

# The Inspiration from the Classroom Observation at the Schools in the USA

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## **School Education System in the USA**

The compulsory education in the USA is divided into three levels: elementary school, middle or junior high school, and high school. The age range from kindergarten (5–6 year olds) and first grade for the youngest children, up to twelfth grade (17–18 years olds) as the final year of high school. Local public control has allowed for some variation in the organization of schools. The schools we have visited have different levels of students. For example, Howell middle school serves students from sixth grade to eighth grade and Sherwood Middle school serves students in grades five and six. That is very different from the system in Taiwan. In Taiwan, every elementary school serves from first grade to sixth grade. Students in elementary schools in the USA are taught in basic subjects and students often stay in one classroom throughout the school day, except for specialized programs, such as physical education, music, and science.....etc. In middle or high schools, students are usually given more independence. Students move to different classrooms for different subjects and are allowed to choose some of their class subjects. The curriculum is determined by individual school districts or county school system. Many high schools in the USA provide Advanced Placement(AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses. Both the Advanced Placement(AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs offer challenging courses to prepare students for college. Alexandra (2014) pointed out that AP courses tend to focus intensively on a particular subject, while IB courses take a more holistic approach. We had a conference about International Baccalaureate (IB)courses while visiting Howell schools and find out that the school dedicates to promoting students' ability to enter colleges. Though the education system differs from here in Taiwan, the main propose of educating is quite the same.

School administrators, teachers, and even parents contribute to promoting children and young learners' growth.

## **Learning Environment**

The school setting and arrangement differs from school to school. For example, Josiah Quincy Elementary School, a public school located in a central city district, has a rooftop play decks and there are gym and auditorium inside the school building. Every morning, students take a walk in the auditorium as a morning exercise. Compare to Howell Township Public schools and Freehold schools, the Josiah Quincy Elementary School seems a little bit crowded. Some classrooms share the same space together and there are no walls among classes. Like Freehold Learning Center, a school serves students from kindergarten through fifth grade, share one space together and there is only cardboard to distinguish between classes.

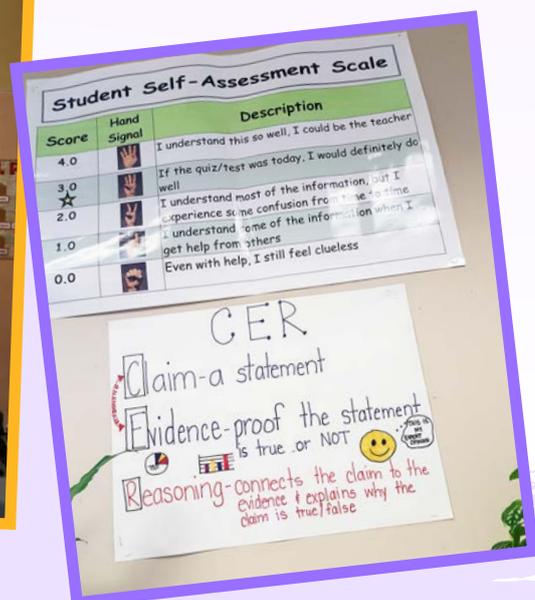
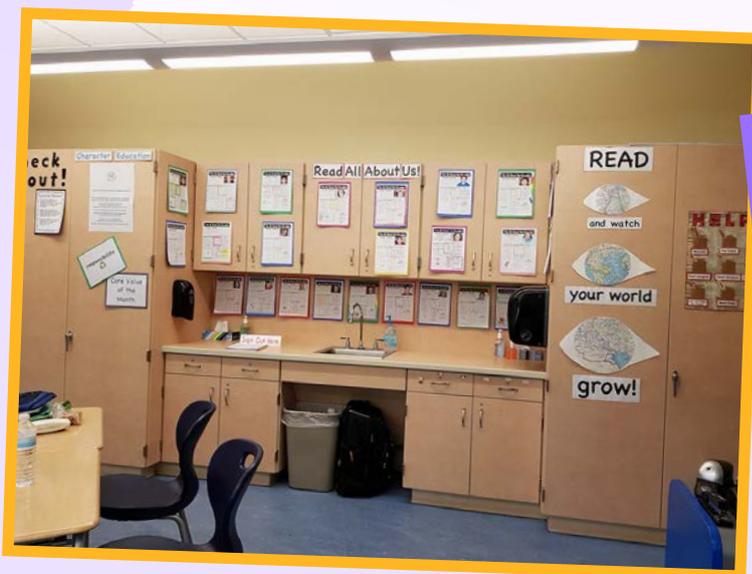


The classrooms in elementary school have carpets in the front. Teachers will gather students on the carpet and do some activities together, for example, reading and discussing books. I noticed that students pay attention to what the teacher is saying while they are sitting on the carpet. A teacher told us that students are taught to listen to teachers from the very beginning when they entered schools. And we can see the classroom rules are posted on the wall in the classrooms.



When I joined a second grade English class at Josiah Quincy Elementary School, I found out that the teacher would repeat the classroom rules to the student who wants to interrupt the teacher. For the middle and high schools, the teacher won't use carpet. The students have the ability of collaboration and usually work in groups.

In the classrooms of the schools we visited, we can see students' works and the objects related to learning are posted on the wall. Some schools even offer students i-pads as an assistance of learning. During the class, students are allowed to search information to complete the assignment and group work that teachers assigned. They do their homework with i-pads as well. The teacher can check students' assignment through the Internet.



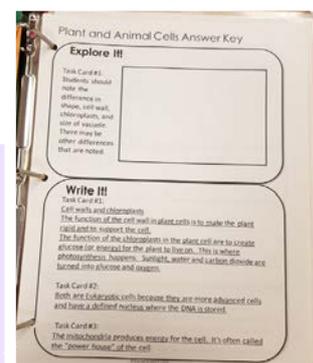
## Teaching Methods

The observation from a 4th- grade classroom in Pioneer Valley Chinese Charter School is that there are two teachers in the same classroom. At first, the class is doing some greeting activities, then one of the teachers teaches English grammar to most of the students. The other teacher teaches four students in a small group. The teacher replied that this small group is for lower-achieving students. Once these students get progressed, they can return to the class. The same situation can be seen in the Freehold schools as well. One administrator in the school told me that in some specific classes, like literature or writing class, there will be two teachers at the same time.

In the elementary classrooms, teachers lead students to learn some basic skills about learning. In the middle or junior high school classrooms, we can see that teachers design some task-based stations that meet the teaching goals for students and students will finish the tasks in groups.

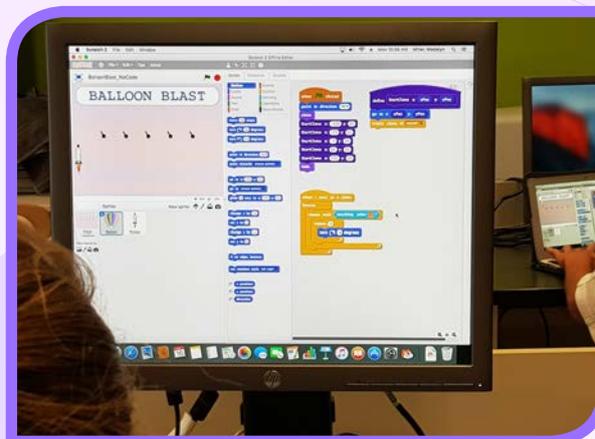


If students need some assistance from the teacher, they can turn the card on the desk into the red one. During the class, students discuss with group members, search for information on the Internet and learn new things by themselves. A science teacher from Freehold Intermediate School told us she designs worksheets for students to examine whether they have met the teaching goals or not. She will also cooperate with other teachers who teach other subjects, for instance, her worksheets integrate with math which students learn right now. Surprisingly, students would ask the teacher for worksheets to check how much they have learned and these worksheets are not required assignment actually. I think this is the act of collaborative learning and positive leaning.



## Students Performance

From the classroom observation of the schools in the USA, we can see that students in the classroom are well-behaved. They follow the directions from teachers and teachers give them opportunities to express themselves. When we visited the Makerspace room in Ramtown Elementary School, the students there explained what they were doing clearly and confidently. Schools tend to offer more opportunities for students to learn new things by themselves, such as design their own robots or computer games.



## Immersion Language Learning

Immersion language learning considers as an efficient way of learning a second or foreign language. The Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School (PVCICS) is a tuition-free public charter school authorized by the state of Massachusetts. The school's goals are to graduate their pupils with excellent scholarship, high proficiency in Mandarin Chinese and English, plus sensitivity to multiple cultures.

PVCICS's educational program provides pupils with a continuous K-12 Chinese immersion program that allows them to develop high proficiency in both languages. Subjects taught in Chinese are taught by a bilingual Chinese/English teacher with native or near-native proficiency in Chinese. Subjects taught in English are taught by teachers with native English proficiency. Art, music, health and physical education are taught in English or Chinese.

In grades K-1, 75% of the daily instruction is in Chinese and 25% in English. In grades 2<sup>nd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>, 50% of the daily instruction is in Chinese and 50% in English. Elementary school subjects are taught by a grade level team of Chinese and English teachers, where each teacher focuses on a particular subject. In grades 6-8, 25% of the daily instruction is in Chinese and 75% in English. Middle school subjects are taught by specialist teachers focused on their subject area. Students take five core subjects (English, Math, Science, Social Studies/History and Chinese) and take three specials classes (art, music and physical education) for the entire school year. In grades 9-12, 25% of the daily instruction is in Chinese and 75% in English. The high school program is designed to be an academically challenging college preparatory program with an international focus. The 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>-grade programs prepare students for the two year International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades.

Grades	% of day in Chinese	Subjects taught in Chinese	% of day in English	Subjects taught in English
K-1	75%	Math, Science, Social Studies, Chinese Language and Culture, Art	25%	English, Music, PE
2-5	50%	Math, Science, Chinese Language and Culture, Art	50%	English, Social Studies, Music, PE
6-12	25%	Chinese Language and Culture	75%	English, Math, Science, Social Studies, Music, Art, PE

I joined an English class of 4<sup>th</sup> grade, a Chinese class of 4<sup>th</sup> grade and a Chinese class of 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. In the English class, two teachers work together; one teacher teaches grammar to most of the students and the other teacher assist the lower-achieving students in a small group. During the Chinese class, students are not allowed to speak English. Furthermore, you won't see any English words in the classroom. The classroom rules, students' names, anything related to learning is written in Chinese. We can also find some Chinese books in their library. When I shared the culture of Taiwan with them, these second-grade students could respond me in Chinese. Even when they were out of the classroom, they still talked to each other in Chinese. As I know, PVCICS uses a "one-way" immersion model, meaning most students will enter the program with no knowledge of Chinese. Chinese language acquisition occurs naturally by using Chinese as the language of instruction during a portion of the day.



### ***The Change in My Classroom After Going Back to Taiwan***

I am so surprised about the team works and learning attitude that students possess in the USA. I have taught 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders English for 6 years. The challenge and difficult I met when teaching these higher graders is that some students have learned English since they were in the kindergarten, but some students even can't recognize simple English words. It appears that most of these

lower-achieving students like to join the English class activities, but they don't like to do homework and take tests. They usually highly participate in some interesting activities, such as competition, games and team works. But when we have tests or individual activities, they lack the confidence to finish these activities. As I observed from the classrooms in the USA, I found out that I can design some stations for every team to achieve the teaching goals and let higher-achieving learners assist those lower-achieving ones. During the time that students collaborate with each other, I can help some students who have special needs or need to teach individually. As for the tests, I will design different kinds levels of worksheets for students to examine whether they meet the goals or not. In order to increase students' self-confidence, I would encourage them to learn automatically and have fun from learning. The experience from the observation of the Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School shows that even though students in Taiwan with no knowledge of English, we still can provide a situation for them to use English more often. In the English classes, we should train our students to think in English instead of translating Chinese into English. Also, enhancing student's learning motivation of English learning is the most important thing of all. Furthermore, learning a language well acquires not only the content of the textbooks, but also the familiarity of cultures.

## **Acknowledgements**

It's an amazing experience for me to have the opportunity to enter the campus in the USA, not to mention that I can have a chance to talk with the teachers and students. Through the teaching experience which the teachers in the USA offered, I learn a lot from them. I am very grateful to many people that have contributed to this journey. First I would like to express my indebtedness to the Bureau of Education of New Taipei City and the leaders and administrators who plan the wonderful visit. Without their efforts, we won't have such an enriching journey. I would also like to acknowledge the members of the delegation. With their company, I expand my horizons by visiting some famous spots and experience the culture in the USA. In Boston, we visited the great and famous universities, Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. We strolled in the Princeton University in New Jersey. We went to Rockefeller Center and took the elevator to the top to see the



impressive scenery of Manhattan. We also took the ferry to the landmark of the USA, the Statue of Liberty, and Ellis Island. We visited the famous park, Central Park, in Manhattan and Time Square as well in the New York City. I used to see these spots on TVs or movies, and I was so excited that I saw them in person. During this journey, the English teachers from different schools in New Taipei City help each other and share experiences on English teaching as well. From these trip, I realize that we can sharpen our teaching skills throughout the professional conversation with other teachers. By doing so, it not only expand our vision, but also learn from each other.

## **References**

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