

## **Cooperative Learning in Classroom**

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Teachers in Taiwan all try to design some learning activities to encourage student cooperation. It gives students to socialize and learn different strategies from others. New Taipei city have introduced “Learning Community” which is promoted by Professor Manabu Sato in recent years. Approaches to encourage student cooperation in class have become a popular issue.

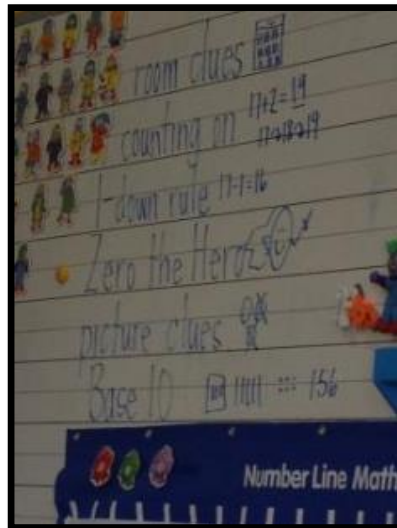
Nowadays many schools in New Taipei city take actions to conduct learning community program, but there is no workshops for interested teachers. Therefore, it was a great opportunity to join the New Taipei City Educational Delegation to visit several public schools in Chicago and Indiana to observe different teaching methods for two weeks. My main purpose for this trip is to observe cooperative learning methods in the US teaching system and compare differences of teaching methods between Taiwan and the USA. Also, I would like to use their learning activities in class as reference to improve my teaching strategies and possible cooperative learning methods in the future.

### **Teacher’s Role**

Teachers, as guides, give student directions to follow, but students hold the responsibility to learn. Teachers in the US believe that if students know how to use strategies to learn, they can build their module to acquire knowledge. Teachers put most efforts on familiarizing students with learning strategies, as opposed to teachers in Taiwan whose main focus is on the learning material itself. Different teaching philosophies lead to different learning strategies: while Students in the US focus on understanding class materials, students in Taiwan pursue photographic memories on class materials. The pursuit of photographic memories discourages students from independent thinking. Therefore, students in Taiwan focus on memorizing class

materials instead of understanding them. The photo below was taken at the kindergarten of Ball State University, where teachers spend a year to help students to develop the math problem-solving strategies, such as room clues, counting on, 1-down rule, zero the hero, picture clues and base 10.

Those strategies gave kindergarten students scaffolding to solve math problems. While a teacher posted a question on the blackboard, students were encouraged to discuss with their partners by using an iPod to record the methods they used. The teacher then chose different groups to present their thoughts and explain which strategy was selected. Through cooperating with other group members, students may learn to respect others, along with different approaches to solve a problem. Students take turns to lead the process of problem solving. Teachers expect students to take this opportunity to practice expressing their thoughts. Also, as a leading role in the discussion, students would learn it is important to do their jobs.



In another class, teacher instructed the rules about making a comic book. Students were divided into group of 3 or 4 to finish this project in two weeks. It is crucial to design a lesson well. No class would success without a good plan. Using comic book to teach writing

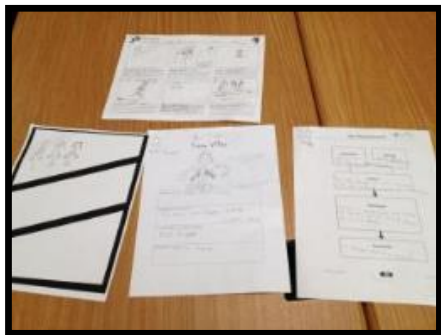
might be unusual in Taiwan, but it is a really nice approach to motivate students and to give a great opportunity for students to show their talents.

The teacher explained how to plan the settings and the personalities of characters, plots and even the storyboard. The teacher then assigned different job to each individual so every member was responsible for one part of this project to contribute their effort to it. It was important that



the teacher designed the material well so every student would engage to the project and cooperate with others.

The teacher can easily to monitor the process and contribution of each team and



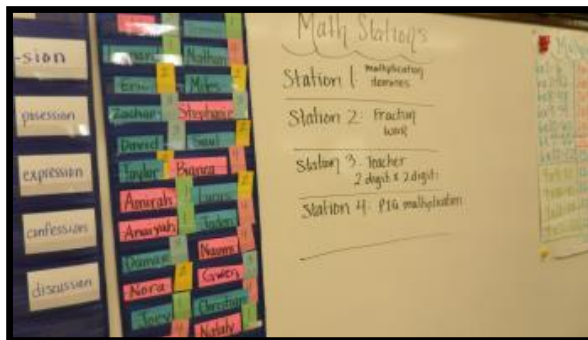
individual with worksheets. Since each student had different duty on character creating, every student would dedicate themselves to accomplishing the group work together. The role of the teacher is to instruct and supervise the team work. Students may always ask for help from the teacher, but the help usually

came from other team members.

Through discussing the situations of Taiwan with teachers in the US, we realized most teachers in Taiwan were worried about the outcome of the project and forgot the learning actually happened through the process of the project. Teachers in Taiwan decide the pace of learning and teaching. Teachers also overemphasize class materials instead of learning

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strategies, and students are used to finishing assignments on their own. Gradually, students are reluctant to cooperate with others. To finish class materials as scheduled on syllabus, teachers in Taiwan can only focus on going through class materials and disregard the importance of helping students developing their own learning strategies. Teachers in Taiwan should practice to design classes for students to cooperate with others and give them the chance to build the relationship with each other.



### Student's Role

In the following passage, student's role is another issue to be discussed to evaluate the cooperation between students in class.

“Daily Five” is a daily routine in primary school. Students were assigned to different



corners or tables to do their project or practice, such as reading, phonics work, writing, and vocabulary homework. Teacher would instruct them at the beginning of the semester to determine what performance

was expected in Daily Five. Students took all the responsibility to finish their assignments without interrupting or bothering others. During the class observation, students had no problem to follow the rules of Daily Five, and no one was out of control. In the meantime, teachers asked the slow learners to gather around and offered them some further instruction or

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help about their homework and reinforce the strategies which they might need to improve.

It is a real win-win situation for both teachers and students. Students got more time practicing and teachers had more time



to take care of the slow learners. Students in need of help may ask assistance from the

partners at the same section, which made the social interactions efficiently and more friendly.

To evaluate the learning performance, students were required to submit the assignments.

Teachers can easily check the process of every student through the student's profile.



In Daily Five, teachers were required to

provide students various levels of reading materials and worksheets to match individuals need. This was a big challenge for teachers, who had to check out the profile every month to decide the appropriate materials for each student. However, it can help many students to build up the knowledge according to their ability and interest.

Interviewing with those students who were doing the Daily Five, they felt they could be in charge of themselves; they could pick the books from their shelves, and were very confident to finish their assignments by their own.



After the training of Daily Five, students learnt to be independent and respectful to others. It was relatively common when a team project was assigned; students had no problem working with their teams and contributed equally.

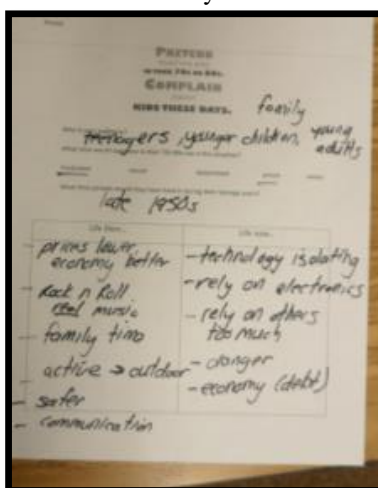
The comic project mentioned above, students needed to work together to create a hero story with clear setting, vivid characters, and the storyboard as well. They may have learned some different skills during section activities, and then put everyone's efforts together as a complete project. This cooperative learning may help students get the whole picture of team



work, a well-organized procedure to follow.

In another school, we observed a language art class of the 8th grade. The teacher introduced the life in 1950s, and then she asked the students pair up to discuss the differences of life style between now and then and to put those factors into writing work. It was a useful way to improve students' writing ability. Students could brainstorm to enrich the content before they started to write an essay. It helped the slow learners too. Slow learners would feel less anxious and frustrated about writing a whole passage without any concepts. At the end of this class, the teacher allowed them finish the article as a team work. That meant one could just speak out his thoughts, and another could write it down. Students worked as a team or individuals from

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time to time. Teachers can switch the cooperative patterns according to different purposes they wanted the students to focus on. And students had to learn to work with people and communicate with classmates to get things done.

## Conclusion

How do the students work together in Taiwan? Do we have the proper project for our students? From my personal experience, I rarely designed a lesson or started a class to help students work in teams. Even I had had tried before; I did not support them with enough resources. The result certainly would not be successful as the observations I had in America. Students in the US know how to work together because they had learned the spirit of teamwork, so do the American teachers. They would prepare the lesson together to make it appropriate and well-organized, like a small teaching research group to plan and to share their ideas, and then they put those ideas into practice. They would review this process and make a better revision to move in circles.



The spirit of cooperation was not only happening in the classroom but also at school. We should try our best to make the surroundings safe and friendly. “The classroom decoration is another way to

improve the social relationship in school.” said the Superintendent of Jay County, Timothy D. Long. It was obvious that all the American schools would post the students’ work and projects on the wall of the classrooms and school corridors. Students were eager to prove their own value. Therefore, when



they were admired and complimented, they were usually friendlier to others in return. And those decorations would build a connection with students, even with their families and teachers. This kind of connection can affect people to be more considerable to each other.

After this delegation to Chicago and Indiana, I start to think about the responsibilities of teachers and students. Teachers should offer proper materials for students in need. The responsibility of teachers is to give the students guidance to be familiar with the strategies of learning, instead of sticking to the text books as the only measure.

I would like to try some small projects at first to demonstrate the essence of cooperation and to create the atmosphere of being respectful and friendly in the classroom. I have started to seek other teachers to work together to prepare the lesson plans for the next year. I would like to form a teaching group to discuss and design the project which students can learn cooperatively. It is a good opportunity that we will have one more period per week on English class next year in New Taipei city. It gives us the best chance to change the way we used to teach in the past.

Also, the Daily Five is one of the programs I would like to utilize in my future lessons. It is amazing and impressive to have multiple learning activities in one classroom at the same time. Teachers should be more confident that students can carry out the different tasks with clear instructions in one room. With a sophisticated preparation, such as preparing the various worksheets for different levels, I believe my students will feel more confident.

Daily Five is worth putting into practice, but I barely find teachers take similar approaches in Taiwan. If we could implement approaches such as Daily Five to our class, we might be able to pay more attention to the slow learners. It will be a great improvement about the remedial teaching.



Sincerely I hope to make some changes in my class, such as forming the teaching group to design the lessons suitable for students in Taiwan. Another change will be focusing on learning strategies as a key capability instead of relying on class materials completely. Hopefully, we would have more workshops in New Taipei City to help teachers learn strategy-oriented teachings.