

What I learned in the California Educational Trip

Learner - Centered Activities

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Special Thanks to...

First, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Educational Bureau of New Taipei City, two principals, Dr. Pao-Ling Kuo and Dr. Tom Tracy who are very nice and thoughtful to make this delegation so successful, and all of the teachers and staff in both ABC Adult School and Stowers Elementary School. Without them, I would not know so much useful and practical teaching techniques used and the elementary school system applied in California. And I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to my host family, Ricci, who is very caring, a “walking idioms” (who uses lots of idioms when she talks), and gives us a ride all the time and a very cook who provide us very good and healthy breakfast. Also, Ricci’s sister, Kasey, who is really kind and willing to tell us everything she knows and her lovely family. Most of all, I would like to say something to the 16 English teachers from New Taipei City who joined this educational trip, “It’s very happy to know you all.”

During this two weeks visit, I tried my best to immerse myself into the American culture and the whole environment. I’ve had an overview of the school schedule and the educational system in California. In the first week, I’ve had a chance to learn about the English language and the teaching techniques that the teacher used in ABC Adult School. In the second week, I’ve had a chance to learn from the classrooms that I observed in Stowers Elementary School.

The Impressive Learner- centered Activities

We spent the first week in ABC Adult School. First, I would like to introduce the useful teaching activities and teaching techniques I learned from the teachers there.

Monday workshop: Songs, Chants and Drama

Trainers: Susanna Levitt and Joanne Locnikar

Teach English through songs, chants and drama is not only interesting but also leads to strong and lasting retention of information. Songs, chants and drama provide a more cheerful atmosphere than either grammar practices or drill repetitions.

The affective, cognitive and linguistic reasons for using songs are all grounded in learning theory. Using songs, chants and drama in language learning are a lot more beneficial than we can think about.

We can take the tunes that students are familiar with to make up the songs and the chants. Use them to teach vocabulary, culture and daily conversations. Teachers should say the lyrics or lines slowly and clearly. Clap both hands to keep the beat going. And then ask the students to follow up. In the end, teachers can talk about the meanings of the lyrics. Have a discussion to read between the lines. There are a lot of hidden meanings and cultural aspects in a song. The trainers also have each team to make up a short song by using familiar tunes. After every team performed its song, one of the trainers collected our works, typed them and printed them out. Everybody has one copy of all teams' work. That is great. The following is one of our course works:

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

(To the tune of "The More We Get Together")

Reduce, reuse, recycle, recycle, recycle,

Reduce, reuse, recycle,

It's easy to do.

Cause your world is my world,

And my world is your world,

Reduce, reuse, recycle,

It's easy to do.

Tuesday workshop: Vocabulary and Cooperative Learning

Trainers: Jenni Santamaria and Joanne Locnikar

The goal of this course is to help teachers teach English vocabulary with cooperative learning method. Mona introduces some interactive activities. One of the impressive activities is using vocabulary cards to facilitate multiple retrievals. Vocabulary cards are the ones we use to teach and memorize the words. Jenni introduced some essential elements to write on the vocabulary cards. She shows us the student- made vocabulary cards: On the front, you can write down the word and part of speech. On the back, you can write down the information about the word, for example, translation, picture or definition, collocations, other members of the word family or a sample sentence. And, we can use vocabulary cards to do some activities. Have students pick three random cards and “teach” the words to their groups. Use their cards to “quiz” each other. Students can also pull three cards and write a short paragraph or story that using all three words. Also, there are teacher- made vocabulary cards: Give each student a card with a different word on it. Make sure students know the word and prepare a definition or sample sentence that they will use to teach to someone else. Have all the students stand up, find a partner, and teach your partner the words. Your partner has to guess the word that you describe and exchange the card with you. You both have to find new partners to teach the new word to. Continue until most students have spoken to about five partners. We can also use “vocabulary” to play lots of games. For example, divide the class in to teams. One team member comes up, pulls a card, and, within a time limit, defines, acts out or draws pictures until one of his or her teammates guesses the word.

The above mentioned is a cooperative learning activity. Cooperative learning includes positive independence, face to face interaction, individual and group accountability, interpersonal and small-group skill and group processing. This is also a student-centered activity, which is mostly done by the students themselves.

Wednesday workshop: Writing and Conversation

Trainers: Mona Suero and Laurie Judy

One of the very interesting activities is using pictures to practice interactive writing skill, which I call it “picture dictating.” Teacher gives everyone a picture, a paper clip and writing paper. In the picture, there is a character (a man or a woman). Teacher asks us to write down the answer that we can think of to her questions-character wheel. You can use any description to describe the main character from the picture. After finishing the first question, everyone has to pass down his or her own picture and the paper sheet to the one who sits next on your right side. Teacher gives questions again, such as “What do you think he or she did last night?” And we have to write down one sentence and pass it down. Questions keep going, the activity ends when we get our original pictures back. By this time, you’ll have a piece of paper that has 5 sentences on it. And people in a team take turns to show the picture and say out the sentences, which now become a funny story of the main character. Everyone can thus practice speaking while reading the sentences. And the group can choose the story they like the best. Teacher then will ask one person from each group come up to the front and share the story in front of the class. In my opinion, this is a very good activity, which students can practice their writing and speaking skills with writing sentences.

The following “Character wheel” is for your reference and you can adjust them according to the topic you want to discuss about:

What is his/her name? How old is he/she? Where does he/she work?

Is he/she married or single? Where does he/she live?

What is something the person really likes?

What is something the person really doesn't like?

What did he/she do yesterday? How did he/she feel about it?

What is the person going to do tomorrow? Why?

Also, try pictures of occupations, scenery, homes, animals, and people doing things. As teachers, we can try anything we can ask questions about. Use concrete items for lower proficiency learners. Use more abstract or inferential questions for advanced students.

Thursday workshop: Improving Listening skills

Trainers: Susanna Levitt and Rebecca Sim

Language learners consider that listening is the most frequently used language skill for second language learners. Half of the time we spend communicating requires listening. Rebecca introduces a very useful website: <http://www.schoolhouserock.tv/>. This is a website that contains a lot of useful songs, such as *Busy Prepositions* for teaching prepositions, *A Noun Is a Person, Place or Thing* for teaching nouns and *Verb: That's What's Happening* for teaching verbs. We can use this kind of "Cloze Using Songs" activity to practice students listening.

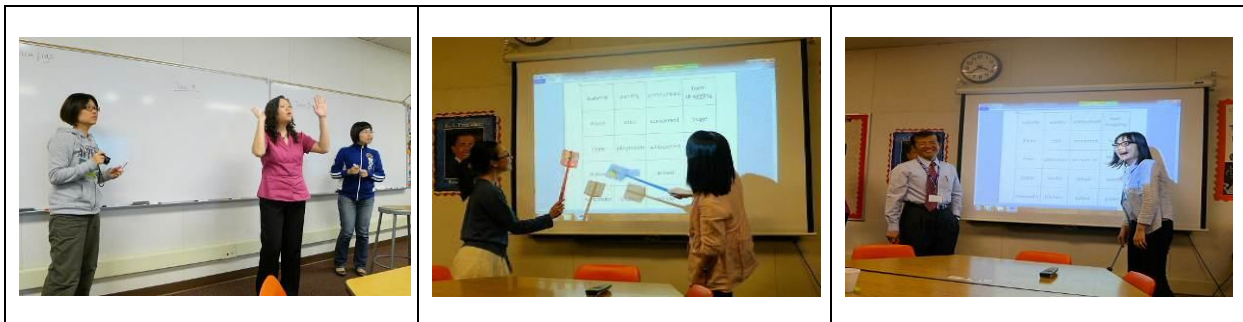
Peer Dictation

And I would like to introduce a learner centered activity, which is called "Peer Dictation." We usually do teacher to student dictation. Compare to dictation conducted by teachers, "Peer Dictation" is more fun and good for use. In this activity, students can practice more about their listening and speaking skills. Two people in a group, partner A listens to partner B. Partner B says the sentences first. Partner A writes down the sentences he or she

hears. If partner A cannot get what partner B's saying, he or she can ask these clarification questions: "Excuse me?" Or "Can you repeat that?" Or "Would you speak more slowly, please?" Or "Can you spell that?" We can also use the three steps: "Repeat, write and check" to make this activity complete.

Participatory Listening

Teacher reads a short story or a few paragraphs to students. Students listen carefully. After that, she shows a set of words on the screen or writes a set of words in the blackboard. She invites two people coming to the front. And another two people are in charge of marking points. "**Listening to the Sight Words**"- Teacher reads the story again, when the two students hear the sight words which are showed on the screen, they have to use the fly swatter to flap the word as fast as possible. The fast one gets a point.



Classroom Observations at Stowers Elementary School

Then, I would like to introduce what I learned and observed in Stowers Elementary School in the second week. I've observed three different classes in Stowers. The following are the pictures taken in Stowers. From left to right, the teachers are Mrs. Johnson, Mrs. Pyle, and Mr. Ives. The next row from left to right presents the pictures of classroom decorations.



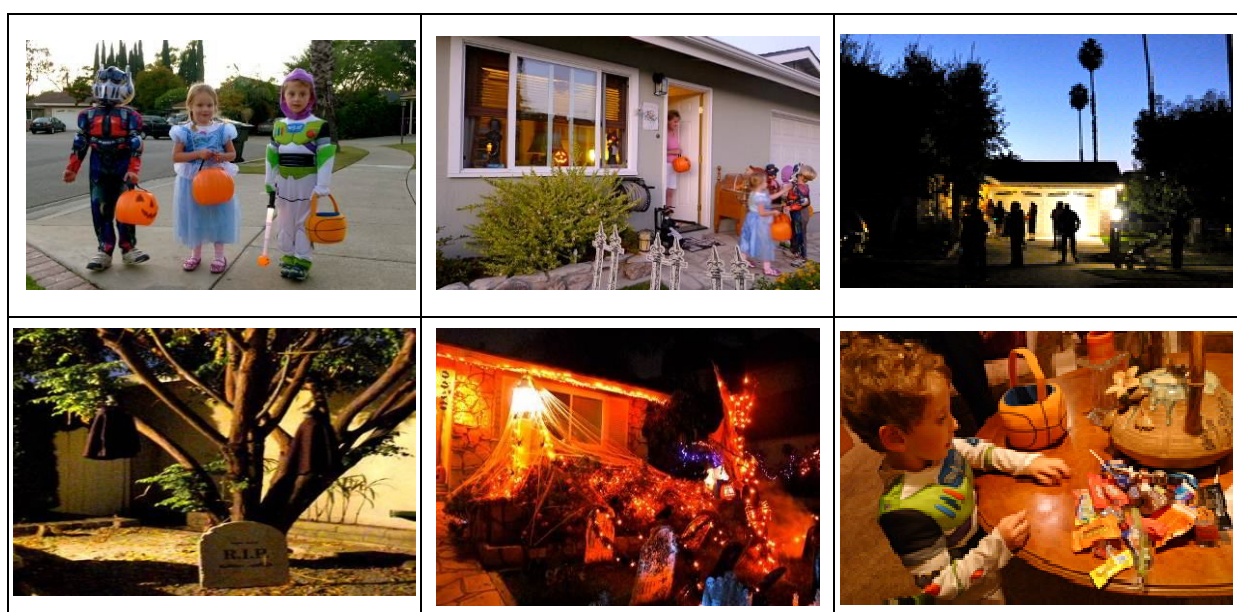
Mini lesson at Stowers

Most of our teacher prepared a mini lesson introducing Taiwan to our new friends in Stowers Elementary School, and I am in no exception. First, I had the grade four students to watch the PowerPoint and the introduction about the Beauty of Taiwan. They were all much focused. I brought Taiwanese red envelopes and New Year couplets to introduce Chinese New Year. I also brought New Taiwan Dollar bills, coins, receipts (invoices), the train tickets, and the ticket of High Speed Rail to show the kids. They were all very excited and asked me a lot of questions about Taiwan. Then, I asked them to find the location of Taiwan from a world map. They were all very attentive to the lesson.



Halloween: Trick or Treat

It was a very precious chance to join the “real” Halloween activity- Trick or Treat in California. On Monday night, we were all very excited to explore the Trick or Treat after dinner. We went through the entire neighborhood to hunt for candies and chocolates. Parents went together to remind their kids to be polite after getting candies and chocolates from the people. It is like an adventure and it is so fun going Trick or Treat with our host family. We can see a lot of scary, a little creepy, but fine and beautiful Halloween decorations in front of many houses.



What I Have Applied So Far in My Classroom

After I came back from California, I try to adapt the teaching materials and methods I learned during the two weeks. I’ve always wanted to try some learner-centered activities I mentioned above in my teaching. Besides, I tried to use the “Elmo” (the document camera) and I like it. It is not only very convenient for teachers to show teaching materials but also very useful for students to get their feedback directly from their productions.

The following are the pictures of the activities, the conversational bag and the interactive writing, I used in my teaching. Students had a lot of fun. And it’s sure that I’m going to apply more in my teaching journey.

