher there) will assign his students 16 tasks. The students will then get to choose any four of the 16 tasks and finish them either on their own, in pairs or working in groups. Mr. Huber will, after they finish the choosing, check around and see if the students are doing OK. His students are so eager to get their job done, as early and as beautifully as possible, to have the attention and kind of stamps from Mr. Huber. Once they get to collect 4 stamps, they will then be rewarded in some way, either verbally or with candies. In so doing, the students can benefit from not only team work, but also spontaneous learning which I truly believe can be applied to my class too. Here is what the tasks look like:

R	E	A	D
(1) Read alone	(2) Make up 3 questions about the book	(3) Pick out 3 new words and look them up in the dictionary	(4) Pick a character to draw and describe
(5) Read with teacher	(6) Make up a song about the story	(7) Tell about the problem and solution	(8) Write about your favorite part
(9) Read with a group	(10) Draw a new cover for the book	(11) Add a new character to the story and write about it	(12) Act out the story with a partner
(13) Read with a partner	(14) Draw the setting of the story	(15) Write a sentence about the beginning, middle and end	(16) After reading, test or quiz

Mr. Huber is actually also a master of classroom management. There are 15 “little monsters”, full of energy, in his class and they are just pretty much like mine. When the students were so close to cross the line in the classroom, Mr. Huber would simply ask those trouble-makers to put their hands on their head, just for a few seconds to cool down. Even so, Mr. Huber could still unbelievably speak in a very calm and soft tone of voice which I would never be able to do the same!

I also noticed that all of his students were instructed to just focus on the goals specified on the bulletin of the classroom. Also, students are requested to show each other the courtesy, dignity and,



most important of all, respect. If anyone breaks the rule, he or she will then be given a green, yellow or red card judging from how bad their behaviors can be. Green card means you will

be missing 5 minutes of recess; yellow means you will be kissing good-bye to the recess for the whole day and red means your parents will be brought to their attention what you have done today. On top of all this, anyone who is bad enough will be sent to the principal's office and disciplined to some extend – that, fortunately, never happened to Mr. Huber's class. Though what I observed here may not have as much effects as you would expect here in Taiwan, it is, however, always good to know that someone will be there for you when you need some emotional supports. As a matter of fact, we people-won't-believe-what-we-are -facing-now teachers in Taiwan aren't that lucky and the sense of helplessness and powerlessness is in the end all we got in cases like mentioned above. In our case we normally will have to time-out the class and do something like asking for some outside help from the parents or the school. Sometimes I just naively think that the parents can at least play

some roles they are supposed to play in their child's education, but it turns out always that they (their kids too!) are either not responding to our crying for help or even, to make things worse, blaming us for their kids' wrong doings. It simply makes everything even more difficult, especially at the time when the kids are going through the teenage rebellion. We are not allowed to ask them to leave the class as it will simply deprive them of their right to learn. We are not allowed, either, to do any corporal punishment, not to mention suspending them from the school. Parents and students these days do show less respect for teachers than before which will simply make teaching more difficult and complicated. It shouldn't be that difficult to understand that courtesy, dignity and respect do come both ways. I really don't want to believe that there's nothing we can do to make things better as long as we face the music and do what we ought to do.

Centers

“Center learning” is widely used in classes there. In Mrs. Gibson’s 5th grade class, students were divided into



three groups: the first one did their writing separately in a center, the second one read loudly with the teacher and the third one practiced spelling, pronunciation and sentence correction in the computer center. Students then rotated among different centers after a while and were required to fill up the worksheets after finishing their tasks. Other than Mrs. Gibson, there were still two more teachers in her class to assist the kids in working on their tasks.

Reading Recovery

For the low achieving students who might need extra attentions in terms of reading and writing, the school does provide a comprehensive literacy plan so that they won’t be left behind. The principal, teachers, resources teachers, and other instructional supporting personnel team up to map out the teaching plan and are responsible for monitoring the progress of those low performing kids. The team is using effective assessment tools such as the measures of phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, vocabulary, fluency and the development of each student’s reading process. These are what I found useful and can be applicable here too:

1. Look at the picture and think about what is going on.
2. Make the first sound/cluster. (Clusters- th, sh, wh, br, cr, gl, etc.)
3. Look for a chunk you know. (chunks – ing, ed, be, ike, eat, etc.)



4. Sound it out.
5. Re-read and think about what would make sense.
6. After you think you have figured out the word, re-read and ask yourself the following questions: Does it look right? Does it sound right? Does it make sense?

At Redkey Elementary School, teachers work closely with student's parents to help them learn and improve. A guideline indicating some learning tips is provided to the parents so that they can assist their child in leaning at home. Here is the guideline:

1. Give your child time before helping. (Count to 10)
2. Suggest that she/he try all the reading strategies.
3. Ask your child to reread when he/she makes a mistake and see if they can correct the mistake.
4. Please do not always begin by asking your child to sound out the word.
5. Supply the unknown word only after your child has tried all the strategies and still cannot figure it out. They should reread the sentence to make sure it makes sense.
6. Remember to focus on what your child is doing well and attempting to do. Remain loving and supportive.

It also came to our attention that not only resource teachers, but also homeroom teachers are teaching in different ways based on student's different and individual needs. We say all the time "to teach students in accordance with their aptitude" Maybe we should just give it a try before we can know how far we can go.

Fried rice, anyone?

During my 3-day visit at the school, I luckily had the chance to have lunch together with students at the student cafeteria. There you can find all kinds of typical American foods such as hamburger, pizza, tacos with creamy cheese and salty meat sauce, chips, jelly, you name it. So for one day, I



tried to have the whole set of the meal including a small plate of canned corns, "walking taco" (taco from the bag and served with fresh meat sauce), a salty pretzel and milk. I tried very hard to finish the meal, but I couldn't - not because these highly processed foods are not that healthy, but simply because I am not used to it. Having all this as lunch for some days can be fun, but everyday, thanks! That can be too much to swallow (except for my kids since they have been complaining for a while already about the lunch

boxes I have been preparing for them!). It seems that teachers and parents here do care about what their kids are having for lunch, but can't do much about it due to some unknown reasons. Thus they might as well just live with it and see what the authority will do to improve it - they have been talking about this for years already and nothing materializes.

I was very happy and honored to have the chance to make some fried rice for Mr. Jerles and everybody there at Redkey Elementary- just to show them what a typical Chinese lunch box might look like. Eggs, lettuce, roast chicken, carrots, rice- everything I can find in the kitchen was properly used to contribute to a tasty meal and then, 15 minutes later, a nutritious and yummy dish was served on the table with no sweat. Having been able to turn the American food into a Chinese one within such limited time really made my day on that day at school and the thing is: they just liked it and they liked it so much that they even asked me for the recipe. How I wish that I could show them some more tips on our ways of cooking so that they can make the school meals more school-meal like. Don't think there will be any big changes to the kid's meal there after this little and nice surprise to them, but if this fried rice can, well, at least inspire the cafeteria workers to make some changes to the meal, then this would be all the better.

I actually did see a lot of obese kids there and poor diet can be the main reason here (it's not that we don't have the problem here in Taiwan, actually the problem is getting bigger and bigger here, just that it's comparably smaller). In terms of that issue, I suggest that American schools increase the intake of healthful foods such as fruits, vegetables and whole grain food, and on the other hand, decrease refined sugar, animal fat and processed foods. After all, we are what we eat! In Taiwan, we have a slogan, "An intake of five sorts of fresh fruits and vegetables a day helps to keep diseases away. We always teach our kids to eat healthy. Sometimes we encourage kids in collaboration with parents to design their own menu of well-balanced diet at home. It is also important to remind parents to maintain a healthy well-balanced diet all the time. At the same time, we should get rid of vending machines with processed food and drink. We should encourage students to bring their own water bottles and drink pure water.

Surprise, surprise!

It was indeed a trip full of nice surprises! Visiting Jane Addams High School was like playing a role of a teacher in my favorite American TV program, "Glee" (for those who know nothing about "Glee": it's like kind of "High School Musical" anyway and they talk, laugh, cry and, of course, sing about love, peer pressure, interpersonal relationship and whatever you can imagine will be happening in high school). Having been able to physically look at all the teenagers walking by, chatting and playing in the hallway simply reminds me of all the scenes I have ever seen on "Glee". And surprise, surprise, they do have a Glee Club (a chorus!) in Jane Addams High School, just like the one on "Glee". Also "The Diary of a Wimpy Kid" simply came to my mind during our observation at the elementary schools, nothing but the characters in the book, nothing different and you can't expect say next. So next time when I get to "Glee" and "The Diary of a Wimpy



Wimpy Kid"
3-day classroom
the kids are
cute and funny,
what they would
recommend
Kid" to the kids,

I would simply tell them: I have been there and what you see and read about “Glee” and “The Diary of a Wimpy kid” is nothing but true.

Introducing Taiwan to someone who doesn't even know where it is, horse-riding, lawn-mowing, watching live baseball game, playing traditional local game (corn hole), preparing food for the donation party, joining one of the teacher's baby shower, being a cook and impress everybody within some minutes, and on top of all this, a lot of teaching skills learned... so how can one ask for more from a single trip? And you know what I learned from Dr. Tim Long and Mr. Tom Jerles to be a qualified teaching role model? It's passion! Without passion, we are nothing but a teaching machine! Even though we are facing mounting pressure and challenges, nothing can get us down unless we admit defeated.



