

Report on Short-term Training Program to Indiana

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This valuable trip gave me an opportunity to observe American teachers' teaching, interaction between teachers and students and to experience American culture. Owing to the great effort contributed by New Taipei City Government, Chicago Taipei Economic & Cultural office and our new friends in USA, Dr. Long and Mr. Tomas Jerles, we had a wonderful learning experience. Furthermore, I would like to thank Mrs. Colleen Fuhrman, my host family, for her hospitality and Mr. Sirk and Mr. Carty who had arranged many things for my partner and me, when we stayed in Indiana.

In this report, I would like to focus on some phenomena that I saw in Northwest Elementary school and to introduce some special programs carried out in the school system. The last part will be my personal reflection.

Daily schedule (Lunch time & Recess)

When I was in Northwest elementary school, I always felt that it was rare to see students in the hallway. The campus was so quiet that you might hear the sound if a needle fell on the ground. Most of the time students stayed in the classroom, or they were lining up for next class. I wondered when the recess time was for playing or answering nature's call. I pointed out this with Colleen and she told us that they don't have a break between classes, but students are allowed to use the restroom freely inside the classroom whenever he/she needs, and students have 3 minutes to shift from one class to another. That explains why you won't see lots of students rush into the restroom during the recess time. However, they do have the recess time which is arranged in a different way from ours.

According to Northwest Elementary school's daily schedule, the class starts at 8 o'clock without any break until lunch time. From 10:55~12:00, each grade takes turn to have lunch. Amazing! 10:55 is pretty early to have lunch, isn't it? Lunch break lasts for 45 minutes, including a 25-minute recess time. Therefore, if students finish their lunch earlier, they can get more time for recess.

In the afternoon, students have another recess time about 25 minutes around 1:00~1:55. During the recess, most students play on the playground and for the safety concern, one of school faculty will be there to monitor them. Indeed, play ground is the place where accidents happen all the time; it would be a wise precaution to have an adult nearby to take care of the students.

Try to imagine this in Taiwan, homeroom teachers do not have lunch with students. What would come next? Quarreling, chasing, playing with food or anything you can

name it. Their students having lunch on their own without making any trouble in cafeteria really surprised me. Being an English teacher and homeroom teacher, I would like to give them a big applause for their good behavior.

Well disciplined students

We all agree that having high motivation, high self expectation and willing to participate are crucial factors to successful learning. Being a teacher, we should offer students a warm and safe learning environment and provide them efficient teaching. Nevertheless, efficient teaching won't exist if the teacher has a hard time maintaining discipline in the classroom.

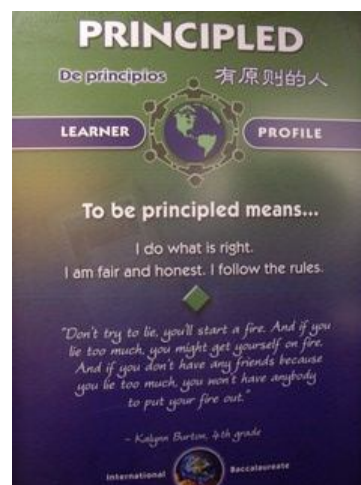
To be honest, I was really impressed by American students' good discipline and positive learning attitude. That must have something to do with teacher's classroom management and unique curriculum design, I think. Almost everyone concentrated on their tasks, and it was hard to find someone chatting with his/her classmate in class.

Not only Northwest elementary school but also other schools put great emphasis on good character. On campus or in the hallway, there were lots of posters or signs telling what traits students were expected to possess. Inside the classroom, teachers set up a good role model for always respecting and treating others nicely. The teacher gave simple and clear instruction to the students, and he/she always used a soft but firming voice to correct students' mistakes or wrong behaviors. The interaction between the teacher and students was harmonious. We could say that students have learned to respect others since they were in the kindergarten.

Basically, every teacher has his/her own classroom guideline, and it is often displayed in front of the classroom as a reminder. Of course, students might violate the rules sometimes. If that happen, they will have to take the consequence. Take a 3rd



grade class for an example, for the first slight offense, it is just a verbal correction; for the second time, a form letter to copy at home is required. For the 3rd offense, the student needs to copy a form letter which must be signed by parents. For the 4th offense, except a form letter signed by parents, the student is also required to fill out behavior paper to explain his/her wrong behavior. If the student continues to offense, he/she will be sent to the principle's office, and

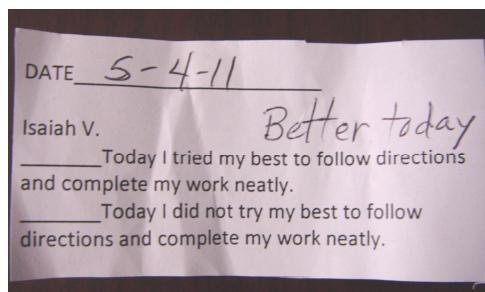


receive the punishment such as suspension from school bus for couple days. This will push parents to put more time on their children's education, won't it?

Administrative support

Teachers won't be alone at the front line, if administrative support can back them up. Northwest elementary school has conducted a systematic method to handle students' behavior problem. Once we saw a little boy, Isaiah, playing Wii in the principle's office. Mrs. Lamon, the principle, explained that he was an emotional problem child. If the homeroom teacher sends her a note which indicates Isaiah behaves well today, he can get some rewards, like Wii Time, Book, Chocolate or Computer Game Time. If the note says that he doesn't behave well, he will be sent into the office to talk with her.

Administrative support is also a key point to help teachers to run the class smoothly, especially when dealing with some special kids. The school also conducts Personal Behavior Plan for special students, and uses a tracking system that puts students' daily behavior data into the computer database



every day to see if there's any improvement on students' behavior. Therefore, parents can understand their children more and be willing to cooperate with the school.

Unique curriculum design

When teachers design the curriculum, they don't just concern about the importance of knowledge itself but more about how students could digest and integrate the information they have learned. I would like to share the below two classes; hopefully you could get some inspiration as I did.

1. Science class

Mrs. Fuhrman wanted to teach phases of the moon, and she used a very creative method. Guess what? When the class started, each student was given a pack of Oreo cookies with a plastic knife and the handout.



After a short introduction of basic concept and terminology, students started to make their own 8 phases of the moon with cookies, and labeled the cookies with the name. By this way, students were not just "playing" happily but also gained the knowledge during the whole process. Personally, I

would like to adopt this brilliant idea into my Moon festival unit for next semester.

2. Math class

Students were working on the “ Bridge Building Contest” project, when we were there. The teachers told us that those students were 6th graders; however, their Math ability had already reached the level of 7th graders. Besides, they had finished the state curriculum, so they had time to do the 10-day project at the end of the semester.

Before building their own bridges, students had learned about history of bridge development, basic bridge types, and one bridge builder was invited into the class to illustrate how people built a bridge in the real world.

Then, students were divided into groups, and each member played a different role, like Project Director, Architect, Carpenter, Transportation Chief and



Accountant. In this project, they also learned how to place an order, write a check and control the budget like keeping balance sheet, and so on. To students, Math was no longer a boring subject, and it could be applied to their daily life. I believe this kind of curriculum design benefits students a lot.

You may wonder where such fabulous ideas came from. Being a teacher in America is lucky; teachers can easily access to this kind of teaching resources, no matter from their publishers or teaching resource websites.

Charmed for Success

Northwest elementary has a special program called Charmed for Success. The purpose of this program is to raise students’ motivation, engagement, and then improve students’ academic performance. By giving immediately feedback to student’s effort and hard work, it encourages them to keep having positive learning attitudes, beliefs and passions.



At the beginning of school year, students will receive a 24 inch beaded chain. Throughout the school year, students have a daily, weekly and monthly opportunity to add up their charms. To earn the charms, they need to meet certain requirement such

as academic achievements, attendance, character education and student participation. For their birthdays or being Student of the Week, students will also be awarded a charm. Based on my observation, students did cherish their charm necklace and took it as an honor to wear. And this attitude will make this program become very successful.

Title 1

Title I is a federal program under No Child Left Behind that provides supplementary funding to improve academic achievement for low-income students(ASD online, n.d.). The purpose of Title 1 is to ensure that all children have a fair opportunity to obtain a high quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments (ED.gov. n.d.).

In Northwest elementary school, they try their best to improve the academic achievement of the disadvantaged. It's very important to know how it works in the title 1 classroom. Basically, three teachers share one classroom and one teacher takes care of 5 students. In order to stimulate students' motivation and reduce the pressure, they use game activities to teach, and every 5 minutes, they would change another game to practice different target.



The following information can give you more idea about Title 1.

Q1: How to select title 1 students?

Teacher's opinion, student's reading level, and dibels assessment

Q2: How to decide students to stay in title 1 or not?

They have tests in the beginning and the middle of the semester. It depends on the result of the test.

Q3: What if students fail the tests?

They'll need to repeat the grade. If they fail twice, the school will check if they have learning disability.

Q4: What kind of arrangement will be made if students have learning disability?

They will go to learning problem room for help.

Q5: What else does the school provide to help title 1 students?

Expect 30 minutes a day in the regular daily schedule, we offer 2 hours of after school class, and therefore, most of them can complete their homework before they go home. Furthermore, students need to go to summer school, and it lasts for 3 weeks.

Below level students are also required to participate after school class for 30 days

in one semester. If students achieve the goal, the reward would be going to a movie. If they show up for only 10 days, they would receive one charm as a reward, which encourages them to participate more in the future.

No Excuses University

This slogan, No Excuses University, caught my eyes when I walked by in the hallway. Each bulletin board displayed its own theme about certain college or university. That aroused my curiosity why they spent so much effort on that since their students were all below the age of 10.

After consulting with the principle, I got the idea about how this project worked. In this school, 65% of students' families are below poverty line, which means that most of their parents' financial statuses are very weak. Many students may not have chance to go to college or don't know why they should go.

Teachers in Northwest Elementary school do believe that every student deserves the opportunity to be prepared to enroll in a college if they choose to attend. Therefore, they try to put students into some kind of environment that a college education will offer and provide a high quality education that prepares students for college.

The methods they used are as below:

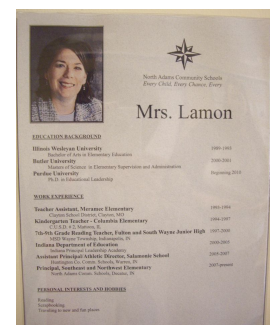
University Adoptions –

Each classroom adopted a four year college or university to create a culture of college readiness and used banner, sign, flags to decorate the classroom.



Signs and Bulletin Boards –

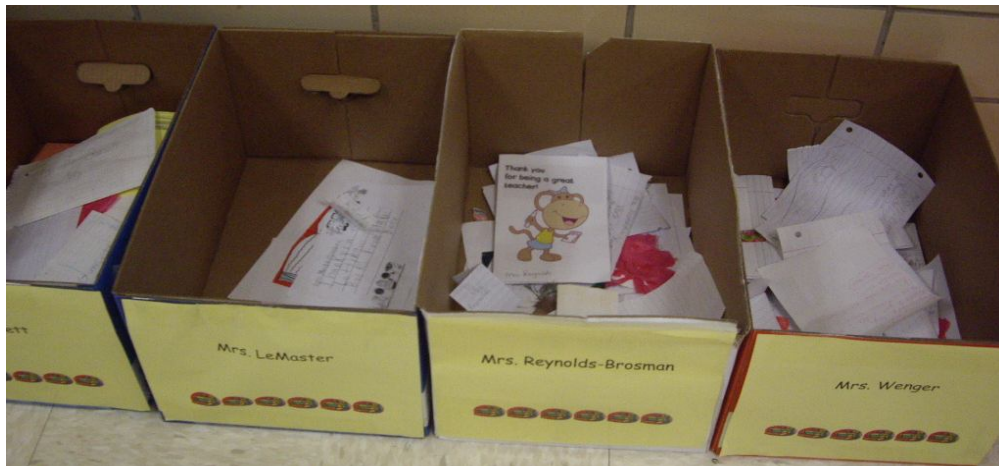
Each staff member's sign were hanged on the wall. The sign had a lot of personal information on it, and highlighted the educational background of each. In the hallway, there was a community bulletin board indicating where each staff member has graduated with a college degree. These two visuals all conveyed their belief to students that education is important.



Teacher's Appreciation Week

In Indiana, they have teacher's appreciation week to honor their teachers. The time when we visited Northwest Elementary school happened to be their teacher's appreciation week. Both school and students had their own way to show their gratitude to teachers. On Thursday, school prepared an abundant feast for teachers in

the teacher's lounge at lunch time. We were honored to be invited to join them, and all the teachers enjoyed great food and chatted with colleagues in a relaxing way. As for students, they put notes, pictures or cards into the boxes which were put aligned in the hallway at the beginning of the week to express their appreciation for teachers. At the end of the week, the box and stuff inside were all sent to the individual teacher.



Those boxes with teachers' name tag were put aligned in the hallway

Campanelli Mandarin Immersion Program

We have taken English an international language for last few decades, but what about Mandarin in 21st century? Jim Rogers said in his book, *A Gift To My Children*, that *"its a Chinese century, so to learn Chinese !!- to be participate in a great country occur, to buy the future of this country."* To many countries, China is a big market and has abundant potentials. Campanelli elementary school wants to prepare their students for the future, and it's going to start Mandarin Immersion program in the next semester. More than half of subjects will be taught in Mandarin, including Mathematics, Science, Literacy and Culture. They expect their students to manage the language well, so they will be in the dominant position in the future. To be honest, I admire their determination of implementing Mandarin Immersion Program, and how much they would invest on their students. We should let our students know what kind of competitors they are going to deal with, and think about whether they should be able to manage English well.

Environmental Awareness

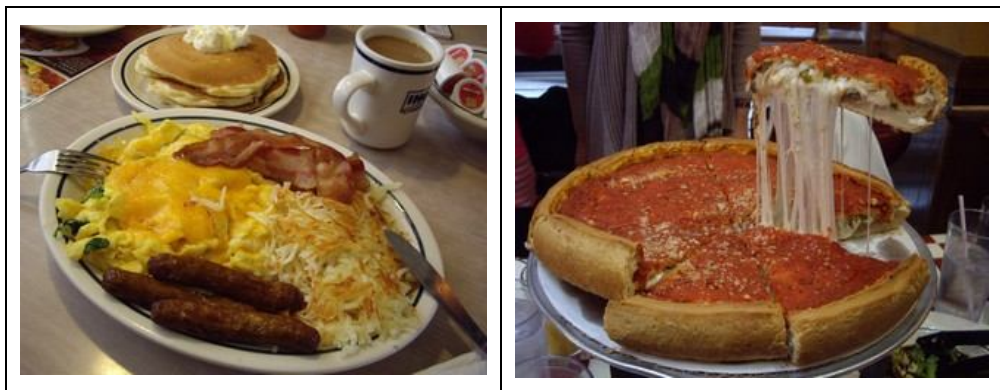
We have only one earth, and we should do as much as we can to protect our environment, no matter where we live. I felt



surprised to see that dining utensils such as plastic plates and forks were highly used at schools. Bottled water was also very common in daily life, but the empty bottles were not recycled well here. Some posters in one school shown on the wall urged “Go Green” and another school recycled Alumni, but I think there is still space for improvement.

Reflection

During this visit, we had shared our opinions about the differences of education system between Taiwan and the United State. For me, it takes time to think over and digest. This trip also broadened my view in many aspects, such as big size western meals, the beauty of Chicago architecture, and people’s passion for sports. What I learned from this trip would be integrated into my future teaching. This is indeed an unforgettable experience I have ever had and I want to say “thank you” again to all the people who had ever helped to make this wonderful training come true.



Reference

ASD online (n.d.) Title 1 program. Retrieved June 08 2011, from <http://www.asdk12.org/depts/titleone/>

ED.gov (n.d.)_ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION Title I — Improving The Academic Achievement Of The Disadvantaged. Retrieved June 08 2011, from <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg1.html>