

# From Decorations to Classroom Management: Creative and Practical Classroom Management Techniques Used by American Teachers

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It is one unforgettable and fantastic trip that I took to LA for a two-week educational training with other outstanding partners in Taipei County. We went to the Instructional Service Center to attend tons of practical and inspiring courses in the first week. We split up into groups and went to different primary schools for practice teaching in the second week. Fortunately, I went to Bixby, a school with numerous passionate and excellent teachers, and learned plenty of instructional techniques. In this article, I would like to share some thoughts on the topic of classroom management, and the first part will be “From Decorations to Classroom Management”, and the second part will be “Other Creative and Practical Classroom Management Techniques.” I will mostly focus on the skills that can be practically implemented in EFL contexts in Taiwan and utilized by Taipei County English teachers.



(Bixby Elementary School)

## From Decorations to Classroom Management

I'm deeply surprised that all of the decorations in the U.S. teachers' classrooms are all well-organized and well-planned. Teachers vary the decorations regularly according to their teaching objectives, and most of the decorations can be related to the content areas and goals that teachers are currently focused on. Through observing the decorations, many fantastic classroom management techniques really worth discussing and sharing can be discovered.

### 1. Behavior chart

Behavior charts are the most popular way for U.S. teachers to manage their own classroom. Students start from the beginning level every day, and if improper behavior takes place, their names might be moved down to the following levels: warning, citation, call home, and office referrals.



## 2. Classroom helpers

Students' duties are well-arranged and stuck on the bulletin board. In this way, pupils can check what their duties are every day. It can be a kind of reminder for students. Students' duties include flag salute, attendance, custodian, line leader, door helper, mail helper, calendar, library, etc. Students can rotate to different jobs from time to time, and students can also be trained to be responsible and autonomous learners by sharing classroom duties together. The following are different versions of bulletin boards concerning classroom helpers.



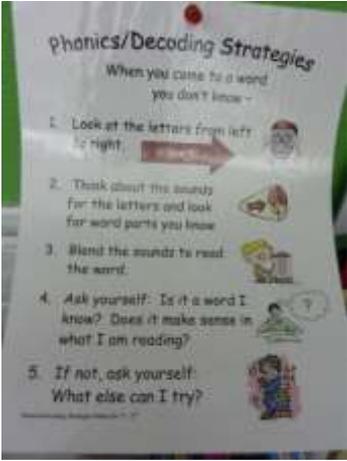
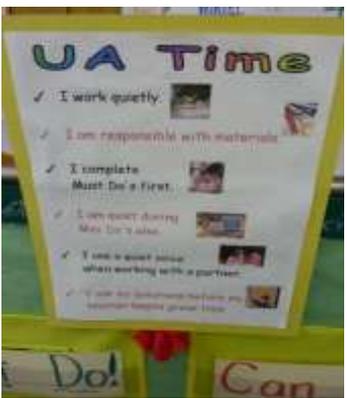
## 3. Directions around the classroom

It's really common in U.S. classrooms that all of the directions, written or printed, have specific and detailed explanations, and therefore, if learners feel uncertain about the regulations, they can resort to checking the directions around the classrooms without asking for answers directly. Attractive pictures or logos are used as well to represent the meaning of the regulations, and it will help learners to understand the rules and directions quickly and easily. For instance, different gestures are used to represent different things that pupils frequently use in class. Students can use the gestures instead of interrupting the flow of instruction during class if they need to use the restroom or have questions.



***I have a question./ I have a comment.  
May I use the restroom?/I have an answer.***

More examples will be provided, and those are all useful in EFL classrooms as well.

 <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Line-up</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Quickly</li> <li>2. Quietly</li> <li>3. Straight</li> <li>4. Facing Forward</li> </ol>	 <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Writing Position</u></p> <p>Sit up <u>tall</u>.</p> <p>Feet <u>flat</u>.</p> <p>Hand on <u>paper</u>.</p> <p>Pencil <u>ready!</u></p>	 <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Classroom Rules</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Listen carefully.</li> <li>2. Follow directions.</li> <li>3. Work quietly. Do not disturb others who are working.</li> <li>4. Respect others. Be kind with your words and actions.</li> <li>5. Respect school and personal property.</li> <li>6. Work and play safely.</li> </ol>
 <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Phonics/Decoding Strategies</u></p> <p>When you come to a word you don't know -</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Look at the letters from left to right.</li> <li>2. Think about the sounds for the letters and look for word parts you know.</li> <li>3. Blend the sounds to read the word.</li> <li>4. Ask yourself: Is it a word I know? Does it make sense in what I am reading?</li> <li>5. If not, ask yourself: What else can I try?</li> </ol>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Phonics/Decoding Strategies</u></p> <p>When you come to a word you don't know~</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Look at the letters from left to right.</li> <li>2. Think about the sounds for the letters and look for word parts you know.</li> <li>3. Blend the sounds to read the word.</li> <li>4. Ask yourself: Is it a word I know? Does it make sense in what I am reading?</li> <li>5. If not, ask yourself: What else can I try?</li> </ol>	
 <p style="text-align: center;"><u>UA TIME</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I work quietly.</li> <li>2. I am responsible with materials.</li> <li>3. I complete Must Do's first.</li> <li>4. I am quiet during May Do's also.</li> <li>5. I use a quiet voice when working with a partner.</li> <li>6. I ask my questions before my teacher begins group time.</li> </ol>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>UA (Universal Access) Time</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I work quietly.</li> <li>2. I am responsible with materials.</li> <li>3. I complete Must Do's first.</li> <li>4. I am quiet during May Do's also.</li> <li>5. I use a quiet voice when working with a partner.</li> <li>6. I ask my questions before my teacher begins group time.</li> </ol>	

#### 4. Focus wall

A focus wall is a bulletin board in the classroom that makes the students aware of what they are learning for the week. The focus wall is a very valuable tool for the class. It is important that you don't just have a pretty focus wall up, but that you actually use it. During the day refer to the focus wall several times. The more you refer to the focus wall, the more likely the students will remember the information by the end of the week. A focus wall may include the following sections:

◎Story of the week

◎Comprehension strategy: Predict and Infer, Summarize, Question, Monitor and Clarify, Phonics and Decoding, and Evaluate are the major comprehension strategies.

◎Comprehension skills: fantasy and realism, fact and opinions, cause and effect, compare and contrast, categorize and classify, story structure, making inferences/judgments/generalizations, etc.

◎High Frequency Words

◎Spelling Words

◎Vocabulary words

◎Phonics skill



#### 5. Alphafriend cards vs. Sound spelling cards

Alphafriend cards and sound spelling cards are used widely in every Bixby classroom. Teachers use sound spelling cards a lot because those cards can help learners to connect sounds with spellings. Once students understand the Sound/Spelling system they are able to decode and encode words.



6. From thinking maps to reading and writing instruction



Teachers in this united school district implement thinking maps frequently and integrate this approach with reading instruction, writing instruction, and even the instruction of other content areas, such as social studies, mathematics, etc. Therefore, thinking maps play a crucial role in classroom decorations. Thinking maps can be divided into eight different types. Each map has its own function and purpose and it can help to guide students to think more deeply and systematically.

***Circle Map: For defining in context***

***Tree Map: For classifying and grouping***

***Bubble Map: For describing with adjectives***

***Double Bubble Map: For comparing and contrasting***

***Flow Map: For sequencing and ordering***

***Multi-Flow Map: For analyzing causes and effects***

***Brace Map: For identifying part/whole relationships***

***Bridge Map: For seeing analogies***

Tree Map	Circle Map	Flow Map
		

7. Students' projects as decorations

Students' writing and projects are another vital part of classroom decorations. Teachers arrange and organize students' worksheets and crafts systematically and then stick them on the bulletin board. Surprisingly, teachers change students' work regularly and frequently as well according to different festivals and learning objectives. It is noteworthy that nearly all of the students' work will be displayed, not merely the fantastic ones.



## 8. Decorations for center learning

Teachers in the united school district decorate their classrooms for fostering center learning as well. A classroom might have several centers, including a computer center, a reading center, a writing center, etc.

 <p>At the computer center, pupils can browse web sites about language arts and mathematics. Tons of fun and interactive games are set up on those web sites for promoting their language proficiency and mathematical ability.</p>	 <p>At this learning center, students read the questions printed on the poster and choose the correct answers displayed on the pocket chart. At last, pupils write down answers on the answer sheet. Students enjoy this activity so much.</p>
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## Other Creative and Practical Classroom Management Techniques

### 1. Reward system

Teachers in this united school district are willing to encourage students' good performance and improvement. Many diverse and creative ways are used as positive rewards such as stickers and stamps. Those techniques are so useful and practical that they can be implemented in our Asian contexts as well. I'm deeply persuaded that a well-designed reward system can increase students' learning motivation and interests. Therefore, I keep seeking workable reward systems to promote my students' performance and achievement. American teachers adopt positive methods to attract and encourage students as well. For instance, one teacher uses raffle tickets as a reward system. When a student performs well, one ticket will be given to him. Students can throw their own tickets in a bowl and

wait for the raffle. This method is quite attractive and exciting. I'm sure that pupils are fond of such activities.



## 2. Rhymes and chants

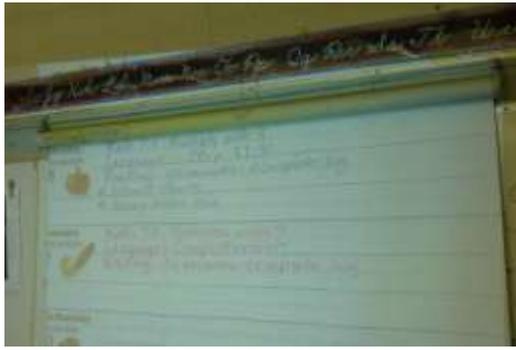
Rhymes and chants are used for classroom management as well, especially for kindergarteners, first graders, and second graders. The following is a chant modified from a traditional nursery rhyme and can be used to help students get ready when they begin to take tests or finish paperwork.

***One, two, paper toward you.***  
***Three, four, feet on the floor.***  
***Five, six, pick up your sticks.***  
***Seven, eight, back up straight.***  
***Nine, ten, let's begin!***

## 3. Parent-teacher communication

Before I went to LA, I thought that there were no communication books in the U.S. Actually, American teachers negotiate with parents a lot as well, and they also utilize communication books from second grade, also called agenda books or student planners. For first grade classes, teachers will staple all of the homework, worksheets and newsletters together on every Monday and distribute them to students. Students have to submit them on the next Monday. The following are several approaches that teachers adopted for parent-teacher communication.

<p><b>Spelling Words:</b>  1. trip      5. grab  2. crab      6. trap  3. drip      7. crack  4. grip      8. brown  Sentence: Trap the brown crab.</p> <p><b>Reading: <u>What a Trip!</u></b>  Vocabulary: charge, fish, whale  High Frequency Words: ate, after, like, blue, funny, many, brown, green, some.</p> <p><b>Other News:</b> Please help your child complete their homework. Next week we will be finishing with our story, spelling test, math, etc. We do not have school Thurs. &amp; Fri.</p>	<p>It is a sample First Grade Newsletter. Teachers will tell parents the teaching points this week, including spelling words, sentence, math, reading, high frequency words, science, and social studies. Other news that parents should know as well will also be typed in this newsletter. For example, "Please help your child complete their homework. Next week we will be finishing with our story, spelling test, math, etc. We do not have school on Thurs. &amp; Fri."</p>
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Teachers frequently use Elmo, document cameras. They announce every day's homework by Elmo as well.



Teachers encourage reading a lot. A reading log is glued in the agenda book every week, and students have to fill in what they read as homework. If students don't finish filling in the log, the teacher would use the agenda book to communicate with parents.



Parents in LA are concerned about their children's performance at school as well. In this picture, the child got many "yellows" this week, and that means he misbehaved at school. And the parent wrote to the teacher spontaneously in apology and gratitude.



It is a very useful form for recording students' behavior and it can be a means of parent-teacher communication as well. There are five squares that represent each day's performance. A stamp indicates good behavior and work habits. A number indicates an area in which improvement is needed. Checks indicate numerous infractions.

1. Talking in class.
2. Not following directions.
3. Not paying attention.
4. Disobeys rules.
5. Bothering other students.
6. Work not completed/returned.

#### 4. Whole Brain Teaching (WBL)

In this school district, WBL is widely promoted and implemented by numerous teachers. It includes many teaching techniques and activities that can activate and stimulate different sections of our brain to process information, and thus, WBL can promote learning efficiency. The following are the big seven of WBL. If you are interested in this approach, you can go browse the web site, <http://www.youtube.com/user/ChrisBiffle>, and plenty of video clips can be retrieved.

Big Seven:

- (1) *Class-Yes*
- (2) *Five Classroom Rules*
- (3) *Teach-Okay*
- (4) *The Scoreboard*
- (5) *Hands and Eyes*
- (6) *Switch*
- (7) *Mirror*

It is a worthwhile and inspiring trip that English teachers in Taipei County should go on at least once in their lives. I am astonished by American teachers' patience and passion. Gratitude and apologies are always expressed to their kids, and that means they respect children a lot and they teach students with tolerance and respect, which can promote students' self-esteem and self-confidence. Through this training, not only have I benefited a lot from the demonstrations from those outstanding teachers in LA,

but I have modified some of my teaching philosophy as well. Their classroom environment, lesson planning, teaching skills are still hanging in my mind! They really motivate me to get better in this field. I extend my gratefulness to those who made this fabulous trip possible.