
A Memorable Visit ~ Beijing

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Early morning on November 26, we arrived at Affiliated Elementary School of Renmin University of China. When the bus stopped in front of the gate, I thought we were in the wrong place. It didn't look like a school, at least not a public school in China. It totally changed my impression!



After getting off the bus, the first thing attracted my attention was a wall full of plaques recording accomplishments through the years, including sports, medical care for students, contribution to society, relationship with different organizations and countries, etc.

The first activity at the school was briefing of the school by Principal, Ms. Cheng, Ruei-Fang. The school moved to current location in 2005. From the minute we walked in the campus, a sense of caring and vibrant life rushed to me.

According to the principal, the gate is named "rainbow gate" and carries deep meanings. First of all, the shape of the gate is like "b", the first letter of best. It also looks like the first character of

Chinese alphabet, “6”. The school set out to be the first in the world. Then, it looks like “6”. For Chinese, the number 6 stands for ease and smooth. They hope everything is smooth and well for everyone in the school. The shape of the gate is like a rabbit. The school hopes to provide an environment for students to study and play with joy. The width of the gate goes from narrow to wide, which means that students will be better and better in the future. The rainbow color of the gate stands for bright future for the students.



When the buildings were completed, teachers, students and parents work on the interior together. Together, they created an environment of uniqueness and suitable for them. Through the process, students were encouraged to use their creativity. For example, they put up a corner using recycled items. Along the stair way, every student printed his or her hands on the wall. The purpose is to show direction and train their sense of touch. Furthermore, remind them to be thankful to their parents for their care as their hands grow bigger each year.



All in all, the school set up different learning centers and activity rooms; such as chess room, both Chinese and western; math learning center; nature learning center; etc. Besides those, in the hall ways, we saw honor wall, themes for students to learn, including manners, current events (such as 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, 2010 World

Expo in Shanghai), knowledge on east and west, etc. The school has created a rich environment immersing students in learning anytime, anywhere.



The school follows government curriculum. The school

has different options in textbooks approved by the government, similar to what we do in Taiwan.

Each year, the district holds assessment on math, Mandarin, English, arts, and physical education. The schools have to prepare the students for the assessments. Besides regular curriculum, the school also develops school based curriculum, such as character education, culture education, extra curriculum activities to cultivate students' basic skills, etc.

The English curriculum in the school also follows the government guidelines. Grade 1 and grade 2 students have 2 English sessions, grade 3 and 4 students 3 and grade 5 and grade 6 students 4 sessions. In grade 1 and 2, listening and speaking are emphasized and learning interest is inspired. In grade 3 through grade 6, four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) are taught in balance. The textbooks they use are more advanced than what we use in Taiwan. The government and schools have more control over how to teach and what to teach. However, in Taiwan, we seem to loose the grip to the parents. The school arranged a teaching demo for us. Here's the lesson.

☀Topic: Fruits

☀Students: grade 1, learned English since kindergarten

☀Teaching aids: flash cards, computer, projector, media files, headbands, real fruits

☀Vocabulary: apple, banana, melon, pear, peach, orange, a, an

◆Presentation:

1. Show chant
2. Introduce new words

◆Practice:



1. Listening comprehension (in textbook)
2. Chant: _____, _____, I like

a/an _____.

[The sentence is slightly problematic. It should either be “I like bananas” (in plural form) or “I’d like a peach” (= I want a peach).]

Invite students to the front,
wearing headbands of fruit.

The whole class chant together.

When the fruit is called, the
person with the headband has to make a movement.

◆Production:

1. Use real objects to encourage students say what they have learned.



The teaching pace was quite smooth and effective. The students were very enthusiastic in learning and participating. One thing I noticed was the accent of the students. The speaking of the students was affected by their mother tongue – Beijing accent. It is debatable that should the teacher correct the pronunciation of the students. Personally, I think proper adjustment on student's pronunciation is necessary. After all, once the habit is set, it will take much more effort and time to change. In the class, the teacher used positive reinforcement, whenever students did well, the teacher added on points for the group. At the end, the teacher used real fruit to reward students who've learned what they were taught. The students were thrilled when they saw those fruits.

The teaching methods used in the class were similar to what we use in Taiwan. If we don't speculate whether the teaching was a show, I'm surprised at the lively atmosphere in the classroom. Besides the accent, the teacher is no difference to us. She is young and enthusiastic, very much like English teachers in Taiwan.

Where there's teaching, there's assessment. The student's performance in listening, speaking, reading and writing are assessed regularly, twice a semester, with pen and paper. Speaking assessment is done by the teacher in his/her own class. Listening assessment is done in mid-term and final. The teacher records before hand and plays the recording in mid-term and final. The school not only assesses the students with pen and paper tests, alternative assessments are put into practice, too, which again is similar to schools in Taiwan. On the report card, qualitative descriptions are shown instead of numbers.

Before I went on this trip, I had the impression that English teaching in China would be very

different from that in Taiwan. After the visit, even it's the first, I have changed my mind. English teaching in China is not far behind that in Taiwan. The teacher who did the teaching demo for us was not super teacher. But her performance is as good as a lot of teachers in Taiwan.

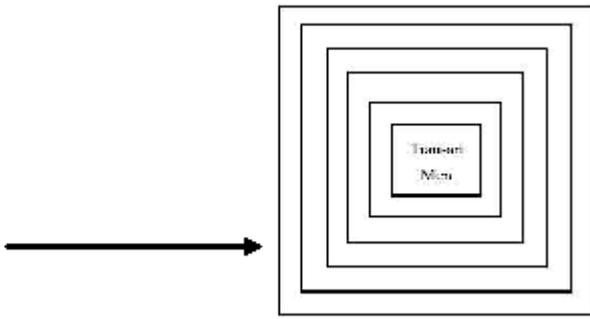
Furthermore, the teachers seem every aggressive in pursuing their professional growth. They are required to go to certain hours of workshops every year. The teachers in China are ranked in 4 levels – nation (super), province, district, school (entry), and their salaries are set according to their level.

In Taiwan, the government is trying to implement the ranking system gradually. In a way, this will help to elevate the performance of teachers. But we have to be very careful in setting the credentials. For example, how many hours of workshops teachers have to participate and how many hours of research to put in. The main objective for teachers is to help children learn. In doing this, teachers have devoted time and effort. If the major credential for teacher to pursue higher level is to do more research, then the time and effort in helping children learn will be taken away, somehow.

In Taiwan, English teaching in elementary schools started about a decade ago, much earlier than in China. At the beginning, ESL approaches were adapted, but the learning performance of the students was up to what was expected. It seemed that there was not a central structure for English teaching and took some years for us to realize there's a difference between ESL and EFL. Look through the education reform over the world, most countries are setting more specific goals to build up basic skills for students. It seems that we are doing the opposite. Maybe it's time for us to examine the education structure again.

Enough for the serious stuff! 2008 Olympic Games will be held in Beijing. Everywhere we went, I saw constructions. Beijing is a huge city with Tian-an Men Square in the center, there are five squares surrounding Tian-an Men Square. It looks like this:





The number of cars is overwhelming. I was told that the city government controls the destinations of the cars by the plate. For example, only cars with a plate start with “A” can go all the way to the center of the city. To compensate the inconvenience, the subway system in Beijing comes handy.



The coliseum for the Olympic Games is 25,000 square meters and able to accommodate 100,000 people. The building is shaped like a nest. People in Beijing call it “Niao Chao”, nest in Mandarin. Besides the unique coliseum, they also design a logo for the event. They transform Chinese character “京” into a personated



character.



There are five fortune girls created, too. Their names are Bei-Bei, Jing-Jing, Huan-Huan, Ying-Ying, and Ni-Ni, which mean “Beijing welcome you!” in Mandarin. Beijing huan ying ni.



The flag of the Olympic Games is composed of white cloth and 5 intertwined rings in yellow, green, blue, black, and red. The six colors coincide with six major Chinese teas. White is Da-Bei tea from Fu-Jian. Yellow is Yin-Zhen from Hu-Nai. Green is Da-Fou Long-Jin from Zhe-Jan. Blue is Don-Ding Oolong tea from Taiwan. Black is Pu-Er tea from Yun-Nai. Red is Chi-Men black tea from An-Huei. The Olympic spirit is to strive for team work and friendship, which matches Chinese Cha-Dao promoting harmony.

All in all, so far, this has been a pleasant trip. I learned a lot. It is also a precious time for me to get to know more people and learn from them.