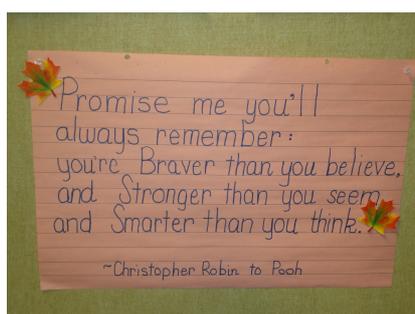


# My learning trip to Portland, Indiana by Li-ju SU, Guang-fu Elementary School

## General ideas of what I have known about American schooling

The schools I visited are basically located in Randolph County, Portland, Indiana. I have visited three elementary schools, Willard, Deerfield and Bakers. I also visited one middle school, Driver. Here are some general ideas of what I have observed.

1. **Character education: “Character counts”**, this is what the superintendent of Jay school corporation, Dr. Tim Long, kept mentioning while we were with him. They consider **“caring, respect, fairness, responsibility, citizenship, and trustworthiness”** are the six pillars of character. The school corporations around the state implement those pillars by creating their expectations which they want to focus on. For example, in Randolph central school corporation, teachers and students focus on three expectations what they called **“life goals”**: **do the right things, treat people right, and use your life skills**. Those three sentences are written on posters or banners and pasted in the hallways and classrooms around the schools. Anyone who first comes into the schools can easily catch the spot and know the goals right away. I saw teachers apply those “life goals” to their teaching. They repeat the goals whenever they



have the chance to remind children of the goals, e.g. *“I am looking for some people who are doing the right things, treat people right and have the right cards on their hands...”*. They also ask children to repeat the goals whenever children behave inappropriately, e.g. *“Sue, are you doing*

*the right thing? Please repeat the sentence, “Do the right thing.”*” It seems that the character education is so well-applied into the teaching. Children actually adopt the spirits and apply them into their daily life and finally it becomes a spontaneous reaction.

**Reflection:** There might be some point that we can review here of our character education. We have our character education and our goals in Taiwan. We try hard to have our children to reach those goals. However, we have too many goals and those

goals are too much abstract. They are too unreal to children. They are clear and logical but they are like some undefeated principles hung on the wall. Children can repeat them clearly but they have a weak awareness of the connection between the goals and their daily life.

**2. Flexibility and evaluation:** Teachers in America decide their teaching topics and design their teaching activities individually, though they share ideas very often.

They choose from a range of resources and design their teaching scheme. Different teachers may have different decisions. They might integrate two or three subjects together into one teaching scheme if they think it is the best



for their children to learn. It is not necessary that each teacher teaches the same units or texts for the same grade at the same semester, as long as their children can reach the curriculum goals at the end. However, children take a state test “I-step” every year since they enter the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. This is to evaluate children’s achievement for remediation. Also this would enable the authority to know whether the teacher’s teaching scheme is on the right track.

From 2012, if those students who are in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and above fail to show their ability in reading and math academically, they might be retained.

**3. Supporting system “Title 1”:** “Title 1” is to be read as **Improving Academic Achievement Of The Disadvantaged**. The purpose of this title is to ensure all students receive a fair, equal opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and all



children reach the state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments ( official statement of Title1 ) . In order to reach this goal, title1 provide remedial program for those who are struggling with academic proficiency. Title1 focus on improving children’s reading ability. They provide scheme as “Reading recovery” for lower grades and “Literacy” for higher grades to improve children’s proficiency on reading. For those

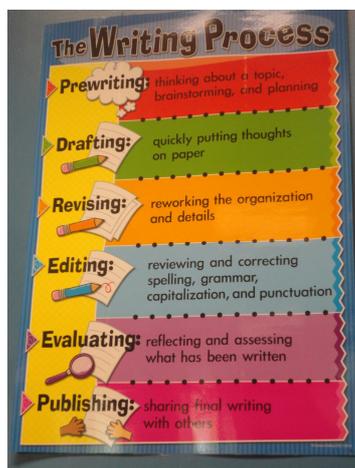
low-achieving children, title1 provides extra reading assistance. Children are provided small-group, supplemental instruction in addition to the time allotted for gaining skills and proficiency on reading. For children who are not able to meet

the proficiency on reading, specifically designed and customized instruction may be provided.

**Reflection:** “No children are left behind” is always a goal to primary education in Taiwan. However there is yet no sufficient assistance provided to the academically low-performing children. Children who are struggling in reaching academic achievement



standards do not receive proper education service to help them make progress. Elementary schools in America, they pull out those who cannot read proficiently and provide them extra help for reading. Their remedial program started with reading because reading is actually the core ability assess to any advanced knowledge. This might be an inspiration to us. We could use it as a reference to arrange our own



remedial program and provide appropriate course to those who need extra help with academic proficiency. For long, we tend to offer the elite better access to education resources and so they get the best of everything, the best teachers, the best facilities, the best timetable.... That’s why parents in Taiwan are so panicked when they see their children being behind others. If we could offer those who are disadvantaged in reaching academic standards intensive, strategic, supplemental instruction to meet their needs, though

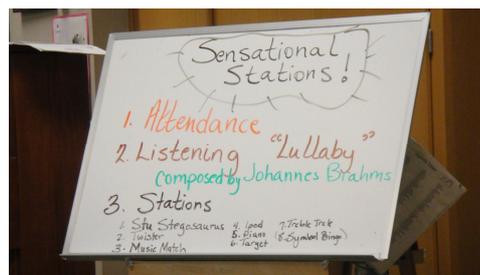
stones won’t turn into diamonds, stones can be valuable.

## **What I have learnt about Teaching**

The timing we chose for our school visiting was not the best as American schools finished at the end of May. By the time we were there, they were doing evaluation or preparing for field trip. There was not much teaching going on. However, I was quite impressed by the teachers’ classroom management.

From those schools I’ve observed, I learnt that teachers make a lot of effort to their classroom management. They decorate their classrooms with some little cute decorations and try to make the classrooms visually friendly. They paste posters with moral beliefs on the wall to announce what is right to follow. They set up rules and put them on the wall to inform their children what to do and what not to do. There are also some excellent works of fine art or writing pieces displayed on the wall to encourage children to carry out with their best. They create different corners for

different learning purposes in the classroom, so that students have alternatives of various activities while they have finished the assigned work. Here are some good points which I think I would apply to my own classes.



1. **Daily schedules on board before started:** What impressed me the most is that the teachers always put on the daily schedules on board, so that students would know what to expect for the day as soon as they enter the classroom. For me this is to show a respect to all students as well as to show the teacher is well prepared and willing to share information. I should apply this to my class. To announce the schedule ahead instead of only keeping it in mind and giving orders when needed.
2. **Everything is related to teaching and learning:** some teachers really have good ideas about how to arrange their information or resources for learning around the classroom. I like the idea of showing useful references around the classroom so that students can always look for the instruction whenever they need to.

**A. Word bank:** catalog by alphabetical order; place all the words that students have learnt in the word bank, continue to add up the words gradually as students learn more words. I like this display because it is useful and very much related to teaching.



**B. Posters of Character education help behaving well:** turn the pillars of character ( *caring, respect, fairness, responsibility, citizenship, trustworthiness* ) into specific and practical sentences that children can understand easily( *do the right things, treat people right, use your life skills* ). Placing the sentences on the wall in the classroom, the teacher can always refer to the sentences to help correct the inappropriate behavior.

**C. Instructions for daily routine or regulations:** it is good to place the instructions or regulations at places around the classroom where students can reach easily, e.g. "*Things you can do after you finish assigned work...* "; "*Work due on ...*"; "*Mail Box for assigned and corrected works*". Children can always look for instructions they need by themselves, instead of coming to ask teachers for answers. Sometimes teachers get upset if they have to



answer the same question over and over again. I think clear rules is an essential of good classroom management. If kids are aware of rules and actually following them, the whole teaching process will go much more smoothly. This will also

help teachers to get things done easily. However, the instructions and regulations have to be clear and simple that children can understand perfectly and easily practice in class.

While I was in those schools observing, I found out it is very common different group of children are at the different corners doing different things. Some might try to finish work assigned by the teacher, some might read books at one corner and some might be working on computers at the other corner. The kids seemed to know what they were doing and everybody was working seriously. No one seemed to play around. Teachers there hardly get mad and hardly need to yell. Everyone speaks softly which is amazing.

3. **Respectful, friendly and interactive environment for learning:** as far as I could observe, teachers in America teach through discussion very often, they ask a lot of questions to lead children to think and talk. In comparison with children in Taiwan, children in America are more willing to speak up in class. They are not hesitated



while they need to say something in front of people. There won't be a humiliation of saying something wrong. Every opinion is respected. I have never heard teachers say anything negative to children towards to an opinion what a child has said in class. Also they have the awareness of

listening to others and no interrupting while others are talking. It seems that all children have already been trained well and they know they need to raise hands for permission before they speak. I like the way it is. I think this is something we have to adopt to our teaching. We have to give our children more respect, so they will be more confident in speaking up in public.

However, before we can encourage our kids to speak up in public, we should set up clear rules at the very beginning of school days and strictly apply the rules to

the classroom, includes “Talk to the whole class rather than talk to the individual while in class.” “Listen to others” “Hands up for permission to speak”“Talk about things that only relevant to the subject while in class”.

## **Lunch**

I ate school lunch while I was in school. School lunch there was simple. They eat mainly cold sandwiches, salad, beans and milk. In America, lunch time is probably the only time the students can relax and be free to talk to their peers. You can see the cafeteria is very busy and noisy at lunch



time. They think meal time is supposed to be a time to relax and to social with peers. Lunch time is their break time. Whereas in Taiwan, we eat quietly in the classroom and we served proper hot meal for lunch.

## **Culture immersing**

Along the way from Chicago to Indiana, there are few things which I think are very impressive.

## **Courtesy**

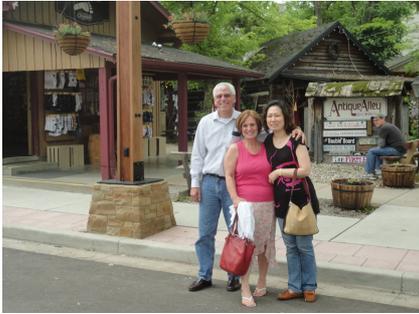
People hold the door for those who want to go through behind. This is just a small effort, but it really shows great courtesy to others. I don't think people in Taiwan have done this very often. Maybe it is because we have automatic doors at many places and we don't need to open doors in public very often. That's why we never have to think about teaching our children this manner. But it might be a great idea to start it now, after all, we teach language and we also teach culture. Thanks to Dr. Long. All the way, he was the one to hold doors for everybody and he's given the best demonstration.



"Lady first"---Along the trip, Dr. Long and Principal Jerles took care of the entire luggage and left us 17 ladies with empty hands watching (included the driver, Barbara). They are true gentlemen and they had somehow influenced our two principals, Principal Hu and Principal Chen, as they joined the luggage lifting up-and-down service at the end. Thank you all!

### **My staying with my host family**

While I was in Indiana, I stayed with Mr. and Mrs. Kiser, Gary and Kris. So did Carol. Their beautiful house is located at Winchester, Randolph County, very close to Winchester Speedway. The house is by a small lake and surrounded by trees, neat lawn and lovely paths. They even have a hot tub on the deck in the back yard.



Gary and Kris are senior elementary school teachers. They are kind and interesting. They took us to schools for observation every day and arranged the schedules for our observation. Also, they took us to visit many places and to meet a lot of people after school and on the weekend. They are so nice that they had tried all they could to help us feel as

comfortable as home. Thanks for their warm hospitality. We really had wonderful time there.

Gary and Kris took us to many places. On the only weekend of our staying, we went to Seymour to watch a show, “The Drifters”. It was a live show with three singers singing and flatter on the stage. They were singing old pop songs and the audiences are mainly elderly. I could see everyone was enjoying the show. The singers invited the audiences to participate in the show. The audiences were clapping, laughing, dancing and hugging their partners during the show. I really enjoyed the cheerful atmosphere. I like the way they show their emotion. They are direct. They show their feelings with no hesitation which I think is great. Thanks to Gary and Kris again. I really appreciate their kindness. The wonderful time we had is just unforgettable!



### **Conclusion**

#### **He, kids! The whole world is out there waiting for you!**

After I got back to my school in Taiwan, one of my students said to me: “Miss Su, it is kind of cool that you know some people thousands miles away, on the other side of the Earth!” I think he is so right! I told him that there is a great possibility that someday he will do the same thing. But before that, he just needs to get himself ready!



### **My appreciation to...**

First, I would like to give my thanks to the Education Bureau of New Taipei City for offering me this great opportunity to visit such a nice place. Secondly, I like to thank Taipei Economic and Culture Office in Chicago for the arrangement of our staying in Chicago. Furthermore, I would like to thank Dr. Long for arranging this learning trip and taking really good care of us along the journey, and Principal Jerles, too. Then I would like to thank all the principals and teachers in Willard, Deerfield, Bakers and Drive schools. Thank you for your generosity for sharing ideas of teaching. Above all, I like to give my great appreciation to Gary and Kris. Thanks for having us. Thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Myers in Seymour, too.