

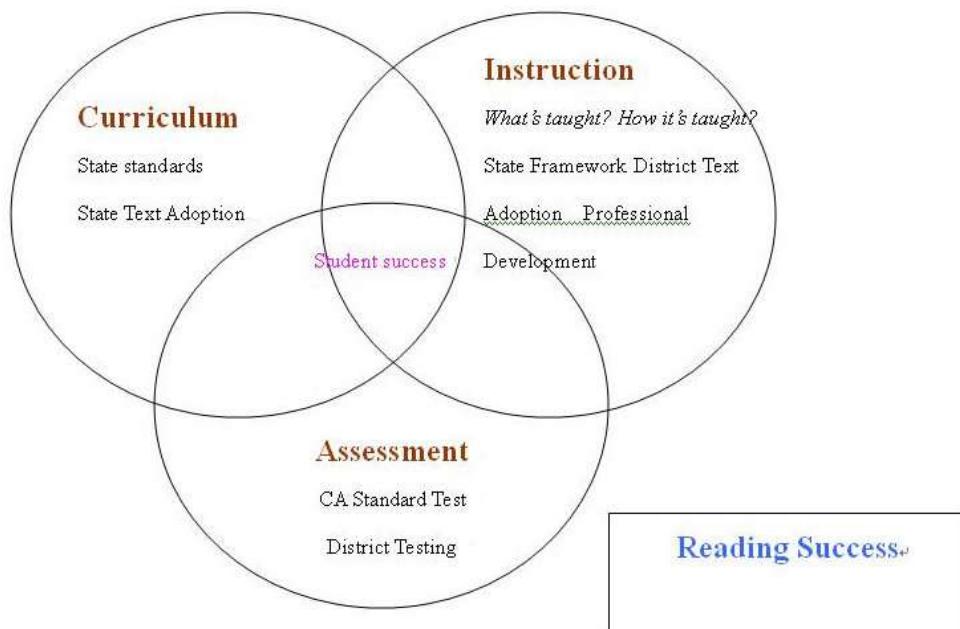
語言教學策略視覺化--從美國加州哈崗達學區教育參訪談起

屈尺國小 英語教師 魏孝軒

From Oct the 4th to Oct the 19th, I went to Hacienda La Puente United School District, LA in California, USA with 17 other members to visit, observe and learn. The two-week educational visiting tour is based on two aspects: the introduction of the American educational system and the observation in the elementary schools in Hacienda La Puente United School District. In this article, I would like to focus on some of American teachers' effective ways of language art teaching, especially the visualization of language teaching and how I apply them in my own teaching situation.

Language Arts

Language Arts is the foundation for the students' development for all the subjects. There are three areas in California educational system to help the students to build up better English language ability, namely curriculum, instruction, and assessment. (please see the pie chart below.)



State standards of English-Language Arts

The English-Language Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve represents a strong consensus on the skills, knowledge, and abilities that all students should be able to master in language arts at specific grade levels during 13 years in the California public school system. Each standard describes the content students need to master by the end of each grade level (kindergarten through grade eight) or cluster of grade levels (grades nine and ten and grades eleven and twelve). For the detail information, please see the website of California State Board of Education: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/>

The standards guide the requested and expected levels of English language ability.

The textbooks and curriculum are designed for achieving those standards. It is like the Grade 1-9 Curriculum Guidelines in Taiwan. However, I would like to point out that the textbooks, which will be discussed further later on, used in Hacienda La Puente Unified School District are amazingly systematic, detailed and user-friendly.

Instruction

Reading is considered to be a chief ability for the students' successful academic work. In other words, students should learn to read and then read to learn. *What is taught and how is taught* are taken into consideration in the area of instruction. To practice effective instruction, the teachings in Hacienda La Puente Unified School District are mainly based on current and confirmed reading research. For instance, the Phases of Teacher Directed Instruction and Student Engagement (Joyce, Well, and Calhoun, Models of Teaching, 6th Edition, please see appendix 1 for detail) describe a fairly explicit process of teaching and learning. Teachers can easily apply this model to predict the possible difficulties the students may encounter and give proper assistance. The Six Principles of Effective Practice (Joyce, Well, and Calhoun, Models of Teaching, 6th Edition, please see appendix 2 for detail) also give a model for effective practice. Both teaching and learning are hence eased in a systematic way.

The Language arts textbooks are well-structured and again, research-based, to meet different grade levels according to the State Standards. All of the teaching activities and strategies are tightly

connected to the standards. It is rather impressive that outside reading books also go packages with textbooks. The students surely have enough reading materials. Teachers' manuals that describe clear and step-by-step teaching method are indeed user-friendly. The textbooks provide so useful and wonderful teaching guide that I highly suggest the Department of Education of Taipei County Government should buy one set of HLPUSD's language arts textbooks for the reference. English teachers in Taipei County can also get some ideas of more careful and precise teaching, instead of current vocabulary and grammar focus teaching in Taiwan.

As for the strategies observed, different ones are flexibly used in classes, such as visualization, skimming, questioning, predicting. To reinforce the understanding of these strategies, the HLPUSD teachers decorate the classrooms with posters that actually "visualize these strategies". One of the teachers in Mesa Robles Elementary School, the one I visited and observed, puts literary genres posters on the wall. When different reading materials are taught, the students discuss and classify the genre of the material and write it on the correct poster. The posters indeed give clear and systematic ways of learning and encourage the students to achieve better reading and writing skills.



The literary genre poster in the classroom.



The teacher is using the posters on the wall to help the students to classify the literary genres.

It should be noted that the strategy of visualization, such as the posters mentioned above, is not only applied in classroom decoration, but also in writing practice. For instance, in Mesa Robles Elementary School, the teachers are adapting a writing program (*Nancy Fetzer's Writing Connections, From Oral Language to Written Text*, Nancy Fetzer's Literacy Connections 2007) , which uses many symbols, provides students simple writing settings and eases the writing process. The picture below shows the record of discussion. The teacher first discussed with the 3rd grade kids about the district event last Friday. He drew down some basic symbols to remind the students of the elemental pattern of writing, e.g. the heart stands for the feeling of the writer.



The teacher adapts Nancy Fetzer's Writing Connections: From Oral Language to Written Text.

While the students were narrating their story and contributing their thoughts, the teachers guided them to organize their ideas by writing down their words under the certain symbols. The teacher

also encouraged the students to use diverse adjectives or verbs to describe the same thing. Another teacher, who has adapted this program for ten years and introduced this program to other teachers, in Mesa Robles Elementary School confidently pointed out that the students found the writing much easier when they were guided. Besides, through the discussion, the higher-level students have chances to apply what they read while the lower-level students may adapt other classmates' ideas and hence feel comfortable about writing. The program benefits both higher and lower level students.

How I apply what I learn in America to my classroom in Taiwan

English teaching is quite new in public elementary schools in Taiwan. During the past decade, English teachers have been groping for the best ways of English teaching in Taiwan. We have tried games, songs, rhymes and so forth, aiming at increasing English learning interests of the students in elementary school level. However, it seems that English teachers have been worried too much about students' interests in learning English and hence have ignored that students should be helped to build up their English proficiency more precisely and academically. That is, in addition to the current vocabulary and sentence pattern drilling, is there more effective way of acquiring the language, which is suitable for both English as native language learners and English as foreign learners? Here is one of the methods I learned from the teachers in America and actually applied in 6th grade classroom in November.

Instead of explaining the abstract grammar technical terms, I wrote down simple terms, such as adjective, noun, verb, adverb, place and time only in a column as the follows. I used different colors that stand for each part of speech (another example for visualization). I encouraged the students to list any words they had learned before, discussed with them the part of speech of each word and wrote down in the certain column.

Adjective	Noun	Verb	Adverb	Place	Time
Beautiful	boy	run	slowly	at school	at night
Old	girl	jump	quickly	at home	in the evening
Crazy	dog	walk	fast		in the morning
Young	cat	eat			on Monday

I simply drew two arrows to explain that the adjectives describe the nouns while the adverbs describe the verbs. My students were really involved during the discussion. After we listed these words, I asked them to make sentences, no matter how silly the sentences were. My students would automatically correct the wrong ones and make correct ones. I could examine how much they could understand and control the usage of the vocabularies in this activity. At the same time, my students felt writing English sentences was not difficult as they had thought.

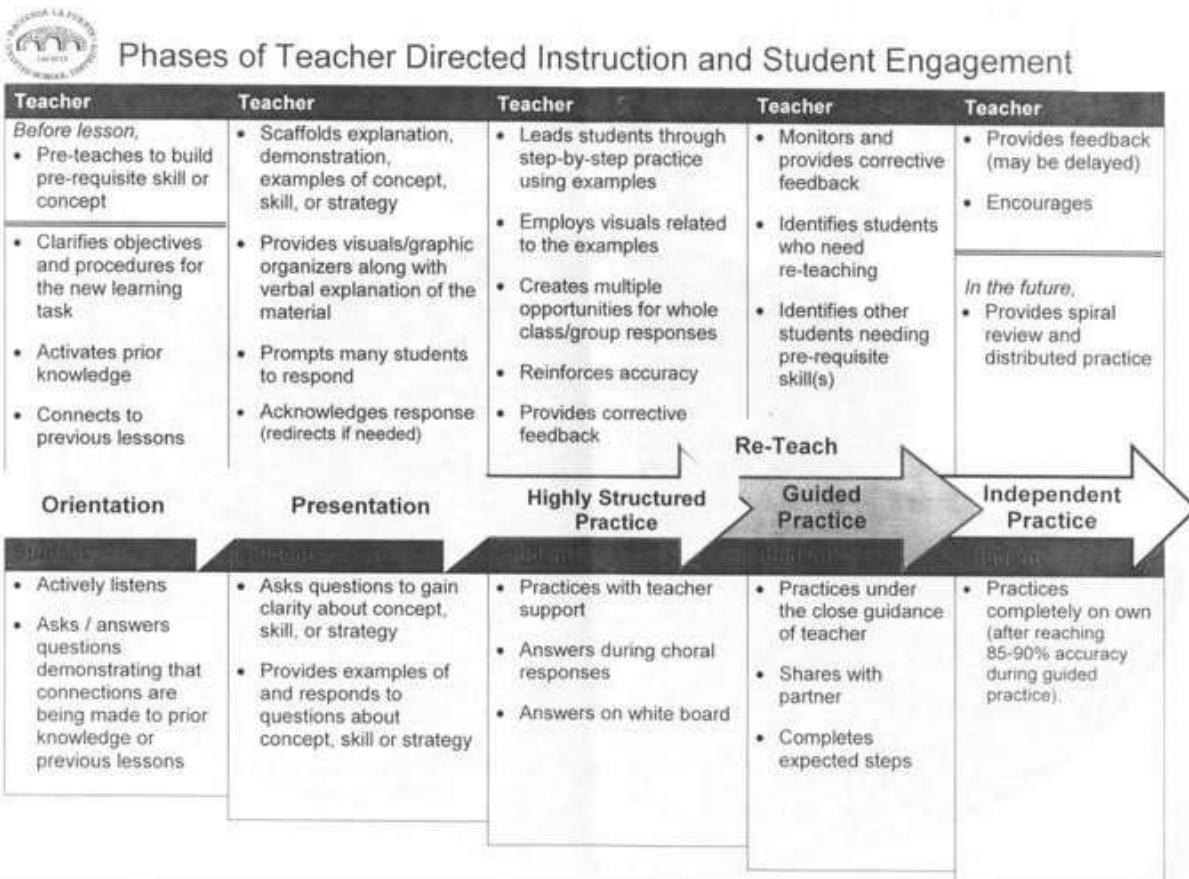
After this practice, I plan to adapt some methods from the book *Nancy Fetzer's Writing Connections, From Oral Language to Written Text* to help my students to establish basic English writing skills. It is time for my students to “produce” their ideas in English in a structured path. At the same time, of course, I will keep in mind to visualize my teaching.

Conclusion

The two-week visiting indeed inspires me in various aspects. I will try to apply some strategies, especially in reading and writing in my classes. I hope that through more structured teaching and instruction, my students will build their foreign language ability more easily and confidently.

Finally, I would like to give my sincere appreciation to all the people that offered the wonderful arrangements and assistance both in Taiwan and during the stay in Los Angeles. I would also like to transfer their efforts to more powerful teaching in the future.

Appendix 1



Appendix 2

